



## **The Incident btw. Russian Jets and a US Drone | 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 recent incident over the Black Sea between the United States and Russia and other related issues. Dimitri Lascaris is a journalist and a board member of the Real News Network. He's also a lawyer specialising in class actions, human rights and international law. Dimitri ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada in 2020 and finished second. Dimitri, thank you so much for your time today.

**Dimitri Lascaris (DL):** Thank you for having me, Zain.

**ZR:** Let us begin the show with an incident that has dramatically increased the tensions between the United States and Russia. On Tuesday, a US MQ-9 Reaper surveillance and reconnaissance drone crashed into the Black Sea, an estimated 75 miles off the coast of Crimea. According to Western media footage you see from the camera of the surveillance drone backs the US story and shows a Russian SU-27, making two extremely close passes with one of them releasing fuel. The drone's propeller appears to be damaged and that is when the US decided to abort its drone. Russia's ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov responded by saying that the drone was moving deliberately and provocatively towards the Russian territory with its transponders turned off. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated that this is a pattern of aggressive, risky and unsafe actions in international space by Russia. And let me quote him here – "Make no mistake, the United States will continue to fly and to operate wherever international law allows", unquote. How do you assess these developments?

**DL:** Well, it's important to understand that the Russians were, as a matter of the laws of war, entirely entitled to bring the drone down. Based on what we know. What we know is that the United States has been using drones, AWACS, other surveillance assets to acquire battlefield intelligence, share it with the Ukrainian military, which they're entitled to do. But that effectively renders them belligerent vis-a-vis Russia. And, you know, essentially parties to this war. And so under the laws of war, Ukraine is entitled to ask the Americans for assistance in terms of intelligence gathering. But Russia is entitled to take measures to eliminate the

gathering of that intelligence. This drone was operating, as I understand it, over international waters. I have no reason to doubt that. But it's what it was doing that is important from a legal perspective. And secondly, the Russians are claiming that it violated an airspace, that it establishes a protective zone during the commencement of the invasion. And I'm not sure where the boundaries of that protective zone may be. They may well extend into international waters at the end of the day I don't think that particularly matters. What matters, again, is the function of this drone and the purpose for which it was flying in areas that are obviously militarily very sensitive to Russia.

**ZR:** What significance do you think this event will have on global security, especially now that we're seeing that tensions are rising between Russia and the United States?

**DL:** Well, it really depends on how the United States, I think, reacts at this stage. You know, we've been seeing a pattern of escalation and counter escalation, as we've discussed before, Zain, in this particular theatre of conflict. The Russians have as Obama noted when he was the president, escalation dominance. They will always be able to escalate the West because of logistical issues principally, and because also of military industrial capacity. They produce more of the weapons they need for this type of a conflict than the West does. So an example of how terribly this could go awry is Senator Lindsey Graham, you know, arguably one of the most belligerent, reckless warmongers in the United States in Congress and that's saying something because there's a lot of warmongering of the US Senate in Congress. He called for the United States military to shoot down any Russian fighter jets, which obviously would entail very likely killing Russian military personnel, something that didn't happen here. There was no American military personnel killed. And I think you can anticipate that there will be a response if that happens and it will be a bigger response than the American response to the shooting down of this drone. And by the way, the other thing I'll say is I think if the Americans choose a less belligerent course of action, which is not to shoot down Russian fighter jets, but just to continue sending these drones into militarily sensitive areas, I think you can anticipate that the Russians are going to continue to take countermeasures against these drones. There's no reason to think that they're going to stop here. And what's interesting to me about this is the way they went about countering this drone. They could have shot it down. They didn't. And if they had, of course, because it's an unmanned drone, they wouldn't have killed any American military personnel. I think one inference you can draw from this is that they were not only taking protective measures in the near term, but also they didn't want to destroy the drone so that they could capture it and, you know, gather important information about how this highly sophisticated piece of aerial equipment and surveillance equipment operates. That's another reason why the Americans should think twice about continuing to send these extraordinarily expensive and sophisticated assets into militarily sensitive areas.

**ZR:** Last time we interviewed you, the debate on fighter jets was still ongoing. Yesterday, Poland became the first major country to pledge fighter jets to Ukraine, and it will send four MiG 29 fighters to Ukraine. Slovakia, Finland and the Netherlands have also stated their willingness to supply Ukraine warplanes whereas, Germany and the US have thus ruled it

out. The US views Poland's decision to send these jets as a sovereign decision. Time magazine, citing an analyst from the Institute for the Study of War States and let me quote them here: "This might be a turning point for when Western capitals start to reevaluate their previous decisions to refuse to sell Ukraine fixed wing aircraft", unquote. How do you assess this development? Will these fighter jets make a difference in driving, in changing the tide of war in favour of Ukraine?

**DL:** Well, the quantities we're talking about, absolutely not you know. I haven't checked recently but I believe at the outset of the invasion, they had far in excess of a thousand operational combat aircraft. Undoubtedly, they've continued to produce combat aircraft. Obviously, the loss of a significant number thanks to the Ukrainian air defences. But, you know, ten, 20, even 50, MiG 29 are not going to turn the tide of this war. The MiGs play an important (role), you know, in combined arms warfare. If you want to launch an offensive, you need to have air power in order to protect your ground forces, including even your tanks and your armoured personnel carriers and your infantry. So this will slightly enhance the Ukrainian military's ability to conduct an offensive. But as I say, not only the number of these MiGs, but also the overall state of the Ukrainian military is such that I don't think there's any realistic prospect of a major offensive achieving anything at this stage. You know, there are reports coming out now of gigantic casualties being sustained by the Ukrainian military. You know, a lot of the armoured personnel carriers and tanks in the area are being destroyed because the roads leading in and out of the city are under Russian artillery fire. And already, you know, before this, before the city was operationally encircled, the Ukrainian military command was literally begging the West for more tanks and armoured personnel carriers so they were already suffering from a huge deficit. I mean, this is just you know, this is like trying to put your finger into a broken dam and stem the tide of, you know, water flowing beyond the busted infrastructure. And I think, again, as I've said many times in our discussions Zain, the sensible, rational, humane thing to do before things get much worse is not to send more weapons to Ukraine, especially MiGs, but to sit down with the Russians and negotiate a peace deal.

**ZR:** The argument that is usually made against this is that Ukraine has a right to defend itself and Russia will simply roll over them if they don't continue to fight or receive weapons. How do you counter this argument?

**DL:** Well, there's a you know, I'm a lawyer. I've practiced law for 30 years. And as I've told my clients many times, having the legal right is one thing, but it being sensible for you to exercise that right is quite another. I don't dispute for one second that the Ukrainians have the right to defend themselves. Of course they do. They have the right to call upon other states to come to their defence. Absolutely. But what is the ultimate outcome going to be, in all likelihood, as a result of their exercise of that right? I think we can say with a high level of confidence at this stage that the likely outcome, not the certain outcome, but the likely outcome is far more casualties, far more destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and far more

loss of territory and a weakening overall of Ukraine's negotiating position.

**ZR:** Russia appears to be winning the war in Ukraine, even according to Western media outlets, most recently making notable gains in Bakhmut, a city which Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin states, and let me quote him here: quote, “more of a symbolic value than it is strategic and operational value, unquote. The US, according to Politico, is preparing Ukraine for a major counter-offensive that could take place as soon as May. They're already submitting war games hosted by the Pentagon. And according to Politico, Kiev has two options: “push south to Kherson in Crimea or move east from its northern position and then south cutting off the Russian land bridge. The second is more likely, according to US officials”, unquote. How do you assess these developments, including the upcoming counteroffensive plans of Ukraine? Will this be an ongoing back and forth, or do you see one or the other making significant gains?

**DL:** Well, again, some of the reports that are coming out of the Western media, which has been systematically pro-Ukrainian throughout this conflict, suggest that Ukraine barely has the ability to defend itself, let alone launch a counter offensive. There was one report from a Ukrainian commander in the Bakhmut area. I believe his callsign was Kupol. It may have been in Reuters or in The Washington Post perhaps, where he actually allowed himself to be photographed, which obviously meant he could be identified by the Ukrainian authorities. And he said basically all of our combat soldiers are dead, dead or wounded. And now we're throwing people into what is a horrific term but it tragically, aptly describes what Bakhmut has become. We're throwing untrained recruits into the meat grinder of Bakhmut. And he talked about young, fairly experienced conscripts in trenches, shell shocked, unable to even fire a weapon because they were so traumatised by the constant barrage of artillery from the Russian military. When your military's in that state, how can you contemplate an offensive in which, you know, in military history usually results in anywhere from 3 to 4 casualties for everyone that the defending army sustains? So if you go on the offensive, you're going to be probably incurring a multiple of casualties on the other side. And in that regard, it's important to understand, and this has been widely confirmed by the West, that in the region you discussed, the Russians over the past several months have built up formidable defences. They built up trench lines, pillboxes, concrete structures to protect their tanks from artillery fire. They have air defence systems. They brought in T-90, their most modern tanks in large numbers into that particular theatre of the battle. So I can't imagine that an attempted offensive against the Russian forces in the south of Ukraine will result in anything other than a bloodbath, perhaps some minor temporary territorial gains. But breaking through all the way to the Crimean Sea or the Sea of Azov? That just seems like a fantasy at this stage. And I find it highly regrettable that the Americans seem to be pressuring the Ukrainian military to attempt this suicide mission.

**ZR:** We talked about how the United States is preparing Ukraine for the offensive, according to Politico, hosting these war simulations. And we also talked about how the United States is providing surveillance and reconnaissance information to improve Ukraine's chances on the

battlefield. The United States however argues there will be no peace unless Ukraine demands it. It's all up to Ukraine. Do you think the United States or Ukraine is calling the shots? And the second part of the question, why is the United States, in your view, not pursuing diplomacy? And does it have a right to even ask that of Ukraine?

**DL:** Well, the Ukrainians, of course, as a sovereign nation ultimately are the ultimate arbiters of whether a peace deal will be done with the Russians, when it will be done and on what terms it will be done. But we also have agency in this matter. And by 'we' I mean Western governments. We are supplying weapons to the Ukrainians. We are supplying battlefield intelligence to the Ukrainians. We are supplying massive amounts of economic aid to the Ukrainians. We have imposed sanctions on Russia, which are in fact having a very negative impact upon our own economies and our own citizens. So we are entirely within our rights to condition our aid, our ongoing aid to the Ukrainians on the Ukrainians taking certain steps vis-a-vis this conflict. And if they don't take those steps, then we can say, well, we are going to withdraw or reduce all or certain forms of our aid. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. Our governments are elected to represent the interests of our citizens. And if it's in the interests of our citizens that this war be brought to an end, then we have every right to condition our ongoing aid to the Ukrainians on a demand that they must satisfy for negotiations. But ultimately, whether they do that is, of course, up to them. You know, why are the Americans, I think it's quite obvious, Zain, not remotely interested in negotiations because this war was never about the well-being of the Ukrainian people. You know, if we can agree on one thing, you know, those of us in the West who take different views about whether this support for Ukraine is right or wrong, whether Russia is the aggressor or not an aggressor, whatever your point of view may be, there's one thing we should all be able to agree upon based upon the historical record, and that is the United States does not arm states and send billions of dollars of money to foreign governments out of the goodness of its heart. It does this for power politics. And at the end of the day, it will throw the Ukrainian people under the bus faster than your head can spin if and when it determines that it is in the interests of American power for it to do that. And so the Americans, what is their real agenda here? The real agenda is to weaken Russia. The real agenda is to cause as much damage to the Russian military as possible. The real agenda is to create so much discontent amongst the Russian electorate that they remove Putin from power and replace him with somebody who will be much more pliable, much more manipulable from the perspective of the United States government. And what that means is the American objectives are served by the prolongation of this war, even if the result is the destruction of Ukraine ultimately. That's not what they're concerned about. And we need to wake up about that in our discussions about this war in the West. We never talk about the big geopolitical picture. We never talk about the history of American aggression and how that plays into our interpretation of events in this conflict. It's time for us to start talking about those things.

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

**DL:** Thank you again Zain, pleasure to be here.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube can censor or shadow ban us at any time. So as a precaution, be sure to join us on our other channels on Rumble and Telegram. And please don't forget to donate. If you're watching this video take into consideration there's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, in the case of our German videos: translating, correction, voiceover that is working to ensure that you receive independent and non-profit news and analysis. Thank you so much, I'm your host Zain Raza and see you guys next time.

**END**