

10 Takeaways From the Zelenskyy Blowup

By Victor Davis Hanson

1) Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy does not grasp—or deliberately ignores—the bitter truth: Those with whom he feels most affinity (Western globalists, the American Left, the Europeans) have little power in 2025 to help him. And those with whom he obviously does not like or seeks to embarrass (cf. his Scranton, Pa., campaign-like visit in September 2024) alone have the power to save him. For his own sake, I hope he is not being “briefed” by the Obama-Clinton-Biden gang to confront President Donald Trump, given their interests are not really Ukraine’s as they feign.



2) Zelenskyy acts as if his agendas and ours are identical. So, he keeps insisting that he is fighting for us despite our two-ocean distance that he mocks. We do have many shared

interests with Ukraine, but not all by any means: Trump wants to “reset” with Russia and triangulate it against China. He seeks to avoid a 1962 DEFCOM 2-like crisis over a proxy showdown in proximity to a nuclear rival. And he sincerely wants to end the deadlocked Stalingrad slaughterhouse for everyone’s sake.

3) The Europeans (and Canada) are now talking loudly of a new muscular antithesis, independent of the United States. Promises, promises—given that would require Europeans to prune

back their social welfare state, frack, use nuclear, stop the green obsessions, and spend 3% to 5% of their GDP on defense. The U.S. does not just pay 16% of NATO's budget but also puts up with asymmetrical tariffs that result in a European Union trade surplus of \$160 billion, plays the world cop patrolling sea-lanes and deterring terrorists and rogues states that otherwise might interrupt Europe's commercial networks abroad, as well as de facto including Europe under a nuclear umbrella of 6,500 nukes.

4) Zelenskyy must know that all of the once deal-stopping issues to peace have been de facto settled: Ukraine is now better armed than most NATO nations, but will not be in NATO; and no president has or will ever supply Ukraine with the armed wherewithal to take back the Donbas and Crimea. So, the only two issues are: How far will Putin be willing to withdraw to his 2022 borders? How will he be deterred? The first is answered by a commercial sector/tripwire, joint Ukrainian-U.S.-Europe resource development corridor in Eastern Ukraine, coupled with a Korea-like DMZ; the second by the fact that Putin, unlike his 2008 and 2014 invasions, has now lost a million dead and wounded to a Ukraine that will remain thusly armed.

5) What are Zelenskyy's alternatives without much U.S. help: Wait for a return of the Democrats to the White House in four years? Hope for a rearmed Europe? Pray for a Democrat House and a third Alexander Vindman-like engineered Trump impeachment? Or swallow his pride, return to the White House, sign the rare-earth minerals deal, invite in the Euros (Are they seriously willing to patrol a DMZ?), and hope Trump can warn Putin, as he did successfully between 2017-21, not to dare try it again?

6) If there is a ceasefire, a commercial deal, a Euro ground presence, and influx of Western companies into Ukraine, would there be elections? And if so, would Zelenskyy and his party win? And if not, would there be a successor transparent

government that would reveal exactly where all the Western financial aid money went?

7) Zelenskyy might see a model in Netanyahu. The Biden administration was far harder on him than Trump is on Ukraine: suspending arms shipments, demanding cease-fires, prodding for a wartime, bipartisan cabinet, hammering Israel on collateral damage—none of which Westerners have demanded of Zelenskyy. Yet Netanyahu managed a hostile President Joe Biden, kept Israel close to its patron, and when visiting was gracious to his host. Netanyahu certainly would never before the global media have interrupted, and berated a host and patron president in the White House.

8) If Ukraine has alienated the U.S., what then is its strategic victory plan? Wait around for more Euros? Hold off an increasingly invigorated Russian military? Cede more territory? What, then, exactly are Zelenskyy's cards he seems to think are a winning hand?

9) If one views carefully all the Oval Office tape, most of it was going quite well—until Zelenskyy started correcting Vice President JD Vance firstly, and Trump secondly. By Ukraine-splaining to his hosts, and by his gestures, tone, and interruptions, he made it clear that he assumed that Trump was just more of the same compliant, clueless moneybags Biden waxen effigy. And that was naïve for such a supposedly worldly leader.

10) March 2025 is not March 2022, after the heroic saving of Kyiv—but three years and 1.5 million dead and wounded later. Zelenskyy is no longer the international heartthrob with the glamorous entourage. He has postponed elections, outlawed opposition media and parties, suspended habeas corpus and walked out of negotiations when he had an even hand in spring 2022 and apparently even now when he does not in spring 2025.

Quo vadis, Volodymyr?

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