

Zelenskyy Bites the Hand That Feeds Him Billions of Dollars

By Victor Davis Hanson

On Friday, recently, on the 28th of February, we saw one of the most extraordinary things I think we've ever seen in American diplomatic history.

[Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) was in the White House and they were arranged in front of the White House fireplace for a photo-op: the vice president, [JD Vance](#); Donald Trump, the president; Mr. Zelenskyy. And as they started to talk, it became heated. HEATED. And it was kind of tragic.



I think Mr. Zelenskyy, in some ways, is a sympathetic character. He needs American weapons, but he

kept arguing and arguing, and interrupting the president of the United States, who kept trying to remind him that without American weapons—and the number is disputed because it includes weaponry, economic assistance, and other types of U.S. aid. And it's somewhere between \$180 billion or, as Trump feels, \$300 billion.

But the point is that Trump was the good cop and Vance was the bad cop. And Vance kept saying to him, "You don't have the

destiny in Ukraine.”

And what he was trying to say is, “Mr. Zelenskyy, we’re not the Biden administration. And our system of government policy changes. You, essentially, got a blank check from [former President Joe Biden](#), who didn’t intervene. That’s not going to happen now. We have \$35-\$36 trillion in debt. We’re putting Americans out of work to save money. We don’t want to keep funding this Stalingrad war. We have to have a ceasefire. But you keep telling us what we should do, your patron.”

Zelenskyy says, “No, I’m not. But we have to have something that’s fair.” But the point that Zelenskyy didn’t appreciate was twofold. Whether it’s tragic or not, he’s in a subordinate position. Without the United States, he would be nowhere. Europe talks a great game. All of Europe together, all 28, 29 nations of the EU, 32 nations of NATO have given less than the United States alone. And they will not come to his aid.

And, more importantly, the only reason that he was able to create a standoff, a tie, some kind of impasse with this enormous Russian juggernaut was due to the bravery of the Ukrainian soldiers, but also United States weapons, but also the United States nuclear deterrent.

Every time that a general or a media personality [in Russia](#) threatened to use nuclear weapons, the United States politely, through diplomatic channels, said, “Don’t do this. Don’t do this.” And we have nuclear superiority over Russia. But we’re also risking the capitals of our country without a say in the conduct of the war.

The other subtext of this amazing public spat was, I don’t think Mr. Zelenskyy realizes that, whether it’s fair or not, he has sided with the American Left. He feels that the left wing and Europe and the left-wing United States are his sponsors. And that means that he is overtly political.

One example, he flew into the swing state of Pennsylvania

right at the heat of the September campaigning season in 2024. He went to iconic Scranton, on the invitation of Joe Biden, who was trying to help [then-Vice President] Kamala Harris.

He was flown in on a U.S. military jet. He met Democratic politicians. He met union workers in a munitions factory and basically said to them, "These jobs are essential to us." Subtext: "You wouldn't want to lose your jobs by voting for Donald Trump, who might cut off aid." That was a terrible mistake. And he has said some things since then.

He's very sensitive to the idea that [Donald Trump](#) has called him a dictator. That might've been unseemly, but all he has to do is to have some—if we had an election during COVID, then he can have an election even with the stalemate in Ukraine. Remember, we had elections during Korea, Vietnam, World War I, World War II. The United States has never canceled an election during a war, even during the Civil War. And so, that falls on unsympathetic ears.

Let me just sum up by suggesting there must be some realization on the part of Mr. Zelenskyy that, unlike Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he does not have a wartime cabinet. Unlike Mr. Netanyahu, he will not be pressured into a ceasefire, which we pressured Israel, to their disadvantage. And unlike Mr. Netanyahu, he's not getting lectures about collateral damage.

He's been given a pretty free hand. He's been interfering in American politics. And that has a long history with Ukrainians. The Ukrainian ambassador to the United States in 2016 attacked Donald Trump in an op-ed. No need to get into [Alexander] Vindman and his role as a dual citizen in the first impeachment of Donald Trump. And no need to go back and talk about all the things Mr. Zelenskyy said.

So, the bottom line was, this was a very strange, bizarre, open diplomatic spat. At one point, Donald Trump said this was

good for the American people to see. And I think what he was saying is, "I'm in a very strange position where a subordinate nation is engaged in a war with a nuclear power and we are its patron and supplying it. And we are taking the risk of an escalation to DEFCON, who knows what? Three? And he doesn't seem to get that. He just talks about his needs, his needs. And I need to apprise him, before the American people, of our needs."

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