



Ukraine: German tanks, Zelensky invites Corporate America & Battlefield Updates

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza and today I'll be talking to journalist and the board member of The Real News Network, Dimitri Lascaris. Dimitri is also a lawyer specializing in class actions, human rights and international law. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada and finished second. Before you continue watching, I highly recommend a video that I made with Dimitri a month ago which deals with the fundamental aspects of the war in Ukraine; make sure to click on the description and visit the link below. Dimitri, welcome back to the show.

Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Thank you for having me. And always a pleasure.

ZR: Let us start with some current developments. In the last few weeks, international and domestic pressure was mounting on the German government to send its Leopard 2 battle tank, considered one of the most agile tanks in Europe. Last week, the German government capitulated to the pressure, approved these tanks and will be sending 14 Leopard 2 tanks while the US will send 31 advanced M-1 Ibrahim tanks. The UK will send the Challenger 2 tanks, and other countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Spain, Poland and Norway will also send dozens of tanks. Germany will train Ukrainian troops on how to operate these tanks and also provide maintenance and logistical support. Ukraine is also now asking for fighter jets as well as long range missiles, which Germany and the US government have currently ruled out. Do you think these tanks will enhance Ukraine's military capabilities and change the tide of war?

DL: Well, let me preface my answer by just acknowledging, first of all, that I'm not a military expert, but I've tried to follow very carefully what is happening militarily and politically in Ukraine. I listen to a range of people who are military experts and based on what I've been able to glean this will not change the ultimate outcome of the war. It has really no reasonable

prospect of doing that because the amount of equipment, first of all, that is being sent to Ukraine is really a drop in the bucket compared to what Ukraine had at the outset of the invasion and has lost. But more importantly, it is a drop in the bucket compared to the military hardware that the Russian's possess and are able to produce. Russia is now on a war footing. Its entire economy is effectively being reoriented or not the entire economy, but large parts of it, to prioritize the production of military material that is necessary for Russian success in this military campaign. And Russia has the capacity, it has the industrial capacity to outproduce the West. As you know, various Western military experts are increasingly acknowledging. The other aspect of these weapons is that the Ukrainian army was trained on Soviet era military hardware, particularly tanks. These are very different pieces of equipment from those that they have been trained to not only use but to repair. So they're going to have to be prepared and trained extensively on the use of these very different main battle tanks and also on how to maintain them. That's going to take time and the fact that you have different types of military hardware- so you have Challengers, you have Leopards, you have Abrams- each one presents its own particular training and repair challenges, each type of equipment. So now you have to train military personnel of Ukraine on various types of military equipment. So it's effectively becoming a Frankenstein of an army in the sense that it's just a hodgepodge of different types of incompatible military equipment. So it's not just a question of the amount of equipment that's being sent. It's also the nature of the equipment that's being sent that's going to pose a real challenge. And the last thing I'll say is whatever, you know, the military realities may be, people of conscience, people who are just applying their basic sense of common sense must ask this question, where is this all leading us? The Russians are going to escalate if they feel that that's necessary in order to respond to this delivery of new batch, more sophisticated, more deadly weapons. And then if the West continues by responding to each Russian escalation with another escalation, we are going to find ourselves eventually in a hot war involving direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia. We shouldn't assume that Russia isn't going to retaliate by striking out at some NATO country that's delivering these weapons. Eventually, it may well do that and that places all of humanity at risk. You know, as Obama himself recognized when he was the president, Russia possesses what military observers call escalation dominance in this part of the world. This fight is happening right next to its border, next to its industrial heartland, it will always have the ability to out-escalate the West. And it regards this conflict as an existential threat. Whether we agree with Russia or not is irrelevant. That is how they see this. They see this as an existential threat and they will bring to bear every weapon at their disposal to win it. Ultimately, this will either end in Ukraine's defeat or it will end in a nuclear war. That's where this is heading. And we have to come to our senses real fast before we find ourselves in that catastrophic situation.

ZR: Let me address a counter argument to the last point you made. Due to the Western military and economic support, Ukraine was able to recapture 54% of the territory previously held by Russia. Analysts also predict a large Russian offensive coming soon due to the mobilization Putin announced last year, as well as the military drills that it is conducting with

Belarus, including Air Force drills. Don't you think that these advanced tanks and possibly long range missiles will help Ukraine defend itself from another Russian offensive and also from further loss of territory?

DL: Well, it certainly will help Ukraine to kill more Russians. It will help Ukraine to kill more or to destroy more Russian military equipment. But it's not enough to tip the balance in favor of Ukraine. Ukraine still has vastly inferior numbers of artillery pieces, armored personnel carriers, tanks, fighter jets, even with these deliveries. And as I said, if we try to compensate for this deficit by sending more weaponry, Russia will respond by increasing its violence and increasing its production. Ultimately, we cannot outproduce Russia. We don't have the industrial capacity to do that, nor should we try because of the potential for nuclear war. You know, when it comes to the Kherson region in the Kharkiv offensive, which did result in Ukraine's military taking back large parts of territory, that happened months ago, for one thing. Secondly, these seem now very much in retrospect to have been a prudent reorientation of Russian military forces to more defensible lines, because since they gave up these territories, the Russians in which they were thinly stretched, they have reestablished defense lines. And Ukraine has made no further, not only has Ukraine made no further significant advances in something like two months. But in addition, the Russians have begun to make very significant advances all over the front line. The tide has turned. So now, we should always base our decision making on the current reality and not the high point of Ukraine's military effort, which was over two months ago.

ZR: Our foreign minister, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, in a speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, stated and I'm quoting her here: "We are fighting a war against Russia and not against each other." What do you think Germany's role has officially become in this war?

DL: By any rational measure, Germany and every other NATO country, to some degree or another, has become a co-belligerent. They are a party to this war. I mean, I condemn you know, we've had these discussions in the most unequivocal terms, the warmongering of the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, who amazingly comes from the Green Party, which is supposed to be a party that espouses nonviolence. But at least, at least, this was candid. It is, in fact, the case that Europe is at war with Russia, and more politicians should be very frank about that and they should be having open debates in European parliaments and in the European Parliament itself about whether Europe should be at war with a nuclear armed state. And they are. And if you're looking at it from the Russian perspective, you see countries like Germany, the United States, Britain not only providing deadly weaponry and more and more advanced weaponry, citizens of their countries are in Ukraine, people who have been trained by NATO militaries fighting alongside Ukrainians. They are training new recruits, newly mobilized recruits from Ukraine to fight against the Russians. They are providing real time battlefield intelligence to the Ukrainians, and this has been admitted by Western militaries. In what sense are we not participants in this war? We are participating in

this war in every conceivable sense. And we should stop pretending that this isn't World War Three. As Emmanuel Todd, the French anthropologist, has written: World War Three has begun.

ZR: Let us look at the battlefield, Ukraine withdrew from Soledar last week, a highly contested city, and now intense fighting has begun around Bakhmut. Many analysts say this area has no geopolitical or strategic importance. Why do you think both sides invested so much in this region? And how do you assess these latest developments in the overall picture?

DL: Well, Soledar and Bakhmut are effectively the linchpin for the most powerful defense line that the Ukrainian military established with NATO assistance over the last eight years preceding the invasion. You know, it is a heavily fortified area which runs north to south, starting up in the Siversk area and going all the way down to Donetsk. The reason why the Ukrainian military- and the Western mainstream media have acknowledged this- have sacrificed so many soldiers to hold on to Soledar and its sister city Bakhmut is precisely because it is a linchpin of the main Ukrainian defense line. Soledar's fall is virtually doomed. Bakhmut, the larger area and more heavily fortified area to an eventual collapse. It is in the process of collapsing. And once that happens, the final defense line in the Donbass for Ukraine is in the Kramatorsk and Slavyansk area. And that area, by all accounts, is not nearly as heavily fortified as this one. So this is a major development in terms of the course of the war. And the Western media misrepresenting to the public that this is purely symbolic, Soledar and Bakhmut has no strategic or tactical significance, is really dishonest and fundamentally misleading the public in the West about what is actually happening in this war and what the current trends are. Ultimately, it is the case that Ukraine is losing despite all of the massive aid, military and otherwise that we have supplied. And that's precisely why we should be negotiating a deal now.

ZR: I want to move to international developments. NATO's secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, is touring Asia, urging countries such as South Korea and Japan to supply weapons to Ukraine. South Korea has refrained due to its constitution. Even our German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, recently visited Brazil to strengthen economic ties with overall Latin America. While he was in Brazil, he asked for support, such as supplying tanks to Ukraine, which Brazil clearly stated that they will not be doing so and are advocating for diplomacy and peace, just like you stated right now. How has NATO, and the West in general, in your assessment, been on the international stage when it comes to getting more and more countries to join in to support Ukraine?

DL: I think their effort to isolate Russia economically and politically is a massive failure. The IMF just came out with its projections for major economies over the next year, or this year 2023, and it projected meager growth, but nonetheless economic growth for Russia of 0.3%, while at the same time projecting a lesser growth- I think it was 0.1%- for Germany and a significant contraction for the United Kingdom. So you have this extraordinary situation in

which the countries that have led or co-led the effort to punish Russia economically are performing worse than Russia itself. Russia is actually beginning to grow again. It experienced a rather modest contraction of, I think, 2.2% last year. And the reason why it's growing is because countries like China and India and Turkey and countries in Latin America, including the major economy of Brazil, countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Iran, countries in Africa, including South Africa itself, are all continuing to do business with Russia. And as long as that situation persists and there's no reason to think that they're going to change their minds after all the pressure that the Americans have put on them to sanction Russia, there is no realistic prospect of the West winning the economic war against Russia. That's the reality. Again, it leads to that conclusion- I don't want to have to repeat myself- we should be negotiating a peace deal and not escalating this war.

ZR: Sweden wants to join NATO, but Erdogan, the prime minister of Turkey, keeps blocking NATO's admission of Finland and Sweden, most recently due to the recent Koran burnings by far right anti-Islamic parties that took place around the Turkish embassy. Do you think- and I'm quoting the German media here- "the defensive alliance in NATO will help protect these countries from Russia"?

DL: Well, Ukraine was de facto a member of NATO in every conceivable sense, other than, you know, formally, but de facto it was a member of NATO. Did that protect Ukraine? Look what's happened to Ukraine. I think the biggest favor, the favorite favor that Erdogan could do to Sweden and Finland is to veto their entry into NATO. They are much more likely to be in a position of belligerence towards Russia and to be subjected to attack by Russia if Russia considers them to be a threat. If they are neutral and they are not massing NATO forces and NATO missiles on Russia's border, Russia has no reason to regard them as a threat. And I think as we've seen, the cost of waging war on Russia in Ukraine itself has been quite high, despite the fact that it is prevailing militarily and it has managed to weather the economic storm. Nonetheless, it has been a difficult fight. There have undoubtedly been significant Russian casualties. I think the Russian government understands perfectly well that it is not in the interests of Russia for it to be waging war all over Europe. It prefers not to wage war. And if you're threatening Russia, then you're enhancing its incentive to wage war against you. Much better for these countries to maintain neutrality, both from a legal perspective and a de facto perspective.

ZR: Ukraine is not only a potential candidate for NATO, but also for the European Union. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other 15 commissioners arrived in Kiev today to focus on talks with the Ukraine government to further support them and also possible accession to the EU. President Zelensky has reiterated that he intends to join the EU and has promised to ensure all the reforms will take place until 2025. As someone who covered a lot of the European Union activities in terms of economic policy in 2015 when you were in Greece reporting, how do you see Ukraine's prospect of becoming part of the EU and what will it mean for Ukraine itself?

DL: Well, let's talk about Greece, which is the country that I covered the most during the financial crisis. You know, the Greek economy entered the financial crisis, as did other European economies back in 2010. At that point in time, what the EU and the ECB and the IMF did was they effectively inflicted upon Greece the most punishing austerity program that has ever been imposed upon a developed economy. And Greece suffered an economic contraction over the ensuing years in the range of 27%; greater than the economic contraction that the US experienced during the Great Depression. And it has never recovered. It still has enormous amounts of debt relative to GDP. You know, real wages have fallen. People have lost their jobs. There's high levels of unemployment. The minimum wage has been reduced. The country is an economic basket case, frankly. And that is thanks to the dictates of the European Commission and the ECB and the IMF. So the first thing I would say about Ukraine entering the EU is be careful what you wish for. At the end of the day, you should not assume that that is going to actually be in the long term interests of the Ukrainian people. But furthermore, as a practical matter, I think there's almost no chance that EU leaders will ultimately allow Ukraine to enter the EU. Because it's going to require massive aid in order to stabilize the economy, bring it up to EU standards. They're going to have to invest far more money they've invested up until now. The country is going to be overrun with weapons. There's already a tremendous amount of corruption in Ukraine, and it has been for a long time. Do we really believe that the EU leaders are serious about allowing Ukraine, particularly in its current state, to accede to the European Union? I find that highly implausible. And frankly, I think the Ukrainian people would be better served by staying outside of the EU and, you know, rebuilding their country through a peace deal with Russia that would see Russia providing a massive amount of reconstruction aid, which is precisely what Russia should do.

ZR: Ukraine has opened the door to corporate America. Zelensky, in a recent announcement, signed a deal with BlackRock and also said that he's inviting JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs and other corporate giants, talking about, on the one hand, that his country's facing genocide and mass murder, but on the other hand, it's open for business. How do you assess corporate America coming into Ukraine in terms of its economic future?

DL: Well, it's important to know what the political orientation of Vladimir Zelensky is. Zelensky was elected in 2019 on a very vague platform. In fact, he was criticized heavily by the Ukrainian media for avoiding them and not answering questions about what his intentions were. When he won, he won essentially on an anti-corruption platform in a peace platform with 73% of the vote. On the eve of the invasion by Russia last year, his popularity rating had plummeted to about 31% from 73%. And a Ukrainian sociologist who was interviewed extensively by the Grayzone months ago explained that a big part of the reason for his plummeting popularity was his neoliberal policies. Privatization, deregulating labor, weakening labor unions, increasing utility tariffs. And the Ukrainian people were becoming fed up with this neoliberalism. So he has that kind of a political orientation. And it's

important to understand that this invitation to these massive profit maximizing corporations to invest in Ukraine in the middle of the war, what is the reality of this? How is this likely to play out? If you're investing, you're putting billions of dollars into a country that is in a war and you are focused upon profit maximization, as BlackRock and Goldman Sachs and all these entities are, you are going to demand very, very favorable terms in order to compensate you for the heightened risk of investing in a country that is at war. So you have this toxic mix right now in Ukraine where you have these massive profit maximizing corporations that are going to look for very favorable terms in order to invest in Ukraine during a war. And you have a leader in Ukraine who is politically oriented towards neoliberalism and prioritizing the interests of the private sector and large corporations. This is basically a recipe for grand larceny, for kleptocracy on a massive scale, which will ultimately work to the disadvantage of the Ukrainian people. These companies are not the friends of the Ukrainian people. They're going to extract every ounce of profit that they can. They've proven that again and again. And Zelensky his ideology is such that he will be more than willing to accommodate them. So I think this is a very ominous sign for the future of Ukraine economically.

ZR: According to the United Nations, 7000 civilians have been killed since the war started, including 433 children. Given that Russia and even Ukraine are not signatory of the International Criminal Court, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock recently called for a special tribunal to be set up at The Hague that should pursue the Russian leadership for its crimes in Ukraine. How do you assess this special tribunal in helping resolve the conflict and if this is not the way to attain justice how can we attain justice otherwise?

DL: Well, I'd be interested to know if Ms. Baerbock has called for an international tribunal to judge Dick Cheney and George Bush and Condoleezza Rice for their blatant war crimes in Iraq, and for the fact that their government, with their authorization, employed torture. Not only within Guantanamo Bay, but at black sites around the world. The double standard is astonishing. I mean, if you're really interested in holding people to account, it shouldn't depend on what passport they happen to carry. A war criminal is a war criminal. So I don't think that any attempt to apply international law selectively, as the German government is attempting to do, is going to have any moral authority. And furthermore, the Russians are simply going to ignore it. What we need to do, what we need to do is to have an effective international legal system, and that means enforcement on a nonselective basis. But that would require a profound reform of international institutions, including the United Nations and the ICC. And the United States and its allies would never allow that because that would place them at risk of prosecution. That's the fundamental problem. We have a flawed international legal architecture. It's not only devoid of effective mechanisms of enforcement, but it's applied in a discriminatory manner. And so I think that I do not support this initiative. I do support holding all war criminals accountable, but not this way. This is not an effective way to do it.

ZR: I would like to sidetrack a bit and talk about the media. In Germany, for example, there's a lively debate going on, pretty dynamic debate, I would say. But the spectrum of the debate is pretty limited. So let me give you an example, you have on the one side that we should be sending less battle tanks and less weapons and on the other side, you have the hawks that are like, we should be sending more of it. That's where the debate is happening. German media is really, if at all, providing voices to people that question this premise, that question sending weapons in itself. How do you view the Western media in terms of Canada? How have you been assessing the media there? And is it following the same trend as in Germany?

DL: Well, based on what I can see, the German media, particularly I'm talking here, of course, of the mainstream media, not the independent media are particularly bad. There was a commentary, I'm sure you've seen or heard about, of a German retired brigadier general by the name of Erich Vad. And there was another commentary, a remarkable interview by another, I think he was the former chief of the German army, a gentleman by the name of Kujat, both of whom commented upon the fact that it's impossible, it's virtually impossible in the German mainstream media to have a discussion about the realities of the war and the pursuit of a negotiated settlement. And I think you're absolutely right about that. That's true of every major country, as far as I can tell. I follow the French press, the mainstream press, with the exception of one interview that Le Figaro did with Emmanuel Todd recently. The British press is terrible on the subject of the Ukrainian war. Just recently, I think within the last 24 hours, some talking head was on Sky News calling for direct NATO intervention in the conflict, which is sheer lunacy. In my own country, well, I split my time between Greece and Canada. Here in Canada, where I am currently, if you're calling for peace, the only treatment you're going to receive from the mainstream media in Canada is to be characterized as a Putin apologist and a Russian propagandist. Nobody who's calling for peace is actually given a platform by the Canadian mainstream media and treated like a serious commentator on the war. Nobody. You have only voices of war dominating the Western mainstream media discourse, and this, as I say, is very dangerous.

ZR: To my last question. We've talked a lot about a negotiated settlement and peace. How can peace be achieved? And usually it is accompanied with the counterargument in the German media that we should not negotiate with dictators like Putin, and that Putin does not want to negotiate. How do you counter this argument?

DL: Well, let's look at what actually happened. First of all, Putin did negotiate a deal that was mediated by Erdogan on the export of Ukrainian grain. And despite the fact that Russia has complained that that grain is going predominantly to Europe and not to poor countries, it continues to remain in effect. There have been numerous negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on the exchange of prisoners, which were agreements that were respected. There was an agreement involving the transfer of Viktor Bout and the American basketball player who was in a Russian jail. So on these smaller levels, there has been actual negotiation which has been effective in resolving limited parts of the dispute. But on the macro scale, back in

March- again, this was a negotiation that was mediated by Erdogan- the Ukrainians and the Russians were on the verge of a peace deal. What happened? According to the Ukrainian media, Boris Johnson went to Kiev and told Zelensky that, first of all, the West would not support a peace deal with Russia. This peace deal, by the way, did not involve, as far as I could tell, based on reports, you know, Ukraine ceding the Donbass to Russia or Kherson or Zaporizhzhia or Lugansk. What it did involve was a guarantee of neutrality. That was the focus of the deal. It is a much better deal than Ukraine could probably get now. And yet the British and the Americans tanked it. They promised Ukraine- and at the same time they were saying they wouldn't support it- they promised Ukraine massive delivery deliveries of weaponry. And ultimately they are the ones who killed the negotiation between Russia and Ukraine. And now the reality is that Ukraine could probably not do a deal as favorable as that one. I can't imagine that the Russians, after the losses they've sustained and the costs they've incurred, would be willing simply to march out of the areas they now control. There have to be some territorial concessions. And this is something that I think is a price that ought to be paid, for the simple reason that it is the humane thing to do. Ukrainian lives will be saved. You can begin reconstructing the country. In the long run perhaps these areas can become reintegrated to some degree, the areas that Russia now controls, with the other parts of Ukraine. At least some kind of a free trade deal, an open border. These are things that are absolutely essential. And to say to the Russians, we won't even sit at the table with you until you overthrow a government that is supported by some 80% of the Russian people, or until you withdraw all of your troops from Ukraine is a recipe for no peace deal at all. We should be sitting around the table without preconditions imposed on either side. And let's see where these talks lead us. And at the end of the day, if they fail, if they fail, and if the Russians proved themselves to be unreasonable and unwilling to negotiate, well, at least we can say we tried, but we haven't even tried. And given the costs and the suffering that Ukraine is incurring we should at least make a good faith effort.

ZR: Dimitri Lacaris, journalist and lawyer, thank you so much for your time today.

DL: Thank you again for having me.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube has been shadow banning us. Our videos are not getting recommended as they used to a few years ago. So be sure to join these other channels and to donate if you're gaining value by building your own independent perspective from our interviews and analysis, be sure to return that value in the form of a donation. I'm your host Zain Raza, I'll see you guys next time.

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