

Trump's Righteous Criticism of Zelenskyy

By Victor Davis Hanson

[President Donald Trump](#) is incurring a lot of criticism lately on the Ukrainian war. He's trying to negotiate an end to the war.

Remember, there's probably somewhere around 1.5 million dead, wounded, missing, and captured on both sides, together. That is the largest casualty rate figure total in Europe since the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942 and 1943.

In his "Art of the Deal" style he came in and he said some things the last week that got people very angry. I'll just give you two examples.

He said that [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) was a dictator and that he "should have stopped the war and never started it." That got people anguished because we know that Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.



So, why did Donald Trump say that? Of course, he doesn't believe that Zelenskyy started the war because he has campaigned

himself on the following narrative:

Under George Bush, in 2008, Russia invaded Ossetia and

Georgia. In 2014, under the Obama administration, they invaded the Donbas and Crimea. On Feb. 24, 2022, under Joe Biden, they tried to take Kyiv.

However, of the last four administrations, there was one in which they did not leave their borders to invade another nation—my administration. Why? Because unlike the prior three presidents, I was able to establish deterrence.

How did I do that? I killed Qassem Soleimani. I killed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. I destroyed ISIS. I got rid of the Wagner Group. I did a lot of things that put the fear of God into [Vladimir Putin](#).

So, Trump knows who started this war. So, why did he say it? And he's retracted it now. He said, "I didn't mean it that way."

What he's trying to say is that this war has been going on for three years. And the Europeans said they were going to come in and this exaltation when the Russian attack on Kyiv was thwarted. This guy in a T-shirt, ex-comedian, was a rock star. Everybody was going to pour weapons in and save Ukraine. We did more than any European power or NATO in aggregate. And guess what? It didn't work.

Three years later, 1.5 million casualties later, a quarter of the Ukrainian population gone, 600,000 Russians gone. A new alliance between Russia and China. Trump wants to stop it. And he says to Zelenskyy, "Don't tell me what I can do and what I can't do. Don't say you have to be in the negotiations. You guys have had three years. I'm coming in. We have funded you. So here's what's going to happen. You are a dictator."

Now, that is an excessive term, but on the other hand, Zelenskyy has canceled opposition parties, suppressed opposition press, suspended elements of habeas corpus, and suspended elections.

Now, some people on the right and left said, "Well, even [Winston] Churchill didn't have election for 10 years." Churchill came in and the first thing he did, in 1940, was have a coalition government of enemies, rivals, and friends in the war cabinet. Zelensky hasn't done that. So, in some ways, yes, he is an authoritarian.

The other thing he's been criticized is he says, "We want natural resources and minerals." They said, "He's a colonialist. He's an imperialist." No, Donald Trump is saying that the United States is very tired of subsidizing and paying for far-distant problems when we're running a \$37 trillion national debt.

This war was on the border of Europe. They said they were going to invest 2% of their gross domestic product as NATO powers in defense. They didn't do it. We have outfunded all of them. And yet, we are very distant with an open border ourselves. If we want to be there, we want some compensation. You have valuable minerals, we'll come in and have a concession with you—a business deal.

But more importantly, there's a subtext to this. He's also saying, "We don't want you in NATO. Europe really doesn't want you in NATO. [Russia](#) doesn't want you in NATO. And you're scared to be in NATO yourself. So, this is what's going to happen. If you invite American business into Ukraine, to help rebuild it and to profit, thereby, with natural resources, you're going to have Americans there. And Putin will be less eager to attack you if he understands there's a thriving American concession there."

Where are we then? What is the solution? Donald Trump is saying what we all know is going to happen.

No. 1, they're not going to be in NATO. But guess what? They're gonna be better armed and better fighters than any of the 32 countries in NATO. Vladimir Putin knows that.

No. 2, nobody ever said they were going to get back the Donbas, nor Crimea. That's not gonna happen. No president said, "We're gonna give you the military wherewithal to reclaim it."

No. 3, if we have a negotiated settlement, the hinge, the critical point will be, can Donald Trump put Putin back where he was before he invaded this time? Can he go back to Feb. 23, 2022?

And Trump will tell him, "You're not going to be worried about Ukraine. It's not going to be in NATO. You can go tell all of your friends that you institutionalized the acquisition of Crimea and the Donbas. But we would like you to reenter the family of nations. We would like you to be able to sell and buy things if we drop sanctions. But for us to do that, it would be wise for you to go back and we'll make a Korea-like DMZ."

And that is the negotiation that's transpiring right now.

If Donald Trump ends this bloodbath, all of this rhetoric and all of this hysteria will cease. And he will be a hero, both in Europe and the United States and in [Ukraine](#) and Russia.

And, final note. He was criticized by, "How dare you talk to a dictator?" Vladimir Putin is a dictator. And he's a violent dictator. And he's a corrupt dictator. And he's an aggressive dictator. But compared to Josef Stalin, who killed 20 million of his own people, he's an amateur. We had a formal alliance with the Soviet Union because they were the enemy of our enemy, Nazi Germany.

Richard Nixon talked to Mao Zedong to try to play him off against the Soviets. Mao Zedong was the greatest mass murderer in history. He killed 70 million people.

There's a long history of real politique of talking to odious dictators if it's in the U.S. interest and it lessens the

chance of war.

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