



Zelensky: Ukraine ‘Must Admit’ It Won’t Join NATO. This Should Have Happened Sooner

BY JOHN HANSON

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This week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country “must admit” that it would not join NATO in a meeting with leaders of the Joint Expeditionary Force.

The issue is at the heart of the conflict in Eastern Europe – and American defense figures have warned against the Eastward expansion of NATO for decades.

Zelensky: ‘It is clear that Ukraine is not a member of NATO. We understand that’

“It is clear that Ukraine is not a member of NATO. We understand that,” Zelensky said. “We are adequate people.”

The Ukrainian president continued, “For years, we have heard about the supposedly open door, but we have also heard that we should not enter, and this is true and we must admit it,” he said of Ukraine’s efforts to join NATO, which began in 2008.

The Ukrainian President’s admission also included a swipe at NATO – which was created in 1949 as a mutual defense agreement in opposition to the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact.

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“The Russian invasion of Ukraine destroyed everything that security in our region — and I am sure international security — was based on,” Zelensky said, “the weight of the organizations we all hoped for, the force of international conventions. It has also called into question the world’s most powerful alliance, NATO.”

While Zelensky’s statement was a much needed aspect of ending the current war in his country perpetrated by Russia, this declaration should have come sooner.

As Ted Galen Carpenter observed in The Guardian at the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, “Vladimir Putin bears primary responsibility for this latest development, but Nato’s

arrogant, tone-deaf policy toward Russia over the past quarter-century deserves a large share as well.”

“Analysts committed to a US foreign policy of realism and restraint have warned for more than a quarter-century that continuing to expand the most powerful military alliance in history toward another major power would not end well,” Galen Carpenter noted. “The war in Ukraine provides definitive confirmation that it did not.”

Many U.S. officials have warned against NATO enlargement for decades for exactly this reason.

Former president Bill Clinton’s secretary of state Madeline Albright wrote in her **memoir**, “[Russian president Boris] Yeltsin and his countrymen were strongly opposed to enlargement, seeing it as a strategy for exploiting their vulnerability and moving Europe’s dividing line to the east, leaving them isolated.”

George Kennan, the famous Truman Cold Warrior who is credited with the “containment” doctrine of the Soviet Union, **warned** in a New York Times interview in May 1998 regarding NATO expansion, “I think it is the beginning of a new cold war. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies.”

“I think it is a tragic mistake,” Kennan forebode.

Bob Gates, the Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, warned “trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into Nato was truly overreaching”. The notion was “recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests”.

Much of this history leading up to this point has been forgotten, or most likely simply ignored.

As the LA Times **points out**,

In early February 1990, U.S. leaders made the Soviets an offer. According to transcripts of meetings in Moscow on Feb. 9, then-Secretary of State James Baker suggested that in exchange for cooperation on Germany, U.S. could make “iron-clad guarantees” that NATO would not expand “one inch eastward.” Less than a week later, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to begin reunification talks.

So, while no excuses should be made for Putin, many saw this coming.

Reasonable people can debate the pros and cons – but we should all be absolutely clear about the potential consequences.