



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on July 20, 2023

NATO Vilnius Summit: Ukraine Left Hanging Once Again

On July 11, NATO leaders convened in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius for a two-day summit, with advocates lauding “unprecedented unity” among member states following Turkish President Erdoğan’s [declaration](#) that he would back Sweden’s NATO bid the evening before.

Moreover, all eyes were on Ukraine as Kyiv seemed to expect that the bloc would formally invite it as a member and provide it with a detailed blueprint leading to full membership.

In context, during the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, Ukraine (as well as Georgia) got the green light to join NATO but were provided no tangible pathway to do so. Fast forward to 2023, many NATO members had hoped that the Vilnius meeting would enable Ukraine to progress toward finally joining NATO.

Nonetheless, as most realistic observers anticipated, Ukraine’s admittance into NATO did not happen, nor did the alliance offer Ukraine a specified time frame of when Kyiv could join.

Rather, the final summit [communiqué](#) agreed upon by the member states relied on intentionally ambiguous language stating that NATO “will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine when allies agree and conditions are met,” dashing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s hopes of joining the bloc.

The 2008 Bucharest text stated that “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.” It then described the way forward, by stating that “[Membership Action Plan] is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership.” Comparatively, this year’s Vilnius declaration appears to position Ukraine even closer to NATO’s orbit, by stating that “Ukraine’s future is in NATO,” and that “we reaffirm the commitment we made at the 2008 summit in Bucharest that Ukraine will become a member of NATO, and today we recognize that Ukraine’s path to full Euro-Atlantic integration has moved beyond the need for the Membership Action Plan.”

Zelensky, who was in Vilnius to greet a group of Lithuanian supporters in a packed city square ahead of his meetings with the NATO leaders, was evidently upset with the outcome, to say the least. Taking to Twitter, he slammed the lack of a precise deadline or blueprint for his country to join the bloc.

“We value our allies,” Zelensky [tweeted](#). “But Ukraine also deserves respect.”

“It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance. It’s unprecedented and absurd when [a] time frame is not set neither for the invitation nor for



AP Images
Volodymyr Zelensky



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Ukraine's membership. While at the same time vague wording about 'conditions' is added even for inviting Ukraine," he elaborated.

Conservative observers such as Rod Dreher of *The American Conservative* were quick to criticize Zelensky's reaction, as NATO has effectively subsidized Ukraine's defense to the extent that NATO countries, including America, are severely lacking in artillery shells for self-defense. Additionally, Ukraine's membership in NATO would arguably provoke a "hot war" between nuclear-armed Russia and Western countries.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov posited that the NATO Summit showcased a vehement "anti-Russian" attitude among the member states.

"We are talking about a summit of an alliance that has a pronounced concentrated anti-Russian nature," Peskov asserted, adding that "Russia is perceived as an enemy, an adversary."

Peskov also pointed out that Ukraine's ultimate NATO accession would be "highly dangerous for European security," and that NATO members should consider the consequences of such a move.

Notwithstanding officially warm ties between the U.K. and Ukraine, recent statements by the U.K. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace hinted at London's impatience with Zelensky's apparent insatiable desire for new weapons.

On July 12, Wallace cautioned Zelensky on the fringes of the summit against his dogged insistence on joining NATO. Urging Ukraine to be patient, Wallace told Zelensky that joining NATO was not an automatic process, and that it was vital that Ukraine display "gratitude" for the support received. In an indirect reply to a journalist who asked him about the unspecified time frame for admitting Ukraine to the alliance, Wallace said that his country — along with its allies — "are not Amazon," indicating his views that Ukraine's constant demands for arms shipments were somewhat overbearing. Importantly, Wallace highlighted that Western powers offered Ukraine aid at the expense of their own domestic stockpiles of weapons.

British news outlet [The Guardian](#) previously reported that Wallace, who recently declared that he would be stepping down at the next Cabinet reshuffle and not seek re-election as an MP at the next general election, had taken umbrage during a 2022 trip to Ukraine, after receiving a "list" of arms that Ukraine demanded.

"I told them last year, when I drove 11 hours to be given a list, that I'm not like Amazon," Wallace was alleged to have said, appearing annoyed that Kyiv was pressuring for more weapons as soon as it had obtained previous batches.

Likewise, the Americans also voiced their annoyance, with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan calling for "gratitude." "The American people do deserve a degree of gratitude," Sullivan replied to a Ukrainian activist who criticized Biden's reluctance to allow Ukraine to join NATO.

As if in an attempt to mitigate Ukraine's disappointment at this year's summit, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg had pledged that regardless of the eventual resolution, the latter would contain "a positive and strong message" on Ukraine's eventual membership. Stoltenberg contended that the bloc had never used "stronger language" to back Ukraine in its bitter fight to fend off Russia.

The Norwegian politician also said that Ukraine is much closer to NATO now as compared to other Eastern European countries in the '90s, hence, "the time has come to reflect that in the NATO decisions."



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Notably, NATO allies formally concurred on exempting Ukraine from the Membership Action Plan (MAP), a program that monitors particular political, military, and economic benchmarks for NATO member aspirants, and which has been fulfilled by every new member since the end of the Cold War.

Some NATO allies even promised heightened financial and military aid to Ukraine. For example, Germany pledged to dispatch €700 million worth of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, encompassing two Patriot launchers, 25 Leopard tanks, 40 infantry fighting vehicles, and about 20,000 rounds of artillery ammo.

Norway, a non-EU member, vowed to step up its planned military aid to Ukraine for 2023 to a total of 10 billion Norwegian Kroner (almost \$960 million). Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre also said Norway will be offering more than \$7.2 billion in financial aid to Ukraine during the next five years.

French President Emmanuel Macron declared that Paris was prepared to deploy SCALP (Storm Shadow) long-range autonomous missile systems, which have an effective firing range of 250 kilometers, to Ukraine. In response to Ukraine's new French military equipment, Russia expressed its displeasure. "Naturally, this will force us to take countermeasures," Kremlin spokesman Peskov [said](#).



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