

# Biden Administration Weaponizes Diplomacy Against Conservative Hungary | Opinion

Aug 07, 2023 at 6:30 AM EDT

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Every year, millions of travelers from 40 countries visit the United States through a visa waiver program. But beginning this month, the Biden administration is tightening the access of citizens from one conservative country—Hungary—to the visa waiver system. While the southern U.S. border lies in shambles, Hungarian citizens will have to reapply for a single-use entry every time they want to come to the United States.

In a sane world, one might assume that Hungary's blacklisting reflected a deep concern for American security. Surely the Biden administration would only restrict entry from Hungary because of some identifiable risk. But [according to U.S. data](#), until 2018 only 65 out of the one million Hungarians abroad who gained citizenship in recent years—the

putative objects of the Biden administration's concern—entered the United States illegally through the visa waiver program.

The Biden administration's focus on Hungary [is no accident](#). Over the last decade, Hungary has made a name for itself as an island of sanity in a sea of woke ideology and gender propaganda, a country with secure borders and secure streets pleading for immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine.

Since late last year, the Biden administration has heightened the pressure on this small, conservative democracy. In doing so, it has pioneered a method of diplomacy that undermines American security and weakens American alliances in a critical part of the world.

Last summer, the Biden Treasury Department announced that it would [terminate a tax treaty](#) between the United States and Hungary that has been in place since 1979. The treaty protects individuals and companies from double taxation—enabling an easier flow of commerce between both countries. Mind you, the U.S. tax treaty with Russia remains in place, but U.S. citizens working in Hungary will face double taxation beginning in 2024.

In October of last year, U.S. ambassador David Pressman [mocked Hungarian politicians](#) on [Twitter](#) by insinuating that their statements defending conservative values were indistinguishable from those of [Vladimir Putin](#)—the Russian leader whose "popularity" in Hungary is overwhelmingly negative.

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In February USAID administrator [Samantha Power](#) visited Budapest [to encourage "civic engagement"](#) by foreign-funded media. While taxpaying Americans rightly think of USAID as providing urgent aid to war-torn countries, the Biden administration's USAID announced a ["rule of law" program](#) targeting countries, like Hungary, where the rule of law still includes protecting children against transgender propaganda.

Perhaps most remarkably, Hungary's State Audit Office has recently disclosed that, during the 2022 election, the six opposition parties [received millions of dollars](#) in illegal foreign funding, including more than [\\$7 million from liberal U.S. NGOs](#).

For any rational observer, the ultimate question is: how does this approach benefit the American people?

Weaponizing diplomacy undermines American security and reduces the incentives for close cooperation between the United States and its [NATO](#) partners. It's a simple point of fact that higher tax rates will squeeze out marginal participants in economic exchange between the United States and Hungary. And making travel between Hungary and the United States more difficult is an alarming step backward in interstate relations.



US President Joe Biden attends the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (R) during the NATO Summit in Vilnius on July 11, 2023.

**PAUL ELLIS / POOL / AFP/GETTY IMAGES**

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For Hungary, all this pressure has occurred during a period of rapid defense modernization. Hungary's military command center in Székesfehérvár plays a central role in NATO's eastern flank. Further, Hungary has already met its 2 percent military spending commitments on 2023, and will do so in 2024 as well. The same cannot be said of certain other NATO partners who are not subject to American pressure campaigns.

Today the expansion of NATO is treated with almost religious significance. But if it is so important, why would the United States come down so harshly on one of its most engaged allies?

To be sure, the putative reasons for the latest action obscure the real ones. According to David Pressman, the U.S. ambassador in Budapest, the Biden administration was forced to take action because of Hungary's reluctance to disclose personal information about dual citizens who hold Hungarian citizenship in Hungary's near abroad. After nearly a century in which Hungarians abroad had no civic relationship with their homeland, Hungary has expanded access to citizenship for Hungarian nationals in neighboring countries over the last decade.

In turn, the U.S. has demanded data regarding Hungarians outside Hungary's borders who have dual citizenship. But disclosing private information regarding its citizens is a line that no government would cross in this war-torn part of the world.

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These actions against Hungary weaken American-led alliances by frustrating and irritating American partners. In making it more difficult for Hungarians to travel to the United States, the Biden administration also makes it more difficult for Americans to build ties with a key American ally that shares a border with Ukraine.

Hungary is not the only small country in this situation. Throughout the world, America and China are competing in new ways. In many countries, the Chinese offer investment while the current American administration offers a hostile cultural approach and punitive diplomacy.

Lost in the diplomatic calculus is the fact that, since the beginning of the war, Hungary received more than 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine. But since Hungary prefers peace negotiations to continued escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, and since it prefers to defend its way of life against cultural aggression, its stance has drawn a harsh look from what should be a close friend.

Enough with the quasi-sanctions against Hungary.

And enough with a hostile diplomacy that ultimately works against the interests of America's own alliances.

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*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

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