

Continued Support for Ukraine Is Fading, but Zelensky Will Press On in a Seemingly Endless Conflict the World Wants to Forget

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You are feted by Washington's most celebrated and powerful and featured as Time magazine's Man of the Year. You return home in triumph bearing pledges of tens of billions of dollars in support for your war against a feared and hated invader. But a year later, everything looks a lot different with all the backslappers and glad handers curiously unwilling to get together to talk strategy. You are angry and show it, leaving with little more than a lot of promises that you know to be empty. When you get home, you realize that the end is coming. What a difference a year makes Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky!

The decline and fall of Zelensky has been detailed in a lengthy *Time* magazine [article](#) entitled "'Nobody Believes in Our Victory Like I Do.' Inside Volodymyr Zelensky's Struggle to Keep Ukraine in the Fight", the same journal that was celebrating him over a year ago. The article is extraordinary in terms of what it reveals about the inner workings of the Ukrainian war effort. It was written by Simon Shuster, a *Time* journalist who covered Zelensky's visit to Washington and New York in September and then returned with the president back to Ukraine for follow-up interviews and inquiry. Shuster was given extraordinary access both to Zelensky for in depth interviews and to Ukrainian senior officers and other officials and he was able to enter into frank exchanges about what was happening to the country, its army and its government as the war continues well into its second year with winter weather looming and doubts surfacing about NATO and US

continuing support for Kiev.

The tale begins with Zelensky's planned visit to Washington after his stop in New York City to attend the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. Zelensky's actual message to the General Assembly was not quite so incendiary and impulsive as some of his other interactions while on his visit, but he offered little new. He [reportedly received](#) an obligatory "warm welcome" from those in attendance, but "he delivered his address to a half-full house, with many delegations declining to appear and listen to what he had to say." He [warned those present](#) that

"The goal of the present war against Ukraine is to turn our land, our people, our lives, our resources into a weapon against you, against the international rules-based order. We have to stop it. We must act united to defeat the aggressor."

Zelensky did go overboard when he referred to Russia and Russians as "evil" and as "terrorists" and accused them of carrying out a "genocide" against Ukraine.

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'Nobody Believes in Our Victory Like I Do.' Inside Volodymyr Zelensky's Struggle to Keep Ukraine in the Fight

Screenshot from [Time](#)

Zelensky's frustrations spilled over in Washington on the following day [where he met](#) both with President Joe Biden and with some members of Congress and also dropped by the Pentagon and left flowers at the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial in Arlington Virginia. But Congressional leaders refused to let Zelensky deliver a public address on Capitol Hill and aides who tried to arrange in-person appearances for him on Fox News and in an interview with Oprah Winfrey were rebuffed. His meeting at the White House with the president did go relatively well with the announcement of a new aid package in the works including "significant air defense capabilities," and, [according to one report](#), some of the much sought after ATACMS long range missile systems. The White House also presented Zelensky with a list of anti-corruption reforms that were essential for the continuance of US aid, which was less welcome. Nevertheless, in spite of the lip service pledge of continuing support, to his evident disappointment, Zelensky was not given a hero's welcome like he received last year. He met privately with Kevin McCarthy, speaker of the House, and several other GOP hawks who will be instrumental in approving any aid, as well as with Senators Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer who promised to be "in his corner." McCarthy boldly asked what Zelensky needed to win the war and to provide lawmakers with "a vision of a plan for victory." Zelensky asked for more weapons and aid and warned that without aid "We will lose!" Nevertheless, it seems that many conservative Republicans and some progressive Democrats were fed up with the war and are concerned over the lack of accountability combined with the all too evident notoriously high level of corruption within the Ukrainian

government.

Shuster picks up the narrative at an event in Washington, where Volodymyr Zelensky was running late because the meetings at the White House and the Pentagon had delayed him by more than an hour, and when he finally arrived to begin his speech at the National Archives at 6:41 pm, he was clearly nervous and upset at the delay. [His speech](#) was in front of an audience that included congressional leaders and top officials from the Biden Administration. It was the major planned event of the visit, an opportunity to strengthen US support against Russia, but it did not go as planned with the Ukrainian president acting as though he wanted to “get it over with.”

Zelensky later told Shuster that he was experiencing frustration over his inability to convince his audience that Ukraine could win the war against Russia, albeit with considerable help. “Nobody believes in our victory like I do. Nobody,” he said. Making the case “takes all your power, your energy. You understand? It takes so much of everything.” He expanded on his concerns, observing that “The scariest thing is that part of the world got used to the war in Ukraine. Exhaustion with the war rolls along like a wave. You see it in the United States, in Europe. And we see that as soon as they start to get a little tired, it becomes like a show to them: ‘I can’t watch this rerun for the 10th time.’”

Indeed, opinion polls suggest that public support for the Ukraine war is sinking both in the US and in Europe. The highly promoted spring offensive by the Ukrainian Army has produced little in the way of territorial gains coupled with large losses in manpower and materiel. No one, not even Joe Biden, really sees victory just over the horizon, and the outbreak of war in Israel-Gaza means that the world’s attention will now be shifting to what is going on in the Middle East.

Shuster spoke with high level Ukrainian officials, all of whom noted that Zelensky had returned from the US a changed man. One said that he was “Angry” all the time while another member of the inner circle said “Now he walks in, gets the updates, gives the orders, and walks out” and still another described how “Most of all, Zelensky feels betrayed by his Western allies. They have left him without the means to win the war, only the means to survive it.”

This has left a stubborn Zelensky with a by now unrealistic belief that Ukraine can still win the war. One adviser opined that “He deludes himself. We’re out of options. We’re not winning. But try telling him that.” Zelensky flatly refuses to even consider entering into talks with the Russians to end the conflict and will not waver on conceding any Ukrainian territory to Moscow, a deal breaker. Zelensky claims to continue to fight because he honestly believes that if the Russians are not stopped in Ukraine, the war will spread. He told Shuster “I’ve long lived with this fear. A third world war could start in Ukraine, continue in Israel, and move on from there to Asia, and then explode somewhere else.” He thought that that was his core message in Washington: “Help Ukraine stop the war before it spreads, and before it’s too late.”

Zelensky is also facing trouble at home, where severe damage to some infrastructure will make for a miserable Christmas that he will be blamed for. And also there are reports of officers refusing to send their men on the offensive due to lack of weapons and high casualty rates but Zelensky insists the war will continue into the winter in an effort to rally foreign supporters. One adviser commented that even if the weapons flow were to increase “we don’t have the men to use them.” Men are now being drafted in their 40s and 50s and

some new conscripts are even older than that being swept up off the street by something like press gangs. Government ministers and generals, including inner circle Minister of Defense Oleksiy Reznikov, who have been perceived as reluctant to prosecute the war or too corrupt have been fired and it is expected that there will be more dismissals as the conflict grows more dismal in winter conditions.

To satisfy Washington by combatting corruption, Zelensky reportedly issued a guideline which was described by a staffer as “Don’t buy anything. Don’t take any vacations. Just sit at your desk, be quiet, and work.” In early October, a top presidential adviser asked Shuster to turn off his recording device so he could speak freely before saying that in spite of the pressure to reform “People are stealing like there’s no tomorrow.” Shuster’s article identifies several other examples of top-level corruption in the Ukrainian government that have not been addressed by the government.

In an effort to turn around the many problems confronting Zelensky, he pulled what he considered to be a shrewd move by contacting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and suggesting a visit to Israel to express solidarity in the war against Hamas. Netanyahu refused, reportedly saying “The time is not right!” but later changed his mind and Zelensky will be allowed to visit possibly by the end of November. Joe Biden was more forthcoming in a bid to help Ukraine by bundling \$60 billion in aid into a package that also included \$14.5 billion for Israel in the belief that anything for Israel would certainly fly through Congress with the money for Ukraine attached. As of this writing, the Republicans have sought to separate the two packages of aid and Zelensky told Shuster that he was pessimistic about the matter due to the politics in Washington.

Shuster’s article concludes with

“...faced with the alternative of freezing the war or losing it, Zelensky sees no option but to press on through the winter and beyond. ‘I don’t think Ukraine can allow itself to get tired of war,’ he says. ‘Even if someone gets tired on the inside, a lot of us don’t admit it.’ The President least of all.”

Nevertheless, Zelensky knows exactly what is happening and one suspects he will be pulling the plug and retiring to one of his seven or so estates in Israel, Switzerland, Italy, and Florida where he will establish his bully pulpit and continue to complain that he was stabbed in the back by NATO and Washington. It was a war that should never have been fought in the first place and if Zelensky had been smarter before it began he would have found in Vladimir Putin a man who was willing to deal and who would have made efforts to avoid a war between the two nations that in reality have so much in common.

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