

Ukraine, It's Time to Make a Deal

By Victor Davis Hanson

I'd like to talk about Ukraine. It's been in the news lately. There's the scent of a deal. And Donald Trump has become the archetypal dealmaker. And he's said to the world, not just us, that he has talked with Russian President Vladimir Putin and had a constructive conversation.



At the same time, his team—Gen. [Keith] Kellogg, Marco Rubio, and Pete Hegseth—there has been some commentary about the outlines of the deal. And it's exactly what everybody's been talking about, that Ukraine will not be in NATO. Ukraine will be armed and protected. There'll probably be a demilitarized zone. The Donbas that was stolen 11 years ago by Putin—I'm not sure that's the right verb—absorbed, and Crimea, it'll be institutionalized, but he'll have to go back to the Feb. 24 invasion point.

So, what do both sides get out of it? Ukraine says, "Our heroic defense of Kyiv saved the country. We've gone from 41 million to 28 million. We're going to get our population back. We proved to the world we stopped this Russian juggernaut. We were never going to get back Donbas and Crimea."

And there hadn't been one administration—not Barack Obama, not the first Trump administration, not the [Biden administration](#)—prior to February of 2022, that ever said they were going to arm Ukraine with enough offensive weapons to militarily invade those areas and take them back. They were written off.

Now, John Bolton said, just the other day, “This is crazy. You gave concessions away before the deal started.”

Does anybody in their right mind—think about it—does anybody in their right mind think that if Donald Trump had said to Vladimir Putin, “Well, Vladimir, we’re going to have a deal and I’ll tell you what, we’re going to put them in NATO.”

“Oh no, don’t put them in NATO. I assure you’re going to—”

“Well, that’s—maybe we can deal. I might not put them.”

Everybody knows that there was no support in this country for them to be in NATO. And the reason was simple, for two reasons. Had they been in NATO, do we really think that somebody having cappuccino in Florence or in Amsterdam or in Barcelona, when they heard that they were invaded by the Russians and the Russians were descending on Kyiv, they were going to rush in with their M-16s and fight the Russians on behalf of Kyiv? It was not going to happen.

Does anybody think that if they had been in NATO, Joe Biden would have said, “That is a NATO partner, we’re going to invoke Article 3, they’re under our nuclear shield, we’re willing to risk Washington to save Kyiv”?

No, that was not going to happen.

So, let’s be realistic. We know the outlines of the deal. I want to say a couple of final things to put this all in perspective. Vladimir Putin invaded during the Obama administration because he thought that Russian reset under

Hillary Clinton and Obama was rank appeasement. And he knew they wouldn't do anything.

He invaded under Joe Biden and tried to decapitate Kyiv because he knew that Biden had said our reaction would hinge on whether it was a minor invasion. And he knew that Joe Biden had suspended offensive weapons for Ukraine, and he saw what happened in Kabul.

He invaded in 2008 into Ossetia and Georgia because George W. Bush had said he looked in the eyes of Putin, he saw a soul, kindred soul. And he knew that the Bush administration was a lame duck and weakened by the Iraq and Afghanistan imbroglios. OK.

He did not invade during Donald Trump. And we know why, because he thought Trump was too unpredictable, too dangerous, and it wasn't worth it in a cost-to-benefit analysis.

We should remember that. We should remember that it was Donald Trump's administration that he did not go into.

We should remember one other thing to put this whole dealmaking—and I wish John Bolton and Bill Kristol and everybody who's so critical would think about this. When Donald Trump came into office, he inherited a failed reset. That was the Geneva button that Hillary pushed. And we were going to make Ukraine this Western, EU, NATO partner on the doorstep of Russia. And then, Russia would be absorbed by our wonderful agendas.

There's never been any popular government under the czars or under the Communist Soviets or under the federation. It wasn't going to happen.

What did Donald Trump do when he came in? He started giving offensive weapons to Ukraine. He killed 300 to 400 of the Wagner Group in Syria. Nobody had ever done that in the Cold War, killed that many Russians. He got out of an asymmetrical

missile deal. He sanctioned the oligarchs at a higher level. He started flooding the world with cheap oil that could bankrupt Russia.

He was the best friend that Ukraine ever had. He wasn't Putin's asset—Putin's puppet, as they said. This hatred of Donald Trump and this accusing him of appeasing Russia was very deleterious. It turned up in Russian collusion hoax. Disinformation hoax. The Alfa Bank. Ping, ping pong—all that—hoax.

Let's get real. There's going to be a deal based on what everybody expects. Is it going to be perfect? No. Is it going to stop the greatest slaughter in Europe since Stalingrad? Maybe 1.6 million dead, wounded, and missing, on aggregate, on both sides? Yes.

So, let's just calm down and let Donald Trump see if he can cut a deal that is satisfactory—not good, but satisfactory for both sides—and stop the bloodletting.

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