

A Rough Diplomatic Week for Ukraine

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In the early weeks of the war, a peace was still possible that would have seen Ukraine lose few lives and little to no land. Even the Donbas would have remained in Ukraine with autonomy under a still possible Minsk agreement. Only Crimea would have remained lost.

A year and a half later, Ukraine's daily loss of life is horrific and Russia is determined to hold not only Crimea and the Donbas, but Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.

But while Ukraine has struggled on the battlefield, it has sustained its diplomatic support. But this week, that too showed strains. Ukraine had a difficult week with both the aligned and the nonaligned.

A year ago, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed an enthusiastically supportive U.S. Congress live and a warm General Assembly via video. A year later, perhaps for fear of a different tone, Zelensky will meet privately with U.S. officials instead of publicly with a televised address to Congress.

In a perhaps even more worrisome sign for Ukraine, when Zelensky's turn came to speak to the General Assembly on September 19, "he delivered his address," [The Washington Post reported](#), "to a half-full house, with many delegations declining to appear and listen to what he had to say." Many countries have refused to condemn Russia or join the U.S.-led sanctions on Russia, but refusing to attend the General Assembly session and listen to Zelensky may be sending a strong signal.

And that was not the only signal. The *Post* further reports that "leaders from some developing nations are increasingly frustrated that the effort to support Ukraine is taking away, they say, from their own struggles to drum up enough money to adapt to a warming world, confront poverty and ensure a more secure life for their citizens." The nonaligned global majority has all along seen the war as yet another proxy war between NATO and Russia that distracts from the problems that are most urgent to the world.

But Ukraine's diplomatic worries come not just from the nonaligned countries but from the aligned ones. Poland has been, perhaps, Ukraine's strongest supporter. It has been one of the biggest suppliers of weapons—and the central hub through which other NATO countries have sent their weapons to Ukraine—and the spearhead for sending tanks and more advanced weaponry. It has given Ukraine about a third of its own weapons valued at over \$4 billion. And it has been a force behind the push for NATO membership for Ukraine.

But disagreement over the export of Ukrainian grain has shown how fragile that fraternity really is. Though united over a common animosity toward Russia, there are old strains in the Polish-Ukrainian relationship. Poland has been bothered by what they perceive as Ukraine's continued glorification of their anti-Polish nationalist past. In January, a Polish official [reminded Ukraine](#) that they "continue to glorify" Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera, who was "responsible for the genocide of Poles in 1943-44, when UPA troops horribly killed about 100,000 Polish citizens." The Polish parliament has [adopted a resolution](#) that includes "recognition of guilt" by Ukraine for the genocide as a condition for "Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation."

But the strain has recently torn over the issue of grain imports. Ukraine has complained about the betrayal of Polish restrictions on the import of Ukrainian grain to protect Polish farmers and markets. In August, echoing recent [U.S.](#) and [U.K.](#) statements, Marcin Przydacz, head of the Polish President's Office of International Affairs, said that Ukraine should be "more grateful." He took to Polish television to harshly [scold](#) that Kiev "should start to appreciate the role that Poland has played for Ukraine in the past months and years." In angry response, Kiev called the Polish ambassador to Ukraine into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furiously, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki shot back that, "The summoning of the Polish ambassador to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry—the representative of the only country that remained in Kiev the day Russia invaded Ukraine—should not have happened." Kiev's action was "a mistake...given the huge support Poland has provided to Ukraine."

And there the disagreement simmered until Zelensky's speech to the General Assembly. There [Zelensky lashed out](#) at "how some in Europe play out solidarity in a political theatre—making thriller from the grain. They may seem to play their own role but in fact, they are helping set the stage to a Moscow actor."

The accusation that Ukraine's greatest supporter is betraying Ukraine and helping Russia, coupled with Ukraine filing a complaint against Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia with the World Trade Organization over their import ban on Ukrainian grain, proved too much for Poland. Polish President Andrzej Duda [said](#) that Zelensky was like a drowning man who "can be extremely dangerous, because he can drag you to the depths" and "drown the rescuers." He [scolded](#) that "It would be good for Ukraine to remember that it receives help from us and to remember that we are also a transit country to Ukraine."

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki then [announced](#) that Poland is "no longer transferring weapons to Ukraine, because we are now arming Poland with more modern weapons." He clarified that Poland would still permit other countries to ship their arms to Ukraine through Poland.

Poland has since [clarified](#) that they will continue to honor the arms agreements they have made with Ukraine made until now:

“Poland is only carrying out previously agreed supplies of ammunition and armaments, including those resulting from the contracts signed with Ukraine,” spokesman Piotr Muller said.

Poland has also [now said](#) that, at a later date, it may send Ukraine more of its older weapons.

“We cannot transfer our new weapons that we buy to strengthen Poland’s security or modernize the Polish army,” Duda said. “We’ve signed agreements with Ukraine regarding, among others, ammunition and special vehicles, and we are implementing them.”

And Poland is not alone. The three Eastern European nations that Ukraine has brought files against at the World Trade Organization form a triumvirate of trouble for Ukraine. Poland is the most threatening because it is the most important. Hungary is the least surprising because they have been an outlier in NATO unity on the war since the beginning. And Slovakia is becoming worrisome.

[Polls](#) show that former Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico is leading heading into the September 30 election. Slovakia has, up until now, been a strong supporter of Ukraine and a supplier of arms. But Fico has [promised](#) that, if he is elected, Slovakia “will not send a single round to Ukraine.” Fico has also criticized the sanctions on Russia and called for improving relations with Russia when the war ends.

Zelensky’s speech at the General Assembly has revealed underlying tensions with the nonaligned world and heightened tensions with nations previously aligned with Ukraine.

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Featured image: APR-23-2022 Press conference of Volodymyr Zelenskyy the President of Ukraine during Russian Ukrainian war at Kyiv Metro station to protect against air strikes. Kyiv, Ukraine

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