

NATO Installing Permanent Envoy to Ukraine, While Not Letting It “Join the Club”

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is [planning to install a permanent special envoy to Kyiv](#) as a new envoy post. This has to do with “institutionalizing” some of “the bilateral support that has flowed to Ukraine”, says US ambassador to Kyiv, Julianne Smith. At the same time, last week, Biden made it (again) abundantly clear that Ukraine is not to become a NATO member.

One should keep in mind that back on 21 December 2022, during a [joint press conference](#) in Washington, when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the US, Biden had already been [clear enough](#) on the limits of Washington's willingness to be there for Ukraine. The American's replies must have been a cold shower to his Ukrainian counterpart: when asked about sending more powerful weapons to Kyiv, Biden said that doing so “would have a prospect of breaking up NATO”, and “breaking up the EU and the rest of the world.” Moreover, according to him, his Atlantic Alliance allies were “not looking to go to war with Russia. They're not looking for a third world war.” Then, he went on to “reassure” the Ukrainian president right next to him, by telling that “as I said, Mr. President, you don't have to worry — we are staying with Ukraine as long as Ukraine is there”, in an unintendedly amusing remark that inadvertently almost paraphrased the famous cruel joke about Americans being willing to fight “to the last Ukrainian”.

One could perhaps add “to the last European.” It is true that the US has reportedly [secretly sent long-range ATACMS missiles to Ukraine](#), which has [made use](#) of them, but [one should not make that much of it](#) – according to Mark Galeotti, head of the consultancy Mayak Intelligence and honorary professor at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, this is [no game-changer](#). The overall American attitude is increasingly one about “let the Europeans spend more, and do the fighting.” Many voices within the American establishment have indeed been [calling for](#) European troops (“not NATO”) being deployed in

Ukraine – which is more than just rhetoric.

In an [interview](#) to TIME last week, Biden claimed that Washington did spend “a lot of money in Ukraine”, but, trying to downplay it, he argued “Europe has spent more money than the United States has, collectively. Europe has spent more money in taking on Russia.” According to TIME’s own [fact-checking](#), the EU has provided Kyiv with more than \$107 billion dollars in assistance (military, humanitarian, financial etc). The US congress, in comparison, has authorized Washington to send Ukraine up to \$175 billion (much more than \$107 billion, therefore) – however, thus far, has sent only about \$81 billion, which, in any case, is already, for a single country, close enough to what the European Union has sent collectively.

In the same interview, asked about what the “endgame” for Ukraine looks like, the US President had this to say:

“Peace looks like making sure Russia never, never, never, never occupies Ukraine. That’s what peace looks like. And it doesn’t mean NATO, they are part of NATO, it means we have a relationship with them like we do with other countries, where we supply weapons so they can defend themselves in the future. But it is not, if you notice, I was the one when—and you guys did report it at TIME—the one that I was saying that I am not prepared to support the NATOization of Ukraine.”

One might [remember](#) that, in December 2023, Oleksiy Goncharenko, a member of Rada (the Ukrainian parliament), in a series of [Telegram posts](#), claimed that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was pressuring European diplomats to cease any talks about Ukraine joining NATO. His allegations could not be verified, but are in line with Biden’s latest remarks on the matter.

Much has been made of former US President Donald Trump’s [rhetoric point](#) about not going to rescue European nations who fail to meet the Alliance’s defense spending duties. During a February rally, he did say “You didn’t pay? You’re delinquent? No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills.” Rhetoric aside, Biden has a similar attitude in terms of making clear that the American role should, to some extent, limit itself to funding and arming its allies. Such funding in any case has also become the target of much criticism domestically, amid corruption accusations.

In the same TIME [interview](#) Biden added, quite surprisingly, that

“I spent a month in Ukraine when I was a Senator and Vice President. There was significant corruption. There was a circumstance that was really difficult.”

Indeed, [according to TIME](#), Biden has traveled six times to the Eastern European country as a Vice President, which is more than any previous President or Vice President. His out of the blue mentioning of corruption there (a true problem) is quite ironic, considering that the issue has [a lot to do with him and his family personally](#) – something which had been deemed by some a “conspiracy theory” before but, more recently, has been covered by major media outlets across the political spectrum. In fact it’s been an issue since at least 202, with [scandals surrounding](#) the American President’s special envoy to (now gone) Nord Stream 2. Biden’s supposed [signs of senility](#) have become, quite openly, a hot political issue, not to mention an embarrassment to his Democrat Party (this was even a topic touched upon during his interview with TIME itself). Those corruption remarks perhaps could be

interpreted while keeping that context in mind.

To sum it up, the West's plan for Ukraine seems to be something like: "not NATO – but kind of NATO". I wrote before on how French President Emmanuel Macron is on record [saying](#) deploying European forces ("not NATO") to Ukraine is a possibility. In a way, this is [already a reality](#), as [admitted](#) by NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who stated that "several NATO allies have men and women in uniform at the embassies" (in Ukraine), while claiming they are merely "giving advice."

Stoltenberg also announced that NATO countries have air defense systems ready to be sent to the Eastern European country. He stressed NATO members have the "right" to "help" Ukraine, however, according to him, this does not make the Alliance itself a party to the conflict.

I've [described](#) this logic as a Schrödinger's cat kind of reasoning: it is all about coming up with a coalition of NATO members which, however, is not NATO, somehow. In this context, installing a new NATO special envoy to Ukraine is not just a consolation prize, but adds to this ambiguous approach that is about giving it to Kyiv without giving too much (in any case giving enough to trigger Moscow national security concerns) – and of course adds to tensions, thereby increasing the risk of conflict escalation.

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