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Phone chat feared by Putin's elite



Russia's elites are getting desperate because of the problems that the aggression on Ukraine have got them into, and they have started sending messages to the West.

A recently leaked phone conversation between the rich and respected members of the establishment, music producer Iosif Prigozhin and Baku-born oligarch and former Russian senator Farkhad Akhmedov, could be just another typical Russian "active measure" inspired by one of the Moscow clans.

Active measures are a notorious set of activities originally adapted and performed by the KGB. It is a typical set of actions designed and implemented by the Soviet and then Russian intelligence, to attack the enemy with ideological or political turbulence.

Active measures are generally a combination of actions and activities that are meant to cause unrest, discontent, or confusion in the rival camp.

Active measures are used to install necessary convictions and beliefs into a targeted camp.

Since the Kremlin in general is a combination of various interest groups, the so-called Kremlin clans or, as some like to describe them, the towers of the Kremlin, are in constant competition with the West and at the same time with each other.

The struggle for survival and assets

The fight between these Kremlin towers was a typical and perpetual scenario that has not changed since the aggression against Ukraine started.

Before the war, it was a fight for assets and budget allocations. Now it is predominantly the fight for the protection of assets and survival.

A thirty-minute conversation between Prigozhin and Akhmedov appeared as a sincere and straightforward conversation between the two wealthy Russians who were unhappy about the current state of affairs, trapped by American and European sanctions.

Yet there was more in that conversation from the standpoint of a person who is familiar with today's Russia's kitchen.

Let's

not forget that anyone who lives in Russia and manages a relatively large business in Russia, or at least has some background, knows well that taking over a phone in today's Russia is very similar to a Facebook post.

All phones in Russia are tapped without exception, based on current Russian legislation which requires all phone and internet communications to be monitored, recorded and kept safe.

Influential and wealthy Russians are exposed to additional surveillance by rival clans, corrupt intelligence or government officials who are in constant search for kompromat and either the source of extortion or bribery income.

Rules of the game

Both Akhmedov and Prigozhin are not kids. Akhmedov lived and worked in Russia during the turbulent 1990s.

Akhmedov even worked with the notorious,

and at the time the most powerful oligarch in the country, Boris Berezovsky, whom both Prigozhin and Akhmedov mentioned in the discussion. They even ironically accused Berezovsky of facilitating Putin's original presidency in the late 1990s, which, in fact, is true to a certain extent.

Prigozhin started his career as an assistant to the late famous and influential music producer Yuri Aizenshpis, who was not only among the first Russian dollar-millionaires of the early 1990s, but someone who spent a great deal of time in prison during the Soviet days.

Akhmedov and Prigozhin know the rules of the game. They know what Russia is all about, and over the years have learned what to say and what not to say in public or over the phone.

And yet, in the course of a long phone conversation, they "naively" covered many sensitive topics and revealed untypical recklessness while they discussed, in a critical manner, many super influential and vindictive Russians without any obvious or justified need and, most importantly, purpose.

Big league gossip

Their long conversation resembled a conversation between Russian grandmothers, the babushkas, sitting on the bench and gossiping about their neighbours.

Whilst Akhmedov was at one point in the Russian main business league, the topics that the two discussed are of an utterly different calibre in comparison to Prigozhin's business activities and thus have nothing in common with Prigozhin and his music business.

First, Akhmedov and Prigozhin complained that Putin has killed Russia and the future of all

people living in Russia.

At one point, Prigozhin used the term Russkie, which only relates to the Russki tribe living in the Russian Federation, whilst Akhmedov added that Putin has killed the future of all Russian people, using the word Russian, which indicates the citizenship of the Russian Federation in general.

Then they started to humiliate both Putin and former President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev by mocking their heights, and calling them dwarfs.

This was a very strange willingness to cross the red line. Putin's height is one of his main and fundamental complexes, which he is very sensitive about.

After his ~~humiliating~~ ~~smalling~~ ~~Medvedev's~~ physical appearances, they started to claim that Putin lost to Kvartal 95, which is the Ukrainian humour and satire programme Volodymyr Zelensky had taken part in before joining Ukrainian politics.

Again, this was a slap in Putin's face because he likes to think that he is facing all NATO in Ukraine.

Sanctions are a painful topic

Then the conversation took a more interesting turn. Both started discussing how unfair sanctions have been for many Russians.

Farkhad Akhmedov shared that he had been unfairly victimised by sanctions because he had nothing to do with Putin, and had last seen him in 2008.

Akhmedov said that people who are helping Americans and Europeans to adapt sanctions are delusional and uninformed Ukrainians or Russians who escaped from Russia.

He said that sanctions are a horrible practice that can be compared to Stalin's purges when many innocent people perished or suffered.

Akhmedov said repeatedly that he had nothing to do with Putin, while Prigozhin suggested that sanctions could not be imposed on those who had done nothing wrong.

The truth is that both were either in direct dealings with Putin's people, like Farkhad Akhmedov, or were actively pro-Putin loyalists, like Iosif Prigozhin.

Then something interesting happened. Prigozhin started discussing and accusing some statesmen and governmental oligarchs very close to Putin, such as Igor Sechin and Sergei Lavrov.

This looked very strange, if not to say suspicious, simply because the difference between these two Putin's frontrunners and Iosif Prigozhin is by far greater than the difference between Charles Koch and Carlson Tucker.

Prigozhin spent a great deal of time describing how low, corrupt, and out of control these two people are, whilst in reality, in today's Russia, both Sechin and particularly Lavrov exist in different universes from someone like Prigozhin.

Even if these two Russian public servants and super wealthy people ever attended or ordered a private event organised by Iosif Prigozhin, one can be sure that all contractual and financial relations with Iosif Prigozhin were performed by assistants working for

these two super powerful and influential people.

And yet Prigozhin spent a great deal of time describing and blaming these two very powerful people, who are not only very close to Putin and the ultimate beneficiaries of today's Russia, but they take part in defining Russia's overall course.

Where did the conversation come from?

It is almost certain that the phone conversation between Prigozhin and Akhmedov was inspired, orchestrated, and then leaked by one of the Russian clans who are not happy with the way things have been unravelling in Russia.

The target of these active measures is Putin himself, and very close people around Putin, like Sechin and Lavrov.

Additionally, the two, while discussing Lavrov and Sechin, mentioned Viktor Zolotov, who was not accused or humiliated in the course of the discussion, but was mentioned as someone who had been unsatisfied with the performance of Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defence minister, who is regularly accused by various Russian nationalist and patriotic groups as not qualified to lead and win the war.

Viktor Zolotov is head of the Russian National Guard and a long-time Putin's personal bodyguard.

The fact that, unlike Sechin and Lavrov, Viktor Zolotov was not trashed in the phone conversation could easily suggest that someone is trying to cause unrest in Putin's

camp, and is stimulating further distrust among people who are close to Putin.

Putin is not Stalin in terms of the grip and ideological delirium, but he is much like Stalin in terms of paranoia. Any suggestion that there can be sentiments of betrayal in Putin's camp can further isolate Putin and cause him to make more mistakes.

Someone in Russia could well be trying not only to send a message to the West that sanctions are horrific and similar to Stalinism, but could even be trying to unseat some of the people who are close to Putin.

The leaked conversation could generally indicate that some people are fundamentally unhappy with Putin's decision to start the war.

No one should be confused by Mr. Putin's

deprived future of the Russian people. Today's Russian elites were cultivated and selected in the course of unprincipled and corrupt schemes.

Even if it resembles a private conversation, its only purpose is to maintain and strengthen the influence they have gained by climbing the ladder of power, according to long-established rules.