

Removing Ukraine's MAP Requirement for Joining NATO

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This country will still have to make major reforms, despite having already brought its military up to the bloc's average standards after serving as its anti-Russian proxy since February 2022, so the latest development is just symbolic. Even NATO itself doesn't expect Ukraine to join anytime soon, which that's why it's being extended an "Israel-style umbrella" instead.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba [tweeted](#) on Monday that "NATO allies have reached consensus on removing MAP from Ukraine's path to membership" ahead of this week's summit. This isn't as important as it seems, however, since his country has arguably fulfilled the typical military obligations of those who participate in [Membership Action Plans](#) (MAPs). The Ukrainian Armed Forces are trained and equipped by NATO for waging its [proxy war](#) against Russia, thus making it a de facto member of the bloc.

Following intensive talks, NATO allies have reached consensus on removing MAP from Ukraine's path to membership. I welcome this long-awaited decision that shortens our path to NATO. It is also the best moment to offer clarity on the invitation to Ukraine to become member.

— Dmytro Kuleba (@DmytroKuleba) [July 10, 2023](#)

Even so, Biden [told](#) reporters last month that "we're not going to make it easy" for Ukraine to join NATO. He then [said](#) over the weekend prior to setting off for Europe that "I don't think there is unanimity in NATO about whether or not to bring Ukraine into the NATO family now, at this moment, in the middle of a war." National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also [informed](#) reporters en route to the UK that Ukraine still needs to undertake far-reaching "democratic, security sector, and economic reforms" before joining.

The policy statements shared above discredit what Kuleba also wrote in his tweet about how removing Ukraine's MAP requirement "shortens our path to NATO." While it's true that this former Soviet Republic is already a de facto member by dint of waging the bloc's proxy war against Russia using their training, equipment, intelligence, logistics, and other forms of support, it can't formalize this status with the guarantees that Article 5 is commonly thought to entail without completing other major reforms.

That being the case, while the military aspect of Ukraine's MAP is arguably redundant as was explained, the other dimensions have yet to be fulfilled and might not be for quite some time until long after the hot phase of its conflict with Russia ends. In other words, Kuleba's announcement mostly only serves to manipulate popular perceptions about Ukraine's path towards formally joining NATO when the reality is that it's still far very away from doing so.

This observation is also based on the other part of Sullivan's press gaggle en route to the UK where he explained a bit more about what the US envisages regarding "Israel-style security assurances" to Ukraine. [According to him](#), this will involve a series of bilateral commitments "to provide various forms of military assistance, intelligence and information sharing, cyber support and other forms of material support" for a presently undetermined period of time.

His team is obviously only considering this scenario as an alternative to formal NATO membership otherwise they'd be investing their time in discussing the details of Article 5 if they truly expected Ukraine to join the bloc anytime soon. Foreign Affairs [recently wrote](#) that there are some who believe that "the sort of weapons, training, and diplomatic support already being given to Kyiv are sufficient to meet NATO's Article 5 mandate, meaning it is not necessary to also promise or deploy military forces."

They have a valid point too since [Article 5](#) doesn't mandate the use of armed force but only "such action as [a member state] deems necessary" to assist those under attack, which does indeed mean that the bloc's existing support to Ukraine satisfies this in principle. The US' "Israel-style security assurances" would therefore formalize the support that's already being provided, which importantly remains below the level of directly engaging Russian forces like many wrongly assume that Article 5 mandates.

From an American soft power perspective, it's better for the public not to have any false expectations regarding their country's security commitments to Ukraine such as those that they'd imagine that its formal membership in NATO would entail. That's not to say that the US won't resort to armed force in defense of existing members like the those along its eastern flank, which it would feel compelled to do in order to retain Western unity in that event, but just that the case of Ukraine is qualitatively different.

Not only does it remain in a state of hot conflict with Russia, which disqualifies it from membership until the conflict ends, but it also has to resolve all border disputes too. The first is much easier to do than the second, so Ukraine's formal membership will either be indefinitely postponed or NATO would have to agree to grant it an exemption from this requirement. Since the latter is unlikely due to the risk that this could embroil them in war with Russia, they therefore settled on the "Israel-style" workaround instead.

[Politico](#) reported on Sunday that the US is working with the UK, France, and Germany to create a so-called "umbrella" under which they can multilaterally manage their military aid to Ukraine, with this potentially being the most significant outcome to emerge from this

week's summit. In essence, it would formalize the support that they're already providing to Kiev without likely committing to employing armed force against Russia on its behalf in order to temper expectations.

It's important not only to avoid getting Ukrainians' and average Westerners' hopes unrealistically high, which could completely discredit NATO if it fails to fulfill what's popularly expected of it, but also to manage the bloc's very dangerous security dilemma with Russia. If Moscow was convinced that its enemies will employ armed force against it on Kiev's behalf, then it could be tempted to preempt this by carrying out a first-strike against NATO, hence why all efforts must be made for it not to think so.

For that reason, it would be highly irresponsible from the US' soft power and strategic perspectives to signal that it might directly engage Russian forces on behalf of Ukraine as part of the "Israel-like umbrella" that it's planning as an alternative to that country's formal NATO membership. No such commitments are therefore expected to be made, but on the off chance that they are, then it would signify that warmongers regained policymaking influence from their [rapidly ascending](#) pragmatic rivals.

The earlier cited statements from Biden and Sullivan don't give any indication to think that the US will promise to employ armed force against Russia on Ukraine's behalf, nor did NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's [press conference](#) from Friday either. To the contrary, every signal that's been sent from top officials until this point is that Ukraine won't join NATO and thus shouldn't expect armed force being employed in its support in accordance with the popular interpretation of Article 5.

Circling back to the lede, one can now better understand why removing Ukraine's MAP requirement for joining NATO isn't as important as it seems. This country will still have to make major reforms, despite having already brought its military up to the bloc's average standards after serving as its anti-Russian proxy since February 2022, so the latest development is just symbolic. Even NATO itself doesn't expect Ukraine to join anytime soon, which that's why it's being extended an "Israel-style umbrella" instead.

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