

Ukraine's Long Road to Potential Admission to NATO

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US President Joe Biden said he won't make it easy for Ukraine to join NATO. Ukraine has to meet the requirements to be a member.

"So, I'm not going to make it easier," Biden stated in convoluted prose. "I think they've done everything relating to demonstrating the ability to coordinate militarily, but," he asked, "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?" He added, "I think they will. I think they can. But it's not automatic."

He made these statements after he had, reportedly, said he could be ready to remove the Member Action Plan, which requires military and democratic reforms by nations seeking to join the alliance.

The leaders of other NATO member countries are not so keen as long as Ukraine is at war with Russia. According to the NATO treaty, an attack on one member "is considered an attack on them all". Countries like Poland, Moldova and the Czech Republic which have been keen to support Ukraine in this war, would not be prepared to be dragged into the war if Kyiv was given fast-track NATO membership. Biden can talk-the-talk because the US is thousands of kilometres away from the theatre of war and runs few risks of becoming embroiled.

The circle of Western commentators prepared to brave the war clique to tell the truth and analyse the war is widening and gaining currency. On June 16, The New York Times, which cheer-led the disastrous 2003 US war on Iraq, published an opinion article by Stephen Wertheim in which he begins, "Sometimes the stories we tell to win the war help us lose the peace." He gives the example of Afghanistan where the US held the Taliban responsible for Al Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, fought the Taliban for two decades, and then turned the country over to them.

He continues,

“The story we are telling ourselves today about the war in Ukraine runs its own risk. Since Russia invaded Ukraine last year, the debate in Western capitals about the origins of the conflict settled on one leading cause: Russia took up arms exclusively out of aggressive and imperialistic drives, and Western policies, including the years-long expansion of NATO, were beside the point.”

Exactly. For Russia, “the years-long” expansion of NATO to its borders was not only “the point” but the *casus belli*. From the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders warned NATO against expansion and NATO ignored these warnings. Ukraine is now paying the price. It is significant that the US president who gave the world the Iraq war, George W. Bush, was the first, in 2008, to call for Ukraine and Georgia to be recruited into NATO. Biden backed Bush’s 2003 war but London Mayor Boris Johnson did not and slammed Tony Blair for joining Bush in this deadly, destructive campaign — for Iraqis and Iraq, not the US or Britain.

The Ukraine war and punitive sanctions will weaken Russia but only temporarily. Russia is a vast country with huge resources which will recover. Russia will have help from the Global South, developing countries which regard NATO rather than Russia as the guilty party in this war. Selected African countries have already come together to send a mission to Moscow, which did not dismiss the call for peace talks, and Kyiv which rejected African mediation.

Wertheim states the obvious, “Ukraine’s best path to peace is to be well armed and supported outside NATO.” He suggested that Ukraine could join the European Union (EU) as this is an option Russia could tolerate. Perhaps.

Four months after Russia invaded Ukraine, the EU granted it formal candidate status. So far, Ukraine has, reportedly, satisfied two — judicial reforms and media freedom — of the seven qualifications for candidacy. The other criteria are combating corruption (which has been rampant in Ukraine), Constitutional Court reform, instituting the rule of law, carrying out anti-money laundering measures, and adoption of laws to rein in oligarchs, and safeguards for national minorities.

Of course, the EU has taken a positive line on Ukraine’s progress. One official told Reuters, “On reforms..we would never adopt a negative tone towards Ukraine at the moment.” However, he wound up by saying, “Not all is satisfactory.”

For Ukraine to gain admission, Kyiv has to harmonise the country’s laws and adopt EU standards on climate change, labour practices, and other key areas which have taken years for candidate members to complete satisfactorily. For example, Cyprus, which joined with nine others in the fifth enlargement in 2004, was mentored by Ireland which gained membership in 1973 in the first enlargement with Denmark and Britain (which left). Poland and former Soviet satellite states — which eagerly backed Ukraine in the war — apparently back a fast track for Ukraine while founder members France and Germany do not. Since all 27 members must accept a new candidate, this could take time and careful consideration as older and wiser members may not wish to alienate Russia permanently.

When this war has ended, Ukraine will face massive reconstruction and the return of millions of refugees. Russia will be weakened but, as long as damage is limited, Russia will be able to recoup its losses fairly quickly. Russia is too big an exporter of vital products and metals,

too big a political player on the world stage, and too big to ostracise and sanction for long.

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