

Press Stunned as Ukraine President Zelensky Points Finger at West

Under the surface is a very different tale of the Ukrainian tensions

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In a stunning and unexpected outburst this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that his country’s current problems came from the west rather than the east.

The fears of a looming war were built on news stories that Russia had troops on the border it shares with the country—but this was not unusual, and there had been a similar assembly of soldiers a year ago, he said.

The truth was that threat level had *not* changed, he told a press conference this week.

Furthermore, the real threat to Ukraine was not Russia, but the “destabilisation of the situation inside the country” he told journalists.

The cause of the panic was the press itself, Zelensky said.

Correspondents at the event were discomfited. The event was “a slightly surreal encounter” said the BBC’s Sarah Rainsford.

The Ukrainian leader went on to slam the US, British and other Western diplomats who were fleeing the country, as if the much-described war was actually real.

He denied that Ukraine was a sinking ship, but even if they saw it that way, “diplomats are like captains. They should be the last to leave a sinking ship.”

What’s Really Happening?

The Western powers appear to be repeating their Taiwan strategy in the Ukraine.

- Step one is to travel to someone’s territory and alter the status quo until the neighbors react.

- Step two is to angrily accuse the neighbors of being aggressive and expansionist—even though they literally haven't left their own territory (unlike the accusers).
- Step three is to work with the press to mislead the world about which side is destabilizing the situation, and thus justify military expansion.

Ultimately, the aim is to push NATO borders eastwards, justify increased spending on the military, and attempt to further unite the world against communities which the West feels need to be “contained”.

It's Working

The plan is working. Russia is being universally painted as the aggressor, and military activity from the west is rising. The UK government is sending weapons and troops to Ukraine, and calling on other NATO members to “unite”. The US says it has 8,500 troops ready to go.

On the media front, the message is virtually identical in every outlet: Russia is suddenly being threatening, so the good guys are being forced to respond. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said the US was committed to helping Ukraine “defend itself”.

The BBC rolled out politician Tobias Ellwood to explain that all the problems are Russia's fault. (The same man is used by the media as a source of negative comments on China.) The BBC newsroom always “forgets” to mention Ellwood's background. He served as part of the 77th Brigade, a British army propaganda unit focused on psychological warfare, media operations, and “special influence methods”.

How differently viewers would see the news if they knew the full story: “We are the media, and we are about to showcase the views of a person trained in spreading disinformation via the media.”

Problems with the Narrative

Just as the carefully balanced relationship between Taiwan and mainland China has been in place for years, with alternating periods of calm and tension, the same has been true in Ukraine. Russia has regularly placed troops on its border with Ukraine, and vice versa.

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said, the military tensions were a long-term fact of life between the two countries, and the threat level had not changed, despite every Western media outlet saying that it had.

But the underlying issue is this: NATO promised not to expand eastwards. It has done so repeatedly. It is never called out for this.

Yet those exact promises are well documented in history books – in the west as well as the east, as all students of recent European history know. Let's look at them below.

After the Quake

In 1989 and 1990, Europe went through a massive political earthquake, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and numerous related events. The Western powers and the Soviet Union held a series of meetings to reassure the other that they would not take advantage of the shake-up

for purposes of aggressive expansionism.

The Russian side, represented by Mikhail Gorbachev, had to play it straight. The country had large numbers of other urgent issues on its plate, so his argument was simple: Moscow would not move westward – as long as the west would not move eastward. Let the countries in between be.



Gorbachev (seated, middle) talking with West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (left) and Helmut Kohl (right) in Russia, July 15, 1990. Photo: Bundesbildstelle / Presseund Informationsamt der Bundesregierung.

The Famous Inch

The buzzphrase that emerged from those discussions was just three words long: “Not one inch.” It came, originally, from the mouth of the US Secretary of State James Baker, on February 9, 1990. NATO, he told Gorbachev, would move “not one inch eastward”.

NATO should rule out an “expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e. moving it closer to the Soviet borders”, the US Embassy in Bonn declared.

America’s national security archive, housed at George Washington University, sums up the meeting thus:

Not once, but three times, Baker tried out the “not one inch eastward” formula with Gorbachev in the February 9, 1990, meeting. He agreed with Gorbachev’s statement in response to the assurances that “NATO expansion is unacceptable.” Baker assured Gorbachev that “neither the President nor I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place,” and that the Americans understood that “not

only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction.

The following day, the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl made a similar promise to Gorbachev: "We believe that NATO should not expand the sphere of its activity."

Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary, declared his country would be party to the same promise. In June of that year, his boss Margaret Thatcher, the UK's "Iron Lady" Prime Minister, made the same pledge to Moscow: "We must find ways to give the Soviet Union confidence that its security would be assured."

A Promise Ignored

Fast forward to the present day: NATO has spent years declaring itself a "defensive" rather than "expansionist" force, while its actions show itself doing precisely the opposite, year after year.

This diagram published this week by the BBC shows just some of the eastward expansion of NATO since that time.



BBC diagram showed the partial expansion of NATO over recent decades

The “not one inch” promised has been disregarded, with Western diplomats saying that it was never intended to be lasting, and was never put down on paper, anyway.

Russia's Requests

Coming back to the present day, what is Russia asking for?

- It is calling on NATO to halt its program of building missile bases in countries bordering or close to Russia's territory.
- It is asking NATO to withdraw troops in Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

- It is urging NATO to make it clear that Ukraine is not being groomed to join, thus further damaging the 1990 agreement.

Putin Can't Win

Like China, Russia will be painted as the aggressor whatever it does. The western powers will be portrayed as the defenders, whatever they do. But while the press is taking a sharply pro-western angle, academics and the public have a much wider range of views.

"You asserted that 'NATO is a defensive alliance'. It is not perceived that way in Russia," wrote Robert Morley, a former staff member of the US National Security Council in a letter to the *Economist* published today. "Our decision to expand into areas previously dominated by the Soviet Union reinforced the perception that NATO is aggressively pursuing policies detrimental to Russia's political and security interests."

Russia's response "is relatively moderate when compared with the American reaction to Moscow's effort to establish a military presence in Cuba during the 1960s," he added.

But while there is little hope that the mainstream media will ever lose its pro-NATO bias, the growth of independent media around the world gives hope that a more diverse, more inclusive set of voices will eventually be heard.

In the meantime, the Western hawks are once more banging the drums of war, but the East, so far, has always shown more patience than expected.

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