



## "The Reality is Ukraine is losing" - Journalist Dimitri Lascaris

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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 Dimitri Lascaris about the war in Ukraine with a focus on international developments. Dimitri Lascaris is a journalist and a board member of The Real News Network. He's also a lawyer specializing in class actions, international law and human rights. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada finishing second. Dimitri, welcome back to the show.

**Dimitri Lascaris (DL):** Always a pleasure to talk to you, Zain. Thank you.

**ZR:** I would like to start with the latest developments surrounding Ukraine. The debate, as you probably know, has now shifted from battle tanks to fighter jets. Training of Ukraine's soldiers on how to operate these tanks is taking place on German soil as we speak and it is expected that these tanks would go into operation in Ukraine sometime in March. The UK and Netherlands have voiced support for sending fighter jets. And in the UK case, they are already training Ukrainian pilots. During US President Biden's so-called surprise visit to Ukraine, the US pledged an extra 500 million aid to Ukraine, which would also entail military equipment such as Javelins, Howitzers and artillery ammunition. Russia's anticipated offensive, many point out, has already begun and is focused on Bakhmut. How do you assess the developments? And will fighter jets make the difference?

**DL:** Well, I think it's hard to answer that question without taking careful account into what's happening on the battlefield. And particularly in Bakhmut, which you just mentioned. The reports coming not just from the Russian Ministry of Defense and from the Wagner private military company, but even from Western mainstream sources, including the Institute for the Study of War, which is one of the most widely cited US think tanks on the question of the status of the war, are all pointing to an encirclement of Bakhmut and if not an outright entrapment of thousands - it's unclear how many - but thousands of Ukrainian forces there.

Bakhmut, although the Western media have tried to diminish its importance, it is really the linchpin of the main defense line of the Ukrainian military, certainly in the Donbas, which is where the main fighting has taken place. And if it falls and it seems very likely that it will, it's entirely possible that that entire defense line will quickly collapse and that Russian forces would then be able to advance largely unmolested to Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. The last two major communities that are not controlled by Russia in the Donbas. And, you know, as all of this is unfolding, any sensible military official from the West or a political leader would be asking, What is the point of sending additional weaponry, including, in particular, F-16s, to Ukraine at this stage? Are they going to be able to deploy to use them in a manner that will change the tide of the war? You know, will it be too late by the time they get there and they have been trained? Would we be sacrificing air assets, air combat assets that are very important to the defense of our own borders? So I think that as the situation in the Donbas deteriorates for Ukraine, it may be that it is becoming less and less likely that it's not just a question of F-16s, but any more, you know, heavy weaponry and sophisticated weaponry will be provided in substantial numbers to the Ukrainian military. Now, even if they do provide it, you know, the F-16s, and they do begin to turn the tide, right, which would greatly surprise me because the Russians have very, very sophisticated air defenses and a gigantic contingent of combat aircraft, very sophisticated combat aircraft. And they've been fighting in this theater of war for months. So, you know, they've had an opportunity to hone their skills in terms of taking down enemy aircraft. I would be very surprised that this would make a meaningful difference. But if it did, you know, we would be looking at a potentially very serious escalation of the war. So I don't think any way you slice it, Zain, this is a good idea. I think it's a disastrous idea. I said it a million times and I'll say it again until I am blue in the face. Sensible, rational, humane people would be prioritizing negotiation right now, particularly given the events in Bakhmut.

**ZR:** You mentioned negotiation. On the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine China proposed a 12 point peace plan to end the war. The German media were quick to denounce this plan by stating that it supports Russia's positions and interests and does not respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. Other criticism centered around the fact that China's plan is seeking to divide the West and the Tagesschau, one of Germany's leading news outlets, even had an analyst on who claimed that this plan is seeking to undermine any international alliance that may develop in terms of Taiwan. How do you assess China's plan? Can they be trusted?

**DL:** Well, look, we can never say with any certainty what is in the minds of a foreign leader, any leader. All you can do is listen to what they say and compare what they say to the actions that they actually take as a government. I read that plan. You know, I'm not a mind reader, but I read that plan and I didn't see anything in it, which is inconsistent with international law. Absolutely nothing. I believe the very first clause of the Chinese proposal is respect for territorial integrity. I think the part that the United States is reacting negatively to - I mean, let's step back. I don't think that there was any prospect of the United States reacting

favorably to this plan because they don't want an end to the war. They see this as an opportunity to weaken Russia. And secondarily, they don't want China to get any credit on the international stage for having facilitated the resolution of the war. So I think it was inevitable they were going to reject it. But I think the part that they're particularly irked about is that the plan also calls for an end to unilateral sanctions. This is actually perfectly consistent with international law. Under international law, the sanctions that the West routinely opposes upon its official enemies are a violation of international law. These are almost rising to the level of acts of war, especially the sanctions regimes that are specifically designed to destroy economies. These should be done only through, you know, multilateral, truly international United Nations regimes of sanctions that have been fully debated before the UN. So I think they had a particularly negative reaction to that, because this has become, of course, the primary weapon of US/Western hegemony, sanctions. So at the end of the day, I'm not surprised by the reaction. I think that it's very regrettable. I think that the Chinese do genuinely want to see an end to this war as do the vast majority of states that have expressed a favorable opinion about that. Interestingly, one of the states that in Europe, at least, that saw this as a positive step was the Hungarian government of Viktor Orban. You know, there's lots we can criticize about Viktor Orban, but from my perspective, when it comes to this war, and particularly the reaction to the Chinese proposal, I think he is one of the more sensible people in the European Union right now.

**ZR:** Let us go through some arguments that are made usually against negotiation and diplomacy. Let me begin with the first one, and when you're done answering, I'll go to the next argument. The first argument is against peace and diplomacy. "Shouldn't the West put Ukraine in the strongest position with weapons so it can avail more concessions when negotiations actually start to take place?"

**DL:** Well, that sounds good in theory, except it's just completely divorced from reality. In fact, I just finished writing an op ed about this very question. You know, within the last few months, Anthony Blinken, the US secretary of state, has said that attempts to retake Crimea by force are a red line for the Putin government. US officials, according to Politico, I believe it was, gave a classified briefing to Congress where they said that they very much doubt that the Ukraine military is going to be able to retake Crimea. You know, there was a report in The Wall Street Journal within the last 24 to 48 hours which said that the leaders of Germany and France had a frank discussion with Volodymyr Zelensky in which they told him that, you know, unless he manages to gain some spectacular battlefield victories in the near future, it's time to sit down and have a serious discussion. The newly elected leader of the Czech Republic, Havel, who was a NATO commander at the Munich Security Conference, said that it's entirely possible that attempts to retake territory will result in losses of Ukrainian life that are unbearable. That was his word. And then you had Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief on the last day of the Munich Security Conference, saying that unless Europe, whose arsenals have been almost entirely depleted, somehow found a way to speed up the delivery of ammunition to Ukraine the war is over. It's over. That's the word he used. And then this

was before, you know, the encirclement of Bakhmut, which just happened within the last 24 to 48 hours. So the reality, you know, any humane, sensible foreign policy should be based upon reality. I don't think I should have to explain that proposition. The reality is that Ukraine is losing. It's being devastated. It's suffering gigantic casualties. A US Marine just told an American media outlet that the average lifespan of a soldier on the front line in Bakhmut is 4 hours. 4 hours. That's shocking. So the reality is if we keep shipping more weapons to Ukraine. You know, Russia, which Obama observed many years ago, has escalation dominance in the theater of Ukraine will always be able to out-escalate the West. It will respond with greater force than has been replied to it. And where this will all end, Zain, is in the complete obliteration of Ukraine. That's where this is going to end. So I categorically reject those who say that the path to peace is more weaponry. I think that's patently absurd.

**ZR:** Second argument, which is usually made by our Foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister. "Negotiations can not take place from a position of subjugation, and until Ukraine does not win back its territory, it is unjust and immoral fundamentally."

**DL:** Well, I don't find that that message, that argument is consistent with Ms Baerbock's claims and those of other world leaders that, you know, Ukraine is winning. I mean, if Ukraine is winning, why does she describe the current state of affairs as a position of subjugation? But at the end of the day, we have to come back to reality. Let's compare where this is going to go or where this is going and where it's likely to be in six months to where Ukraine is today. Ukraine's negotiating position will weaken. That is the overwhelming likelihood. Right now, and this is very important strategically for Ukraine, Ukraine still has an outlet to the Black Sea. It still has control of Odessa. It could lose that. There's been a lot of noise in the last few days about Transnistria. And the Russians are very concerned about an accumulation of Ukrainian forces near the border with Moldova. They've been very concerned about the security of the ethnically Russian inhabitants of Transnistria from the outset of this war. It is entirely possible that once the Ukrainian military is sufficiently weakened by Russia's military assault or offensive, that they will move on Odessa and they will seek to develop a land bridge to Transnistria and deprive Ukraine of all access to the Black Sea, rendering the country completely landlocked. That would be a strategic disaster for Ukraine. And I didn't even mention all the people who will die in that process. We need to look at where things currently stand to where they're heading. Ms. Baerbock is frankly spewing hopium. It's just delusional. She's imagining that providing more weapons to Ukraine is going to turn the tide and ultimately result in Ukraine greatly strengthening its negotiating position. I just don't think that reflects the current reality, sadly.

**ZR:** And the last argument that is made is, "We don't negotiate with dictators and terrorists like Putin." What do you make of this argument?

**DL:** Well, first of all, it's just not true. In the course of human history, the Western powers have many times negotiated with persons that they regarded as very unsavory human beings

because they realized that the alternative was worse. The alternative was prolonged war and the destruction of entire civilizations and potentially all of humanity. And that's what we're doing with the nuclear era. So I just don't think that's true. But more to the point, I think it's a gross simplification of the Russian government. It's a caricature. It's this black and white good versus evil narrative that we're hearing in the West, doesn't reflect the complexity and the nuances of this war and its history. For example, I'm not going to, you know, recite all of the things you and I have discussed in past conversations, but there actually were millions of Ukrainian citizens of ethnically Russian origin who were under threat by the Ukrainian military in the Donbas and in Luhansk. Thousands of them were killed by shelling over the eight years prior to the invasion in February of last year. And there was a dramatic increase in the bombardment of Donetsk, the Donbas, by Ukrainian military forces in the days leading up to the invasion by Russia. So Russia and of course, there's the whole issue of NATO expansion as well, the guarantees that were given by Western powers to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand eastward, which were repeatedly violated. So there were legitimate complaints and concerns that the Russian government had. It's not just Putin. You know, it's the entirety of the Russian government. Again, I want to reiterate that, you know, when William Burns, who's the current CIA director, was a diplomat in Russia, he sent a secret cable to the State Department, which was later leaked by WikiLeaks, in which he said that he had spoken to people across the political spectrum in Russian politics and every single one of them was deeply concerned about NATO expansion up to the borders of Russia. So I think Ms. Baerbock is greatly simplifying - it's really a discredit to her and to the Green Party that she's doing this - the history of this conflict. Russia has and has always had legitimate concerns which need to be addressed. And if we address them frankly, Zain, it will not only benefit Russia, it'll benefit us all. What is in the interests of all Europeans and all of humanity is that this war be brought to an end and there be peace and stability in Ukraine.

**ZR:** Let us move forward with more international developments. The UN General Assembly approved a non-binding resolution recently that calls for Russia to end its war and withdraw from Ukrainian territory. The resolution passed with 141 voting in favor, seven against, with 32 abstentions. Asian heavyweights like China and India abstained from voting. Brazil even voted to support the resolution. Does this resolution signify a change of the Global South in terms of its position towards Russia?

**DL:** No, I don't believe so. I think that the voting in this, for the most part, the voting has been consistent with the past UN General Assembly votes with respect to this war. And if you do the math, I haven't done the math specifically for this one, but I did actually go through the list of countries that abstained and voted 'No' to the prior resolution at the UN General Assembly about the Ukraine war and the ones who either voted against the resolution or abstained represented over 50% of the human population. And I think it's roughly 50 - 50 now. And let's be honest, Zain. We should all be adults and recognize how the United Nations General Assembly actually works today. And in fact, I'm doing a study on the current session of the UN General Assembly to determine voting patterns, not with respect to just the war,

but just on a whole range of issues: nuclear weapons, Palestine and so forth. And what you find again and again and again is that this large collection of tiny nations which are extremely vulnerable to US pressure, consistently vote with the United States, like Micronesia, Palau, the Marshall Islands, you know, Liechtenstein, Andorra, Monaco. So when you actually look at that list, I'm not saying that there aren't heavyweights out there that have voted in favor - there are a number of heavyweights - but a lot of the states that voted in favor of that resolution represent a tiny proportion of the human population and are subject to immense economic pressure by the United States. So I do not think we should really attach too much weight to that, especially when you look at the distribution of the population of the world across the states that voted 'No' or 'Abstained'.

**ZR:** Russian President Putin and US President Biden held major speeches recently. While visiting Poland Biden stated that the Russians will never win in Ukraine, whereas Putin blames the West for the war in Ukraine and announced a suspension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, also known as the START Treaty that aimed to cap the number of strategic nuclear warheads that the United States and Russia can deploy. How do you view these developments? Are we heading into a nuclear confrontation?

**DL:** We're certainly heading into a nuclear arms race. You know, the nuclear arms race has been revived with a vengeance. Let's again, we should look at the history. How did we get here? This started, the dismantling of the nuclear proliferation, legal infrastructure, began with the Bush administration's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which I think happened in 2004. And then you had the Trump administration withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2018. And the Trump administration in the same year withdrew from the JCPOA, the nuclear deal with Iran, even though the International Atomic Energy Agency certified that Iran was complying with the deal. And so, you know, at every step of the way, the US has been bending over backwards to dismantle the nonproliferation architecture. Not to mention that all of the major nuclear powers are floating their obligations on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty because they're supposed to be moving towards the complete dismantling of their nuclear arsenals, whereas they've been doing the opposite for decades. So that's what ultimately got us to this point. I think it's highly regrettable what the Putin government did. I wish it hadn't done that, but it's very difficult to blame the Putin government for no longer having confidence in, you know, the mutual inspection procedures under the START treaty. Given what's happened up until now. So I think, again, to go back to the question of how we can de-escalate and revive the movement towards disarmament, it has to begin with an end to this war. We can't realistically expect to make real progress on nonproliferation and the dismantling of the world's nuclear arsenals, which are an existential threat to humanity, as long as NATO and Russia, the two biggest nuclear powers in the world, are effectively at war, which they are.

**ZR:** This war has also led to a frenzy in militarization. As you mentioned, the calls for growing NATO are growing stronger and stronger. Finland and Sweden accession to NATO is

currently blocked by Turkey, but analysts say it is only a matter of time before the tide changes. In addition, there are plans to increase NATO's high level troops from 40,000 to 300,000 and strengthen the Eastern Front to prevent what they call here in the German media a Russian expansion. In Germany, also, there is a debate taking place right now between whether to improve social spending, for example, providing children with food in kindergartens and schools versus increasing the military budget. Do you think these developments are going to affect the social fabric of the West? And also, and this is the other argument, "Is it necessary to improve militarization to prevent another possible attack from Russia?"

**DL:** Well, you know, it's amazing that whenever people talk in the West about, you know, or these political leaders, about vast increases in their military budgets, they just ignore the fact that the collective military budget of NATO prior to the invasion was approximately \$1.2 trillion. I want to repeat that number, US \$1.2 trillion per year. The annual military budget of Russia prior to the invasion was approximately US \$60 billion. And the annual military budget of China, which has a much larger economy than Russia's, was about 300 billion, I believe 300 to 330 billion. So Russia and China together had a military budget that was well under 50% of NATO's collective military budget. It was actually under 50% of the US military budget alone. So why are we asking why the current expenditure levels are not sufficient to defend NATO countries from the supposed threats being, you know, created by Russian and Chinese military expenditures? It's not enough that we're spending 2 to 3 times more in NATO already? You know, where's this money going? And I think the answer is, quite obviously, the money is going to enrich arms manufacturers, which are robbing us blind. I mean, they are selling to us military hardware that is extremely overrated and obscenely expensive. Every time they quote a price to us, the price that we pay ends up being the multiple. Somehow these budgets always skyrocket. You know, you see people who are on the boards of major arms manufacturers moving in and outside of government as though there's a revolving door. Then they are trotted out by the mainstream media, the same people who sit on the boards of arms manufacturers and they're requested to offer their opinions on military threats without there being any disclosure that they actually have financial ties to arms manufacturers. I mean, the military industrial complex, as you know, Dwight D. Eisenhower warned at the end of his presidency, it has effectively destroyed democracy in the West. We are now beholden to the military industrial complex. And the mere fact that, you know, spending \$1.2 trillion a year is not enough, according to these people, tells you all you need to know about the reality of the situation. We are being robbed blind. This money should be plowed into socially beneficial programs, education, health care, transition to a renewable energy economy, addressing homelessness, a growing problem in our society. This is where the money should be going. It's being diverted towards a military budget that's spiraling out of control. And no one has a good answer for why it's not enough already.

**ZR:** When Biden visited Kiev, he announced more sanctions will follow suit against Russia. Just a few days ago, the EU announced its 10th package of sanctions, according to the EU

Commission's website, it will include trade and financial sanctions, further export bans worth more than 11 billion and with the aim of depriving the Russian economy of critical tech and industrial goods. It also steps up enforcement and anti-circumvention measures, including a new reporting obligation on Russian central bank assets. Do you think these sanctions will cripple the Russian economy and help end the war?

**DL:** Absolutely not. I mean, you know, the IMF just issued its predictions for global growth and well, the growth that it predicted for the Russian economy was quite small. It was growth, nonetheless. And its prediction for GDP performance in Russia for the coming year was greater than that of Germany and the United Kingdom. In fact, the United Kingdom is an economic mess, in part because of the increased price of energy resulting from these sanctions. The reality here, Zain, and you know, there was an excellent interview done by one of the leading intellectuals in France, Emmanuel Todd with Le Figaro, about a month or two ago, in which he talked about the fact that Russia actually produces things that the world actually needs. You know, a lot of the GDP you see in the West, particularly in the United States, is just, you know, financialized, you know, a fantasy. It doesn't actually represent the production of goods that are essential to the well-being of people. If you were to truly remove, you know, from the global economy the things that Russia produces, the fertilizer, the grain, the oil, the gas, the minerals, you know, this would be disastrous for the global economy. I think they actually know this. And so a lot of this is just a game, these sanctions. It's just designed to, I mean, they are trying to damage the Russian economy. There's no question about that. But at the same time, they're being quite sneaky about it and with a wink and a nod allowing states like India to recycle Russian gas and sell it into global markets because they understand that if they don't do that, this is going to be a gigantic problem for the global economy. The sanctions at the end of the day are not working as long as two huge economies like those of China and India are doing business with Russia as they are. In fact, business is booming and growing rapidly with Russia. And you also have countries like Turkey. You have, you know, Iran, you know, even Mexico. Mexico, which is next door to the United States and is part of the North American Free Trade Arrangement, has refused to sanction Russia. This has clearly failed. And I think that this is why we find ourselves in this extremely perilous situation, because the West didn't imagine a situation where Russia would be able to survive the sanctions regime. Obama disdainfully described Russia's economy as a gas station pretending to be a nation. No, actually, it turns out that it is vitally important to the health of the global economy. People in China and India and elsewhere realize this. And the West didn't have a plan B, Zain. They didn't think, Well, what happens if the sanctions fail? No matter how many sanctions we impose, the Russian economy survives and thrives and Russia then decides to escalate militarily? Which it has. They didn't have a plan B and now what is happening? They're running out of weaponry. That's why Josep Burrell said, you know, this war is going to be over unless we find a magical way to get more ammunition to Ukraine. So, again, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, the sensible, rational, humane thing to do is to negotiate a peace deal now before things get a lot worse. And I think any sensible person can see that that's exactly where this is heading.

**ZR:** To my last question, returning back to our Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, she recently presented guidelines for a feminist foreign policy which would include protections for women ensuring equality across the world. In addition, Annalena Baerbock at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, stressed the difficulties that women are facing in Afghanistan and Iran and also mentioned that Russia is reportedly abducting children, children in the war in Ukraine. How do you evaluate our foreign minister's call for feminism and human rights? Is this something to take seriously?

**DL:** Well, let me just say quickly before I answer that, the thrust of your question about this claim that Russia is kidnaping children, I don't know to what extent this is true or not true. I do take claims of this nature with a grain of salt. I don't assume them to be false. I don't assume them to be true. Obviously, the Russian government strenuously denies them. In the current propagandistic environment, it's very hard to know who's telling the truth. So I think we should all just, you know, withhold judgment on that and wait until there has been a truly independent, thorough investigation done of this and other allegations of human rights violations by Russia in this war. But, you know, more broadly, putting that aside, of course, you know, the principles she's articulating are admirable. You know, what ethical person wouldn't support them. But the foreign policies of the Western states are anything but promotional of human rights and particularly the rights of women. So let's just look at the case of Saudi Arabia. My country, Canada, is selling \$15 billion of heavy weaponry to Saudi Arabia, one of the most misogynistic regimes on Earth. You know, look at the way the Israeli military forces treat Palestinians and particularly Palestinian women and children. You know, she's concerned about children in Russia, Annalena Baerbock? Well, B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization for years has documented how Israeli forces are torturing, I repeat, not just kidnaping, torturing Palestinian children. Israel's military administration is the only one in the world, I believe, which subjects children to prosecution in military courts which have virtually no due process protections. And Germany is one of the fiercest defenders of Israel on the world stage. Fiercely. You can hardly, you know, defend the Palestinian people in Germany without being persecuted by the government, accused of anti-Semitism and ultimately silenced in some manner. So Ms. Baerbock's rhetoric is wonderful, but the reality of German and Western foreign policy is profoundly inconsistent with her purported objectives.

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

**DL:** Pleasure. Thank you for having me again, Zain.

**ZR:** And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube is not suggesting our videos like it used to a few years ago to new viewers. So if you want to stay in touch with our information, be sure to join us on our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. And be sure to donate. If you're

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