

Weekly Commentary 28 – July 2023

When Arrogance and Hubris end, a country is destroyed.

There was a debate among Republican presidential hopefuls last week, moderated by Tucker Carlson. A highlight of the debate was the heated exchange between Carlson and a battered Mike Pence, former VP, on the war in Ukraine.

Pence started:

“The Biden Administration has been slow in providing military aid to Ukraine. Make no mistake about this. We promised them thirty three Abrams tanks in January. I heard two weeks ago they still don’t have them. We were supposed to train F-16 pilots but now they are talking about January when somebody would transfer them the jets...”

Carlson cut him off:

“I’m sorry, Mr Vice President. I know you are running for president, You are distressed that the Ukrainians don’t have enough American tanks. Every city in the United States has become much worse over the past 3 years. Drive around. There’s not one city that’s gotten better in the United States. And it’s visible. Our economy has degraded, the suicide rate has jumped, public filth and disorder and crime have exponentially increased, and yet your concern is that the Ukrainians, a country most people can’t find on a map, who’ve received tens of millions of US tax dollars, don’t have enough tanks? I think it’s a fair question to ask, like, where’s the concern for the United States in that?”

Pence:

“Well, it’s NOT MY CONCERN. Tucker, I’ve heard that routine from you before, but that’s NOT MY CONCERN. I’m running for president of the United States because I think this country’s in a lot of trouble. I think Joe Biden has weakened America both at home and abroad.”

What an idiotic reply from a presidential candidate who was always thought of being as engaging as a corpse. The man has proven it himself, again. He is “not concerned” about the deterioration in the country? “Not concerned?” As an aspirant for the presidency to run the country? I think Pence just lost the nomination.

More importantly, it puts on stark display the kind of empty-headed rhetoric that is prevalent in the American political class. They all want to just mouth the words, “we support Ukraine”, without even knowing what it entails or whether that support will bring Ukraine into a deeper shit hole than would exist without that support. It is just brain-dead parroting of something that makes no sense. The Germans also have their Pence, in the form of Annalena Baerbock, the Foreign Minister who wanted support for Kyiv several months ago, “no matter what the German people think”. I mean, there is such callousness with some of these western politicians who fall over themselves to voice support for Ukraine. If they are so enamoured of war, they should just go to the front themselves or have their children fight there.

Compare this with the answer given by his former boss, Trump, when asked by CNN during the infamous town hall debate which eventually got the CNN CEO fired. Trump said he would end the war in 24 hours, and push for a negotiated peace. And he is of course, all for America First...does one wonder why Trump still has a base?

The alacrity with which Tucker Carlson jumped on Pence is also a sign that there is now the beginning of an anti-war movement all over the collective west. War-mongering leaders and politicians get booed when they appear in public and even in Poland, the most vocal among NATO countries in supporting Ukraine, has seen a drastic change in sentiment.

Here is an article from a Hungarian newspaper on a survey about Polish support to Ukraine on their NATO membership :

Survey: the majority of Poles also oppose Ukraine’s NATO membership

WORLDRita World 4 days ago

According to a survey, nearly half of the Polish population opposes Ukraine’s immediate NATO membership. Officials in Kiev insist on quick admission to the military alliance, even as heavyweights such as the United States and Germany have expressed reservations.

According to a survey conducted by IBRiS on behalf of the newspaper Rzeczpospolita, 47.7% of Poles do not want Ukraine to join NATO. Another 40% are in favor of immediate membership, while the rest have not taken a position.

Clearly, if the IBRiS poll is accurate, then it is clear that the Poles do not want to become cannon fodder. And beyond Poland, nobody in Europe or America wants a war in which their own soldiers will be required to fight Russia and be brought home in body bags. They are content to just supply the munitions so that Ukrainians can fight on to the last man. It's actually quite despicable.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi claimed in April that the “majority of Europeans” will not understand NATO leaders if they do not extend a “well-deserved” political invitation to Kiev at the Vilnius summit.

Over the weekend, the British newspaper Telegraph quoted NATO officials speaking on condition of anonymity as saying that Germany had spoken out against offering Ukraine a clear agenda or concrete guarantees to join the alliance at the Vilnius meeting.

According to the newspaper, Berlin fears that Kiev would immediately invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an attack on one is an attack on all, if it were to be included in the bloc.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz insisted last month that Ukraine's leadership was well aware that joining NATO was “out of the question” as long as its military conflict with Russia continued.

But even that policy of better you than me on the battlefield is testing the patience of Kyiv's allies, when Zelensky and his cronies keep demanding for more and more weapons and money. Ben Wallace, defence minister of the UK, lost his patience and criticised Zelensky for his lack of gratitude. And while the rest of NATO didn't say it, they are all getting tired of Zelensky's megalomania and narcissism. He was evidently shunned at Vilnius.

You don't believe me?

The following picture speaks a thousand words about who is the scariest person in the Ukrainian conflict (and hint, it is not Putin):

Memed: As NATO hangs Zelenskyy out to dry, netizens lampoon Ukraine prez

In a viral photo, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was spotted standing alone while other delegates were busy talking and greeting each other

Shivam Verma Last Updated: July 12, 2023 14:18:18 IST



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a social dinner during the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. AP
A viral photo from the NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania has surfaced online, where the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was spotted standing alone while other delegates were busy talking and greeting each other.

The picture was shot at the family photograph ahead of the social dinner. It could be seen that the Ukrainian President was left isolated amidst decisions over Ukraine joining NATO.

However, it remains unclear whether Zelenskyy was left alone with other leaders refusing to indulge in a conversation with him.

You can't blame all these NATO leaders. Whenever you run into Zelensky, he will hold out his hand and ask for money and weapons. It's never a gentle "ask"; it's always a loud overbearing demand because he claims to be protecting your ass against Putin. At the rate he's going, it's better to deal with Putin than with this obnoxious megalomaniac from Kyiv.

And you want to know what he's done with all that money and weapons? Well, you will never know. Nobody does. It's disappeared into a black hole, with some 30% suspected to have gone to line the pockets of corrupt Kyiv officials and the rest having already been

destroyed on the frontlines when they were supposed to enable the Ukrainian army to chase the Russians out of the Donbass, and the Crimea, and even all the way to Moscow. With all the hype and hubris of a Napoleonic army on its way to Borodino, the western narrative that Kyiv is winning is what the elites want to put out to their electorates – even as the latest of the Ukrainian counter-offensives is being lost.

Don't believe that?

Biden himself said so. When he announced the deal, he said that the US and its allies have run out of 155 mm artillery shells and it was necessary to send the widely banned cluster ammo to keep Kyiv in the fight. Keep them in the fight? Didn't they say Ukraine was winning? Why do they then need cluster ammo to be "kept in the fight"? The obvious corollary of that is without those vile weapons, Ukraine has lost the war.

But isn't using cluster ammunition the greater evil in this chain of events?

Here is one writer's view of this moral dilemma.

America Is Running Out Of Bullets

They're unloading the vile dogshit on Ukraine now

indi.ca

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Jul 9

155mm M795 artillery projectiles are manufactured at the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant in Scranton, Pa. The 155mm howitzer round is one of the most requested artillery munitions of the Ukraine war. Already the U.S. has shipped more than 1.5 million rounds to Ukraine, but Kyiv is still seeking more.

There's a [Chris Rock](#) joke that goes, "You don't need no gun control, you know what you need? We need some bullet control. Men, we need to control the bullets, that's right. I think all bullets should cost five thousand dollars... five thousand dollars per bullet..."

Well, today America is admitting to some involuntary bullet control. They are simply running out of regular artillery rounds and are unloading the most vile dogshit on Ukraine, cluster

munitions. Cluster munitions spray the land with explosives, many of which don't explode. This is why they're widely illegal, because they ruin the places they're used in for years. And they're doing it not for any strategic reason (however vile). They're doing it because they're running out of regular shells. This is a stunning admission coming from a superpower. It's like Scarface saying "oh no! I'm not reloaded!"

Don't take my word for it, President Joe Biden said, "This is a war relating to munitions. And they're running out of that ammunition, and we're low on it." He's lying about Russia, but he's telling the truth about the US/NATO running low. As the privatized propaganda outlet *The Washington Post* ([via](#)) puts it:

*The move, which will bypass U.S. law prohibiting the production, use or transfer of cluster munitions with a failure rate of more than 1 percent, comes amid concerns about Kyiv's lagging counteroffensive against entrenched Russian troops and **dwindling Western stocks of conventional artillery.***

The article continues:

*The United States and other Western donors have sent millions of non-cluster howitzer shells to Ukraine, but **stockpiles are running low and manufacturing cannot keep up with demand.** It "is not enough," [Ukrainian Defense Minister] Reznikov said. "**The Russians use three or four times more artillery shells of different calibers than we do.** And we must conserve because we can't shell as intensively," he added.*

This is quite a thing to admit. One, that you're committing war crimes and two, that you're incompetent criminals. Cluster bombs are the spray-and-pray of artillery, and prayer is not a winning military strategy. Especially if you're praying to Satan. Cluster bombs salt the earth with high explosives, which make them a crazy thing for Ukraine on soil it claims to care about. They fail at a much higher rate than 1%, 14% according to [the NYTimes](#). I'm citing from imperial propaganda rags because even they can't hide the depravity. These are widely illegal weapons for a reason. They are also not nearly as effective as A) just having a steady supply of regular shells and B) more accurate guided and drone munitions. It's really a unique combination of evil and incompetent.

Forget *wunderwaffen* like F16s and HIMARS, how do you win an artillery war with no bullets? As the [Good Ole Boys from Tennessee](#) say, "You're gonna look pretty funny tryin' to eat corn on the cob with no fuckin' teeth!" People are focused on the immorality of cluster munitions, which is one thing, but the more striking thing is how much desperation this shows. I'll repeat because it's the point. The great Empire is **running out of bullets**. They're becoming the butt of a joke. And the punchline is the severed legs of children.

The view above about the unsustainability of this war, let alone a defeat of Russia, is not unique to this one writer - a Canadian growing up in the US, but now living in Sri Lanka - who brings up contentious issues in the west's conduct of the war in Ukraine.

But he is not the only one. There is a lot of criticism of this act of deploying cluster ammunition, which will result in a lot of Ukraine being laid waste not by Russia but by its own government desperate to win. It is a sign not just of the lack of choices it faces but also of the stupidity of the men in charge who prefer to destroy their own country's future rather than to negotiate with Moscow in the face of a humiliating loss.

And this is also how the Biden administration thinks. Anything, even immoral decisions, would be better than the loss of face which comes with admitting that they cannot beat Russia, even in this simple task of making shells. What's all that boasting about Russia's economy being just a miniscule fraction of the combined collective west's economic might, of it being just a gas station masquerading as an economy, and that one good kick will collapse the whole rotten structure. Well, it must be totally humiliating for Biden to pick the vile choice of seeding Eastern Ukraine with little bomblets that will be there for generations, than to just sit down and talk terms with Putin to end the war.

And the other conclusion one can make at this juncture in the war is the picture of the pariah Zelensky among his peers who don't dare look in his direction in case they face his outstretched hand, demanding them to make the same choices of immorality versus an embarrassing helplessness.

And the choice is obvious when they face the issue of having to deal with Ukraine's admission to NATO – they simply said no. Not now, not ever. The “no” came with a lot of theatrics, which I have covered in one of my Daily Reports last week,

And here is what the Financial Times has to say about it...

Nato's dilemma: what to do about Ukraine's bid to join?

Membership represents the long-term security that Kyiv wants and was promised 15 years ago. But Russia's war has complicated things

Henry Foy in Brussels, John Paul Rathbone in London and Felicia Schwartz in Washington

Financial Times

JULY 10 2023

When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy strides into Nato's annual summit in Vilnius on Wednesday, his country will have been fighting a full-scale war of survival against Russia for 503 days.

As his battered troops continue to fight off a relentless invasion and attempt to claw back occupied territory in the country's south and east, Zelenskyy comes to the Lithuanian capital with another strategic objective: to gain a seat at Nato's table.

To Zelenskyy and his government, the US-led alliance represents long-term peace and security. Article 5 of Nato's treaty is an ironclad mutual-defence clause backed up by American, British and French nuclear weapons.

But Kyiv's objective goes beyond defence. Through Nato membership, Ukraine would receive an unambiguous ticket into "the west" — a break from centuries of subjugation by Moscow — and the security required for its reconstruction and economic revival.

Yet Ukraine poses a series of questions for Nato's 31 members. Those questions reach to the heart of the alliance's purpose, from how prepared its members are to fight a war against Russia to whether Nato's mutual-defence clause is a security blanket to be thrown around states or a badge of distinction to be earned.

"What I believe is that Ukraine will become a member of this alliance and that Ukraine's rightful place is in Nato," the alliance's secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg tells the FT. "It's for allies to decide when the time is right."

"Compared to 2008, Ukraine is much closer to Nato now," he adds, referring to the year Ukraine's potential membership was officially announced without a timeline. "That's a factual thing."

"[But] of course there are different ideas, different proposals on the table, as it always is when important issues are discussed," Stoltenberg, whose term as secretary-general will be formally extended to a tenth year this week, says. "I'm absolutely confident that we will end on something that will unite the allies and will send a clear message."

When the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania acceded to Nato in 2004, it was over a decade since they had regained independence from the USSR. Russia was then in a state of chaos, caught between economic collapse and political upheaval, with ill-equipped and poorly-managed armed forces.

Today is markedly different. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced more than 10mn Ukrainians from their homes, in a stark demonstration of President Vladimir Putin's willingness to use force to achieve militaristic ambitions.

Now, after more than 17 months of war, during which Nato allies have provided Ukraine with over \$160bn in military and financial support, western capitals are grappling with a far larger question. Having given Ukraine the means to stop Russia's conquest, are they now ready to promise that if it were to happen again, their troops would be fighting and dying too? And if not, what might they be willing to offer instead?

"The sole task here [in Vilnius], and one that all allies agree on, is that we left grey areas on the map 15 years ago which Putin took advantage of, and now we need to make sure there is no more grey," says one senior Nato diplomat. "It is about making crystal clear where the lines are."

A fateful breakfast

It was over breakfast in Bucharest in 2008 that the seeds of Nato's current dilemma were sown.

At an early morning meeting on the second day of the alliance's summit that year, then secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer met with US president George W Bush and his French and German counterparts Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel.

The outcome of that breakfast, and a result of Merkel softening her opposition to Bush's proposal to offer membership to Ukraine and Georgia, was a statement by the entire Nato alliance.

Both countries "will become members of Nato", it said, without providing a timeline. That declaration, at the same time both unequivocal and non-committal, was hailed as a major achievement. It has since sunk into infamy.

Those like Germany and France who opposed Ukraine's membership — each of whom had a veto, given Nato's unanimous requirement for new members — believed it put an indefinite pause on the country's ambitions.

But in Moscow, it was seen at the other extreme: tantamount to Nato's annexation of both republics. That, Putin said the next day, posed a "direct threat" to Russia and broke what he understood to be a pledge for Nato not to add members from the ex-USSR.

Kyiv and Tbilisi found themselves trapped between both positions: exposed as future Nato members but without any of the alliance protection that comes with accession.

Four months later Putin's tanks rolled into northern Georgia. In 2014 his special forces annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. Nato, as Putin knew well, refuses to accept new members with "frozen conflict" on their territory. Aside from condemnatory rhetoric, Nato did little to punish Moscow. Putin, who had been present at the Bucharest summit as a guest, had called Nato's bluff.

"The most dangerous place for Russia's neighbouring countries is to sit in the waiting room of Nato," says Margus Tsahkna, Estonia's foreign minister. "And we did exactly that 15 years ago with Georgia and Ukraine."

It's like arriving at triage in a hospital emergency room, he adds: "... you go in, but you're waiting and you're not labelled yet. Are you a green, yellow or red patient? We must label [Ukraine]. We must start the process."

Nato has a self-proclaimed "open door" policy towards prospective new members. Since 2008 it has not stood still, accepting five new members in the 15 years that have passed. Last year, in response to Russia's invasion, Finland and Sweden launched fast-tracked applications to join the alliance. Finland acceded in April; Sweden is hopeful of becoming a member in the next few months after Turkey lifts its veto.

Dotting the i's

Updating the language on Ukraine agreed at Bucharest is Nato's thorniest task this week. While no member of the alliance believes Kyiv can join while at war, the discussions on whether to advance its status, and how to convey that, are intense and emotive.

"There's this huge spectrum from 2008 language through to full membership. As an alliance we have whipsawed up and down that spectrum over the past year of debate," says a senior US diplomat. "We're pretty close to knowing where we will land as 31 [members], and everyone agrees that unity is the primary objective here."

Few officials are willing to disclose what language their government has proposed or would accept, such is the sensitivity over what will probably end up as one sentence in summit conclusions running into pages.

Those like the Americans and Germans, who are more strongly opposed to any sort of language that would imply immediate Article 5 commitments, want to make sure that Ukraine only enters when it can make the necessary reforms.

Biden said last month that he would not fast-track Ukraine's path to membership. "I'm not going to make it easier. I think they've done everything relating to demonstrating the ability to co-ordinate militarily, but there's a whole issue of: is their system secure? Is it non-corrupt? Does it meet all the standards every other nation in Nato does? . . . it's not automatic."

Others have shifted their prior position. Emmanuel Macron, France's president, said in May that Ukraine should be given a "path to Nato membership".

The intervention from Macron, who only four years ago voiced his belief that Nato was "brain dead", has been crucial for those campaigning for more ambitious language in Vilnius.

"Of course, the Ukrainians want to see the word 'invitation' in there somewhere," says one European official involved in the negotiations. "But it won't be unqualified; instead, some kind of words will be found that don't allow for it to be automatic."

Having recognised that a membership invitation would fail to meet US and German approval, in a private meeting of Nato foreign ministers in May, Stoltenberg offered an alternative sweetener. When the invitation is finally presented to Ukraine, he suggested, it should be shorn of the bureaucracy that comes with the formal Membership Action Plan most states go through to join.

That should speed up the process, Nato officials say. But it would not cut corners on non-negotiable issues including anti-corruption reforms, use of modern, Nato-standard weaponry interoperable with allies' armies, and structures to protect secret alliance intelligence.

"If the Membership Action Plan is no longer the path to Nato membership, there can be no so-called shortcut," the European official adds. "Preconditions must still be fulfilled."

How long that might take depends on who is asked. Russia hawks such as Poland, for example, say that Ukraine is already meeting some of those preconditions.

"Poland is very clear that we want Ukraine to become closer to Nato at an institutional level," foreign minister Zbigniew Rau told reporters last week. "When [the preconditions] are met, we can think of a relatively quick pace of bringing Ukraine into Nato."

An 'Israeli model'?

Ukraine has realistic expectations of what will happen this week.

"Membership is not on the table and it's too late to change the agenda," says one Ukrainian adviser to his country's defence ministry.

"Turkey and Hungary have even opposed Sweden's accession to the alliance. It's not going to be possible to achieve anything [on Ukraine]," the adviser adds.

But Nato leaders are aware that a message would be sent were Zelenskyy to leave Vilnius empty-handed. They have a plan: formalising security commitments.

Nato is at pains to stress that proposed security assurances are wholly separate from the issue of alliance membership, to protect the distinction of Article 5. But the reality is they are generally regarded as a stepping stone to accession.

Not least because the core countries set to provide them — the so-called Quad of the US, UK, France and Germany — are four of Nato's five biggest military powers.

While the formal promises are not yet agreed or stated publicly, officials involved in the discussions tell the FT that they will centre on codifying existing military supplies and making a clear pledge that they will continue. Plus there will be guarantees on the training of Ukrainian troops, intelligence-sharing and assistance with defence policy reforms. There is also likely to be a multilateral declaration of some kind with countries making individual pledges.

Nato will also elevate the existing Ukraine-Nato commission to a council. That gives Kyiv an equal seat at the table with Nato members and allows it to call meetings for "crisis consultations". The inaugural meeting will take place on Wednesday in Vilnius.

Proponents say that these measures not only help to protect Ukraine in the short-term, but both increase longer-term security and better prepare the country for Nato membership.

But sceptics, such as Estonia's prime minister Kaja Kallas, warn that they "blur the picture" and distract from Nato membership. Kallas likes to joke that to a non-native English speaker, "assurances", "commitments" and "guarantees" can pass for synonyms, whereas only Article 5 can be relied upon.

Ukraine is understandably wary of paper promises. In 1994, under an agreement called the Budapest Memorandum, it gave up its arsenal of Soviet-era nuclear weapons, then the third-largest in the world, in return for security assurances from Russia, the US and the UK. These counted for nothing in 2014 and 2022.

Some officials have pitched the commitments as an "Israeli model" akin to the overt military support Washington provides to the Jewish state.

The US currently commits to making sure Israel has a "qualitative military edge" in the Middle East and signs memorandums of understanding every 10 years. Officials envision Ukraine could have something similar, putting the country's defences on a suitable footing — it would be impossible to commit to parity with Russia.

Benjamin Tallis, a senior research fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations, says that such commitments have an additional benefit for the US. "The US is still blocking [Ukraine's membership], and blocking for not wholly unfair if still blinkered reasons: they want Europeans to take more care of their own defence and to not simply add another European country that is dependent on them," says Tallis.

But some countries are nervous about the potential cost of the commitments, tying up tens of billions of taxpayer money at a time of rising inflationary and budgetary pressures.

"The concern is that the more we talk about security guarantees, or assurances, or commitments, the more it becomes obvious that this is really expensive," says one senior European official who speaks regularly to Zelenskyy's cabinet about security issues.

The choice for Nato members, the official adds, is: “either the Israel model, which is them [Ukraine] being able to defend themselves, which is expensive in terms of investment, or the Nato model of us defending them if they need it, which is expensive in terms of the responsibility we take on.”

‘Too much hesitation’

Russia’s land forces may have taken a beating in Ukraine, with western intelligence estimating that over 200,000 soldiers have been killed or wounded since last February. But the country’s armed forces remain a potent force. And they are learning invaluable lessons about modern war on Ukraine’s battlefields.

Ukraine’s most vocal supporters, particularly in eastern Europe, say this fear should only compel Nato to move faster. Only with Ukraine in Nato and armed to the teeth can Europe sleep soundly, they argue.

“There’s too much hesitation, and so much of that runs through Berlin,” says Tallis. “What we are seeing is an interesting historical forgetfulness, from Germany in particular, given that they relied on Nato and the Americans to protect them as they rebuilt themselves after the second world war into the state we see today.

“They’re not realising the real cost of European security. The short-term savings aren’t real if they come with long-term insecurity,” says Tallis. “They need to see this as an investment, not a cost.”

For Stoltenberg, the answer to the alliance’s Vilnius dilemma on Ukraine may come to define his tenure.

Having maintained Nato’s unity through the war so far — and ensuring allies provided the support that has allowed Ukraine to fight back — he must now find agreement on an issue that will define what Ukraine, Europe and Nato’s future security looks like.

One big thing that the war has changed, according to Tsahkna, the Estonian minister, is Ukraine’s place in the western world. Before the invasion, doubts remained about whether Ukraine had fully shed its Soviet past — whether it was still in Moscow’s orbit. “Now, it’s clear for generations, the Ukrainian nation has made their own choice,” he says. “Our question is whether we ask them to join. They are sharing the same values . . . They belong to us, to the west.

“They have decided,” he adds. “And I think we also have to have the courage to make historical decisions.” Additional reporting by Laura Pitel in Berlin

Here is another report from Politico on why in the end, Ukraine did not get into NATO last week:

How Ukraine lost its battle for a NATO membership commitment

As the summit wrapped, exhausted Ukrainian and NATO officials tried to put the spat behind them and highlighted Kyiv’s gains.

BY LILI BAYER, ALEX WARD AND LAURA KAYALI

JULY 12, 2023

VILNIUS — Ukraine wanted this year’s NATO summit to end with a clear declaration that it will become an alliance member once the war ends, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is leaving Lithuania without that ultimate prize.

For weeks, Ukrainian officials pushed their counterparts in the United States and Europe to draft language that offered a timeline and clear path toward membership.

The communiqué allies released Tuesday fell short of that, stating instead that “we will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine when allies agree and conditions are met.”

That line proved a deep disappointment for Kyiv, which raged behind the scenes as the U.S. and Germany resisted pressure to offer Ukraine concrete pledges. It was particularly upset at the vague reference to conditions, seeing it as a potential arbitrary roadblock to membership.

Ukraine’s leadership reached out to Washington and Berlin to make its displeasure felt, ending in Zelenskyy firing off an irritated tweet on Tuesday referring to the confidential draft text as “unprecedented and absurd.”

“It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the Alliance,” the president fumed to his 7.3 million followers.

The battle over the communiqué left Kyiv unhappy with the process.

Ukrainians were “disappointed with how NATO works” and felt there was “no real dialogue” with the alliance on the issue, said a Ukrainian official familiar with the negotiations.

Ukraine’s backers, to the tune of billions in military and economic assistance, were blindsided by Zelenskyy’s anger.

Even some of Kyiv’s closest friends within NATO were taken aback, seeing the blunt social media criticism from Ukraine’s president as unhelpful and unwarranted during the sensitive diplomatic negotiations.

“We take the tweet as an unfortunate expression of frustration,” said a senior diplomat from Northern Europe.

The tweet, coming just as NATO leaders were preparing to meet in Vilnius, added more tension to diplomats’ last-minute efforts to finalize the contentious text, which was ultimately published on Tuesday evening.

“We saw his tweet same time as everyone else did,” said a senior Biden administration official. “I think everyone understands the pressure he is feeling, and we’re confident that the commitments made at Vilnius will serve the long-term defense needs of Ukraine.”

Backing off

But by Wednesday, everyone was making an effort to tone down emotions.

Officials highlighted the package NATO leaders agreed for Ukraine, which includes a multiyear program to help forces transition to Western standards and the creation of a new NATO-Ukraine Council, along with a decision to drop the need for a so-called Membership Action Plan (MAP) — a path of reforms ahead of joining.

And in a gesture intended to underline Western governments' backing for the Ukrainian cause, G7 leaders issued a declaration on Wednesday afternoon on long-term security commitments for Ukraine. That will see governments making bilateral deals to provide security assistance, training and other support.

“I believe the package for Ukraine is good and a solid basis for a closer relationship on the path to membership,” said the senior diplomat from Northern Europe.

An angry Kremlin said of the G7 action: “We believe that it’s a mistake and it can be very dangerous.”

In the end, the specter of Russia’s aggression proved to be a unifying force.

“The tweet did not change anything in that sense,” the senior diplomat said, adding that the G7 declaration was “also positive and many allies already said they will join” and that “the mood today was very warm and friendly.”

French officials, meanwhile, were keen to showcase understanding and empathy for the Ukrainian leader.

“He’s in his role as head of a state at war and war chief. He’s putting pressure on the allies,” French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu told French TV on Tuesday.

“You have to put yourself in his shoes, there was a commitment in Bucharest, and we know what happened next,” he added, referring to a NATO summit in 2008 when the military alliance made vague promises Ukraine would eventually become a member.

For French President Emmanuel Macron, the Vilnius summit was a key moment to show unwavering support for Kyiv — after months of being perceived by Central and Eastern European leaders as being too conciliatory to Moscow.

“It’s legitimate for the Ukrainian president to be demanding with us,” Macron told reporters on Wednesday.

Bygones

On the Ukrainian side, there was also an acknowledgment that Wednesday’s talks brightened the mood.

“The meetings with the NATO leaders were really good,” said the Ukrainian official. The country “got the clear signals that our membership in NATO will not be a bargaining chip in negotiations with Russia ... this was the main fear.”

“So, despite the lack of clarity in the text of declaration on Ukraine’s membership path, the meetings showed that there is the commitment to deepen the relations,” the official said. But, they noted: “Of course, it’s not the same as clear fixed commitment in the joint declaration.”

Zelenskyy himself, who was in Vilnius to attend the first meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, also took a more positive tone in press appearances, expressing his thanks for the decision to drop the MAP requirement, gratitude for allies and praising the G7 commitments.

“I haven’t changed my point of view,” he insisted when probed about the difference in tone from the previous day.

“What’s most important is that we have a common understanding on the conditions on when and under which conditions Ukraine would be in NATO — maybe not all the details were communicated, but for me it was very important that it depends on the security.”

And asked about fears in Kyiv that NATO membership could end up as a chip in future negotiations with Russia, he was firm that this would not be acceptable.

“I’m sure that there won’t be betrayal from [U.S. President Joe] Biden or [German Chancellor Olaf] Scholz,” Zelenskyy said, “but still I need to say that we will never exchange any status for any of our territories — even if it’s only one village with the population of one old man.”

Speaking to a crowd in Vilnius on Wednesday evening, Biden stressed that the West is there for Kyiv.

“We will not waver. I mean that. Our commitment to Ukraine will not weaken,” Biden said.

And as the summit wrapped up, many officials were quick to try to put the tensions behind them.

“I consider this episode closed,” said a senior diplomat from Eastern Europe. “It is more important to look forward. We have a process in front of us. Let’s work on it!”

“It’s all ended well,” quipped a senior NATO official, adding: “that will do for me”

Laura Kayali and Alex Ward contributed reporting.

But there are dissenting views. Here is one from a prominent critic of the war:

Scott Ritter: NATO Summit, A Theater of the Absurd

July 11, 2023

The unfulfilled goals and objectives from last year’s meeting in Madrid loom over the Atlantic military alliance. When the membership meets in Vilnius this week, normalizing failure might best describe the most that can be accomplished.

By Scott Ritter / Consortium News

The leaders of NATO's 31 constituent member states have begun to assemble in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, for the alliance's 33rd summit, an event that has come to symbolize the military organization's increasingly difficult task of transforming political will into tangible reality.

Since the Wales Summit of 2014, when NATO made Russia a top priority in the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the Warsaw Summit of 2016, when NATO agreed to deploy "battlegroups" on the soil of four NATO members (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland) in response to perceived Russian "aggression" in the region, Russia has dominated the NATO agenda and, by extension, its identity.

The Vilnius summit promises to be no different in this regard.

One of the major issues confronting the NATO leadership is that the Vilnius summit operates under the shadow of last year's Madrid Summit, convened in late June in the aftermath of Russia's initiation of military operations against Ukraine.

The Madrid summit came on the heels of Boris Johnson's deliberate sabotage of a Ukrainian-Russian peace agreement that was supposed to be signed on April 1, 2022 in Istanbul, and the decision by the United States in May 2023 to extend to Ukraine military assistance exceeding \$45 billion as part of a new lend-lease agreement.

In short, NATO had opted out of a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and instead chose to wage war by proxy — with Ukrainian manpower being married with NATO equipment — designed to achieve what U.S. Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith, in May 2022, called the "strategic defeat" of Russia in Ukraine.

The Madrid summit generated an official NATO statement which declared that "Russia must immediately stop this war and withdraw from Ukraine," adding that "Belarus must end its complicity in this war."

When it came to Ukraine, the Madrid statement was equally firm. "We stand in full solidarity with the government and the people of Ukraine in the heroic defense of their country," it read.

"We reiterate our unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders extending to its territorial waters. We fully support Ukraine's inherent right to self-defense and to choose its own security arrangements. We welcome efforts of all Allies engaged in providing support to Ukraine. We will assist them adequately, recognizing their specific situation."

Confidently seeking a Strategic Defeat

NATO, it seemed, was supremely confident in its ability to achieve the outcome it so very much wanted — the strategic defeat of Russia.

What a difference a year makes.

NATO assistance to Ukraine resulted in a successful counteroffensive which compelled Russia to withdraw from territory around the city of Kharkov, as well as abandon portions of the Kherson Oblast located on the right bank of the Dnieper River. Once the Russian defenses solidified and the Ukrainian attack stalled, NATO and Russia both began preparing for the next phase of the conflict.

NATO began a months-long effort to equip and train nine Ukrainian army brigades to NATO standards by providing them with NATO tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and training them in NATO-style combined arms warfare.

For its part, Russia conducted a partial mobilization of both its manpower (calling up some 300,000 reservists while recruiting an additional 150-200,000 volunteers) and its defense industry (dramatically increasing its production of tanks, missiles and artillery ammunition). Moreover, Russia prepared hardened defensive positions in accordance with a military doctrine that had been updated to consider the lessons of the first year of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine.

NATO had placed high hopes on the Ukrainian army being able to carry out a counteroffensive against Russia which would achieve discernable results both in terms of territory re-captured and casualties inflicted on the Russian army. The results, however, have been dismal to date — tens of thousands of Ukrainian casualties and thousands of destroyed vehicles while failing to breach even the first line of the Russian defenses.

One of the challenges NATO will face in Vilnius is the question of how to recover from this setback. Many NATO countries are starting to exhibit “Ukraine fatigue” as they see their armories stripped bare and their coffers emptied in what, by every measurement, appears to be a losing cause.

The scope and scale of the Ukrainian military defeat is such that the focus of many NATO members appears to be shifting from the unrealistic goal of strategically defeating Russia to a more realistic objective of bringing about a cessation to the conflict that preserves Ukraine as a viable nation state.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will attend the NATO summit. However, his demands for NATO membership will not be met — U.S. President Joe Biden himself has weighed in on the matter, saying this would not be possible while Ukraine is at war with Russia.

Face Saving Gestures

There will be face-saving gestures from NATO, such as the creation of a NATO-Ukraine Council and talk of eventual post-conflict security guarantees. But the reality is Zelensky’s presence will do Ukraine more harm than good, since it will only accentuate the internal disagreement within NATO on the issue of Ukrainian membership and highlight NATO’s impotence when it comes to doing anything that can meaningfully alter the current trajectory on the battlefield, which is heading toward a strategic defeat for both Ukraine and NATO.

The vision of the Madrid summit was that of NATO capitalizing on its strategic victory against Russia to further expand its ranks in Europe (both Finland and Sweden were invited), and to push its influence into the Pacific Ocean. While NATO's Pacific partners (Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea) have been invited to Vilnius, the hopes that their presence would coincide with the announcement of the opening of a NATO liaison office in Japan have been quashed by France, which objects to an alliance ostensibly focused on North Atlantic security becoming involved in the Pacific.

While Finland has joined NATO, Sweden has not, and its membership is becoming increasingly problematic given Turkey's opposition. Turkish President Recep Erdogan's recent announcement that Turkey will agree to Swedish NATO membership when the European Union admits Turkey appears to be a poison pill that permanently scuttles Sweden's membership hopes, since the European Union is not inclined to admit Turkey.

The Vilnius summit will most likely be defined by these issues, and by the inability of the alliance to reach a meaningful consensus on how best to address them.

One can expect a plethora of rhetorical spin and posturing by the NATO membership, but the fact is the real mission of the Vilnius summit is how best to achieve a soft landing from the unfulfilled goals and objectives laid out last year in Madrid.

Normalizing failure might best describe the best that NATO can accomplish in Vilnius.

Any failure to try to stop the accumulation of debacles that represent the current NATO policy toward Ukraine will result in further collapse of the military situation in Ukraine, and the political situation in Europe, which, in their totality, push NATO closer to the moment of its ultimate demise.

This prospect does not bode well for those whose task it is to put as positive a spin as possible on reality. But NATO has long ago stopped dealing with a fact-based world, allowing itself to devolve into a theater of the absurd where actors fool themselves into believing the tale they are spinning, while the audience stares in dismay.

That is very well put by Mr Ritter, and those of you who have been following my own analysis in the past 1 ½ will know that my intellectual orientation is the same. This is a calamitous defeat on the battlefield trying to be covered up as a victory, and everybody from Biden to Blinken to Borrel to other key officials in Brussels, London and Washington are trying to fool their respective populations with narratives that talk bombastically about beating Russia but are being punctured by the emerging facts. There is no Ukrainian victory in sight, but having become invested in the fake narrative for so long, none of these spineless politicians can survive the truth. As such, the lying, via well-crafted but despicable theatrics, will continue, at least until major elections are over, in particular the American one in Nov 2024. In the meantime, the comedian Zelensky will be shunned, as he has evidently found out at the moment the photo caught him apart from his sponsors at the Vilnius summit.

Frankly, he has only himself and his own government to blame. He was elected to end the war that started in 2014, but he followed the path of warmongers to unilaterally ignore the peace provided under the two Minsk Accords of 2014 and 2015, and chose to fight Russia in a civil war of two countries with the same race, culture and traditions and to chase after NATO suitors that he thought had the power to defeat Russia. He and other like-minded Western Ukrainians were wrong. I can see that he could not have imagined that NATO would run out of bullets, weapons and also money, and he did not think that the promises he was made that his country would join NATO would turn into treachery. Fool.

The corollary of the debacle in Europe is that the attempt to expand NATO to the Pacific will not work. The American politicians are shit stirrers everywhere, as one of their own citizens, Caitlin Johnstone, writes succinctly as follows:

The US Is War: Notes From The Edge Of The Narrative Matrix

Caitlin Johnstone

5 days ago

The US won WW2 and then immediately plunged into the Cold War. The US won the Cold War and then immediately set to work destroying the Middle East. The US destroyed the Middle East and then immediately started another cold war in preparation for another world war. The US *is* war.

A normal country wages war with the goal of getting back to peacetime. The US wages war with the goal of getting to the next war.

The “Uyghur genocide” narrative is a lie, the “debt trap diplomacy” narrative is a lie, the “social credit score” narrative is a lie, they’re lying about Taiwan, and they’re lying about China trying to conquer the world. They lied about every other disobedient nation, and they’re lying about China.

You cannot understand the geopolitics and major conflicts of the 2020s without understanding that the US empire has been actively amassing military threats in the immediate surroundings of its top two rivals that it would never tolerate anyone else amassing near the US.

President Biden had a recent interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria during which he defended his controversial decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine and suggested that the US can continually support Ukraine the way it supports Israel rather than adding it to the NATO alliance.

About halfway through the interview Biden said something about China that’s worth flagging, because the claim he makes is self-evidently false, and it’s not the first time he’s made it.

Describing the conversations he's been having with China's President Xi Jinping, Biden said the following:

“We're going to put together the Quad which is India, Australia, the United States and Japan. I got a call from him [Xi] on that. He said why are you doing that. I said we're not doing that to surround you, we're doing that to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean and in the South China Sea. Because we believe the rules of the road about what constitutes international air space, international space and the water should be maintained.”

Biden uttered this same bogus talking point about not trying to surround China last month at the private fundraising event where he made headlines by calling Xi a “dictator”:

“But what he was really upset about was that I insisted that we — we reunite the Qu- — so-called Quad. He called me and told me not to do that because it was putting him in a bind. I said, All we're doing — we're not trying to surround you, we're just trying to make sure the international rules with air and sea lanes remain open.”

Biden is lying. The US is deliberately surrounding China with war machinery and has been for years, and has rapidly escalated its efforts to do so during Biden's term. There are currently no fewer than 313 US military bases in East Asia by the Pentagon's own admission, with the Biden administration adding four new ones in the Philippines. Biden's war machine has been busy instituting the AUKUS alliance which is specifically set up to menace China, moving nuclear-capable bombers to Indonesia, signing a military deal with Papua New Guinea, working to station missile-armed marines at Japan's Okinawa islands, staging provocations in Taiwan, and getting into increasingly confrontational encounters with Chinese military vessels and aircraft off China's coast as part of its dramatically increased military presence in the area.

So of course the US is trying to surround China, as evidenced by the mountains of US war machinery that are being moved into areas surrounding China. Biden can babble all he wants about wanting to secure sea lanes and protect international waters, but only a drooling idiot would believe the world's most powerful empire is militarily surrounding its top geopolitical rival as an act of *defense*.

And Beijing is under no illusions about this. Xi said in a speech earlier this year that “Western countries — led by the U.S. — have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression against us, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country's development.”

So Biden isn't trying to fool the Chinese government with his “We're not trying to surround you” schtick — he's trying to fool *you*. He's trying to fool the western public and the allies of the United States, who would get spooked if the US president openly admitted to a deliberate campaign of militarily encirclement against an economic superpower they all trade with extensively.

You simply cannot understand the geopolitics and major conflicts of the 2020s without understanding that the US empire has been actively amassing military threats in the immediate surroundings of its top two rivals — China and Russia — that it would never tolerate anyone else amassing anywhere near the United States. The single dumbest thing the US empire asks us to believe nowadays is that surrounding its two biggest foes with war machinery is a defensive action, rather than an act of extreme aggression.

The best advice I can offer about US-China tensions is to ignore the words and watch the actions. Ignore what officials say about wanting peace and not trying to surround China and supporting the One China policy etc, and just watch all the US war machinery that's being rapidly added to that region. The US empire is better at international narrative manipulation than any power structure that has ever existed in human history, but what they can't spin away is the concrete maneuverings of solid pieces of war machinery, because they are physical realities and not narratives.

Fortunately for us in Asia, the Japanese, the S Koreans and the Taiwanese are not as easy to be led astray by pied pipers. Take on China on behalf on the Americans? I don't think so. As the Wall Street Journal reports:

Would Allies Fight With U.S. for Taiwan? Japan Is Wary

Washington and Tokyo are making plans to defend Taiwan against a potential attack by China, but Japan won't commit its military

By

Alastair Gale

July 15, 2023 12:01 am ET

TOKYO—American and Japanese military officials have been working on a plan for a conflict over Taiwan for more than a year, but the talks have yet to resolve a central question: Would Japan join the fight?

Washington has nudged Tokyo to consider roles for the Japanese military such as hunting for Chinese submarines around Taiwan, said people familiar with the discussions, without getting any commitment.

The planning is one of the most important aspects of the U.S. response to Beijing's threats to capture Taiwan by force. At its closest, Japan is just 70 miles from the democratically self-governing island, and it hosts some 54,000 U.S. troops, concentrated on the southern island of Okinawa.

If China moves to seize Taiwan and the U.S. intervenes, as President Biden has said it would, the first response would likely come from those U.S. bases. Under an agreement dating from the 1960s, the U.S. would need Japan's approval—but Tokyo would feel pressure to provide that, as refusing would jeopardize the alliance that ensures its security.

Getting Japan to engage in the fight directly would be harder. Japanese leaders publicly shun discussion of a role in any Taiwan war, in part because public opinion is generally against getting ensnared in a conflict.

“If you ask the question of whether you are willing to risk your life to defend Taiwan, I think 90% of Japanese people would say ‘no’ at this point,” said Satoru Mori, a professor of politics at Keio University in Tokyo.

Tokyo is investing heavily in long-range cruise missiles and other hardware in response to China’s growing arsenal, but it says the buildup is strictly for self-defense. “We have to spend more on military deterrence and response capabilities to reduce the risk we would be attacked,” Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on a recent visit to Okinawa.

Japan’s Constitution, written by the U.S. after World War II, renounces the use of force to settle disputes. But under a law approved in 2015 under then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan can respond militarily if a close ally is under attack nearby and its own survival is at stake.

Simulations conducted earlier this year by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, found the U.S. could likely block a Chinese takeover of Taiwan with the support of allies such as Japan and Australia.

In most of the center’s wargame scenarios, Japan joins the U.S. in the fight after China attacks U.S. bases on Japanese soil, destroying hundreds of American and Japanese aircraft—a modern-day version of Pearl Harbor. Surviving Japanese ships and planes attack the Chinese to the north and east of Taiwan and help intercept Chinese amphibious invasion craft before they overwhelm the island, with Japan’s hard-to-detect submarines playing a vital role in sinking Chinese ships.

While a Chinese attack on U.S. bases in Japan would likely end Tokyo’s hesitancy, some American and Japanese security analysts said, there is no guarantee a conflict would play out that way. What worries Tokyo most about getting involved in fighting is the risk of escalation—for example, of China’s encouraging allies Russia and North Korea to attack Japan, or threatening to use nuclear weapons.

The U.S. is seeking more clarity from Japan as the two sides try to develop a combined operational plan for a Taiwan conflict. Subjects include supply routes, missile-launcher sites and refugee-evacuation plans, people familiar with the talks say. Japan is willing to support the U.S. military by providing fuel and other supplies, these people say.

A Pentagon spokesman said the U.S. and Japan share a commitment to peace in the Taiwan Strait and that the U.S. welcomes Japan’s interest in “expanding its roles, missions, and capabilities. This will enhance deterrence.” Asked about planning for a conflict over Taiwan, a Japanese government spokesman said Japan and the U.S. maintain joint defense plans but declined to go into further detail.

If we read between the lines everywhere in this longish report, the following conclusions can be made.

- 1) As Prof John Mearsheimer has long contended, the Ukrainians have been led up a garden path by the collective west. The promises to them that they will join NATO

have come to nothing and Ukraine will essentially be abandoned. Thrown upon the proverbial bus. This is a huge treachery by the collective west because those guys behind the narrative of noble resistance against an imperialist Russia, have no willingness to put their own boots on the ground in Ukraine. As a matter of fact, under this label called Ukraine fatigue, they will soon be reducing the flow of weapons to Kyiv.

- 2) Ukraine without weapons and without Article 5 is doomed. After the key elections in the west, they will be sold down the drain, and there will be negotiated peace. They will evolve into a rump state that will be crippled forever. I mean forever... That will be an immense tragedy for the ordinary folk of Ukraine even if they don't know it yet.
- 3) The fools in the Kyiv government have simply taken on more than they can chew. There is no cavalry charging to their rescue anytime soon. The Russians, after destroying the rest of the Ukrainian army in the remaining months of summer will march into Kharkov and Odessa, and take over the regions with a majority of Russian speaking Ukrainians. The game is over for Kyiv.
- 4) The Americans who are manipulating NATO to take on China will fail in this effort and their entreaties to the Europeans to set up NATO Asia will fall on deaf ears. The Europeans have no reason to travel halfway around the world to take on an Asian super power, just like the Americans themselves don't want to do so on their own. It is just not logistically feasible and everybody knows it.
- 5) They want the Japanese to do that, but those blokes have turned pacifist after the two atomic bombs dropped on them. Good for them. The Japanese only want to protect their own asses without pissing off the Americans, not join some ill-conceived military adventure to defend Taiwan with Japanese boys. And at the end of the day, neither the Americans will protect 27million Chinese in Taiwan against 1.4 billion Chinese with their own boys. They are just trying to find Asian boys to die in an Asian war to contain China, like they have done in Ukraine. But the ploy is so obvious that there are no takers, other than lip service.

Nobody in Asia is going to war against China to back up America. The American empire can decline for all we care. Fight to maintain their global hegemony? They can do it themselves.

I am going to bet that the Asian countries are not as naive as the Ukrainians. And having seen what happened to Ukraine, with the puppet master running out of basic ammunition halfway through a war in which the client state has been totally destroyed and left defenceless, the Asian states must be much wiser than to join a hapless American empire to take on their own most important trade partner, China, to support Uncle Sam as global hegemon. It's just not going to happen. Fuck, no.

Therefore, if the only good thing to emerge from this disgraceful betrayal of Ukraine in Vilnius by the collective west, is that Asia will not be led up another primrose garden, then everything has turned out well.

Quite well...

By:

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Fintech Entrepreneur, Money Manager and Blogger

Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris