

ZELENSKY'S 'BAD MOMENT'

The Ukrainian leader resorts to lies and threats at the tail end of a failing counteroffensive

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BAND OF BROTHERS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Prosecutor General of Ukraine Andriy Kostin, Foreign Minister of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba, US Climate Envoy John Kerry, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken listen as President Joe Biden addresses the 78th United Nations General Assembly in New York City on Tuesday. / Photo by JIM WATSON/AFP via Getty Images.

Next Tuesday will be the anniversary of the Biden administration's destruction of three of the four pipelines of Nord Stream 1 and 2. There is more I have to say about it, but it will have to wait. Why? Because the war between Russia and Ukraine, with the White House continuing to reject any talk of a ceasefire, is at a turning point.

There are significant elements in the American intelligence community, relying on field reports and technical intelligence, who believe that the demoralized Ukraine army has given

up on the possibility of overcoming the heavily mined three-tier Russian defense lines and taking the war to Crimea and the four oblasts seized and annexed by Russia. The reality is that Volodymyr Zelensky's battered army no longer has any chance of a victory.

The war continues, I have been told by an official with access to current intelligence, because Zelensky insists that it must. There is no discussion in his headquarters or in the Biden White House of a ceasefire and no interest in talks that could lead to an end to the slaughter. "It's all lies," the official said, speaking of the Ukrainian claims of incremental progress in the offensive that has suffered staggering losses, while gaining ground in a few scattered areas that the Ukrainian military measures in meters per week.

"Let's be clear," the official said. "Putin did a stupid and self-destructive act in starting the war. He thought he had a magical power and that all that he wanted was going to work out." Russia's initial attack, the official added, was poorly planned, understaffed, and led to unnecessary losses. "He was lied to by his generals and began the war with no logistics—no way of resupplying his troops." Many of the offending generals were summarily dismissed.

"Yes," the official said, "Putin did something stupid, no matter how provoked, by violating the UN charter and so did we"—meaning President Biden's decision to wage a proxy war with Russia by funding Zelensky and his military. "And so now we have to paint him black, with the help of the media, in order to justify our mistake." He was referring to a secret disinformation operation that was aimed at diminishing Putin, undertaken by the CIA in coordination with elements of British intelligence. The successful operation led major media outlets here and in London to report that the Russian president was suffering from varied illnesses that included blood disorders and a serious cancer. One oft-quoted story had Putin being treated by heavy doses of steroids. Not all were fooled. The *Guardian* skeptically reported in May of 2022 that the rumors "spanned the gamut: Vladimir Putin is suffering from cancer or Parkinson's disease, say unconfirmed and unverified reports." But many major news organizations took the bait. In June 2022, *Newsweek* splashed what it billed a major scoop, citing unnamed sources saying that Putin had undergone treatment two months earlier for advanced cancer: "Putin's grip is strong but no longer absolute. The jockeying inside the Kremlin has never been more intense. . . . everyone sensing that the end is near."

"There were some early Ukrainian penetrations in the opening days of the June offensive," the official said, "at or near" the heavily trapped first of Russia's three formidable concrete barriers of defense, "and the Russians retreated to sucker them in. And they all got killed." After weeks of high casualties and little progress, along with horrific losses to tanks and

armored vehicles, he said, major elements of the Ukrainian army, without declaring so, virtually canceled the offensive. The two villages that the Ukrainian army recently claimed as captured “are so tiny that they couldn’t fit between two Burma-Shave signs”—referring to billboards that seemed to be on every American highway after World War II.

A byproduct of the Biden administration’s neocon hostility to Russia and China—exemplified by the remarks of Secretary of State Tony Blinken, who has repeatedly stated that he will not currently countenance a ceasefire in Ukraine—has been a significant split in the intelligence community. One casualty are the secret National Intelligence Estimates that have delineated the parameters of American foreign policy for decades. Some key offices in the CIA have refused, in many cases, to participate in the NIE process because of profound political disagreement with the administration’s aggressive foreign policy. One recent failure involved a planned NIE that dealt with the outcome of a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

I have reported for many weeks on the longstanding disagreement between the CIA and other elements of the intelligence community on the prognosis of the current war in the Ukraine. CIA analysts have consistently been far more skeptical than their counterparts at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) on the prospect for a Ukraine success. The American media has ignored the dispute, but the London-headquartered *Economist*, whose well-informed reporters do not get bylines, has not. One sign of the internal tension inside the American community emerged in the magazine’s September 9 edition when Trent Maul, the DIA’s director of analysis, gave an extraordinary on-the-record interview to the *Economist* in which he defended his agency’s optimistic reporting on the Ukraine war and its troubled counteroffensive. It was, as the *Economist* observed in a headline, “A rare interview.” It also passed unnoticed by America’s premiere newspapers.

Maul acknowledged that the DIA “got it wrong” in its reporting on the “will to fight” of America’s allies when the US-trained and -financed armies in Iraq and Afghanistan “crumbled almost overnight.” Maul took issue with CIA complaints—though the agency was not cited by name—about the Ukrainian military leadership’s lack of skill and their tactics in the current counteroffensive. He told the *Economist* that Ukraine’s recent military successes were “significant” and gave its forces a 40 to 50 percent probability of breaking through Russia’s three-tiered defense lines by the end of this year. He warned, however, the *Economist* reported, that “limited ammunition and worsening weather will make this ‘very difficult.’”

Zelensky, in an interview with the *Economist* published a week later, acknowledged that he had detected—how could he not?—what the magazine quoted him as saying was “a change of mood among some of his partners.” Zelensky also acknowledged that what he called his nation’s “recent difficulties” on the battlefield were seen by some as a reason to begin serious end-of-war negotiations with Russia. He called this “a bad moment” because Russia “sees the same.” But he again made clear that peace talks are not on the table, and he issued a new threat to those leaders in the region, whose countries are hosting Ukrainian refugees and who want, as the CIA has reported to Washington, an end to the war. Zelensky warned in the interview, as the *Economist* wrote: “There is no way of predicting how the millions of Ukrainian refugees in European countries would react to their country being abandoned.” Zelensky said the Ukrainian refugees have “behaved well . . . and are grateful” to those who have sheltered them, but it would not be a “good story” for Europe if a Ukrainian defeat “were to drive the people into a corner.” It was nothing less than a threat of internal insurrection.

Zelensky’s message this week to the annual United Nations General Assembly in New York offered little new and, the *Washington Post* reported, he received the obligatory “warm welcome” from those in attendance. But, the *Post* noted, “he delivered his address to a half-full house, with many delegations declining to appear and listen to what he had to say.” Leaders of some developing nations, the report added, were “frustrated” that the multiple billions being spent without serious accountability by the Biden administration to finance the Ukraine war was diminishing support for their own struggles to deal with “a warming world, confronting poverty and ensuring a more secure life for their citizens.”

President Biden, in his earlier speech to the General Assembly, did not deal with Ukraine’s perilous position in the war with Russia but renewed his resounding support for Ukraine and insisted that “Russia alone bears responsibility for this war”—ignoring, as the leaders of many developing nations do not, three decades of NATO expansion to the east after and the Obama administration’s covert involvement in the overthrow of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine in 2014.

The president may be right on the merits but the rest of the world remembers, as this White House seems not to, that it was America that chose to make war in Iraq and Afghanistan, with little regard for the merits of its justification for doing so.

There was no talk from the president of the need for an immediate ceasefire in a war that cannot be won by Ukraine and is adding to the pollution that has caused the current climate

crisis engulfing the planet. Biden, with the support of Secretary Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan—but diminishing support elsewhere in America—has turned his unrelenting financial and moral support for the Ukraine war into a do-or-die issue for his re-election.

Meanwhile, a relentless Zelensky, in an interview last week with a fawning correspondent of *60 Minutes*, once the pinnacle of aggressive American journalism, depicted Putin as another Hitler and falsely insisted that Ukraine had the initiative in its current faltering war with Russia.

Asked by the CBS correspondent, Scott Pelley, if he thought “the threat of nuclear war is behind us,” Zelensky responded: “I think he’s going to continue threatening. He is waiting for the United States to become less stable. He thinks *that’s* going to happen during the US election. He will be looking for instability in Europe and the United States of America. He will use the risk of using nuclear weapons to fuel that. He will keep on threatening.”

The American intelligence official I spoke with spent the early years of his career working against Soviet aggression and spying has respect for Putin’s intellect but contempt for his decision to go to war with Ukraine and to initiate the death and destruction that war brings. But, as he told me, “The war is over. Russia has won. There is no Ukrainian offensive anymore, but the White House and the American media have to keep the lie going.

“The truth is if the Ukrainian army is ordered to continue the offensive, the army would mutiny. The soldiers aren’t willing to die any more, but this doesn’t fit the B.S. that is being authored by the Biden White House.”