



## **Dimitri Lascaris in Crimea - NATO's Pledge to integrate Ukraine & Pentagon Leaks**

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Thank you 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, who's visiting Russia and Crimea. We will also be talking about the recent developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. Dimitri Lascaris is a journalist and lawyer. As a lawyer, he specializes in class actions, human rights and international law. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada, finishing second. Dimitri, welcome back to the show.

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

**ZR:** Before we get to your recent trip to Russia and Crimea, you know how media commentators and politicians are quick to label people as Russian propagandists or mouthpieces. Can you therefore first talk about the actual purpose and motivations of your trip?

**DL:** I am painfully familiar with the practice of labeling anybody who challenges the Western narrative about this war as a Russian propagandist. And I think what's going on here, Zain, is that the Western governments and the corporate media want you to believe that everything that the Russian government says is false. That's the fundamental premise of everything; every critique that's leveled against Russia, that its government always lies. And therefore, once they've sold you on that false bill of goods, it just naturally follows as a logical matter that anybody who agrees with anything the Russian government says is a disseminator of propaganda. The problem with this attack, and it's very important to understand this and we must have the moral courage to say it, is that not everything the Russian government says is false. The Russian government unquestionably disseminates

propaganda much of the time, as do Western governments. In fact, I would go so far as to say it's really hard sometimes to know who is being more propagandistic and who is more effective and clever when it comes to propaganda. But there should be no question in anybody's mind that we are in a two sided information war. And sometimes both sides sometimes tell the truth and a lot of the time they lie or say things that are misleading or leave out important information. The challenge for us as citizens is to discern when the belligerents in this conflict, both the enemy, which if you live in the West, Russia or the ally, is telling the truth and lying. That's the challenge. And in order to do that, we have to consult the variety of sources of information, a diversity of sources. We shouldn't confine ourselves to the mainstream discourse. We have to, above all else, use our capacity for critical, independent thinking and ultimately do the best that we can to discern the truth. But we should start by rejecting the idea that anybody in this terrible war has a monopoly on truth. Because that's absolutely not the case.

**ZR:** So what are your purposes? Why are you going there? To gain a different perspective, talk to people and see if what they're telling in the mainstream media is false or true?

**DL:** Very simply, what we're hearing in the West is only about the negative aspects of Russia's record, the Russian government's record, number one. So they never talk about the positive aspects and there are positive aspects. I have covered a number of them in an article I just published on my website, [dimitrilascaris.org](http://dimitrilascaris.org), entitled Ten Days in Moscow. I recommend you read it. It's not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the record of the Russian government, but citing Western sources, I make the case that there are in fact positive aspects to the government's record. It's not entirely negative. The second thing that we do in the West is that we exaggerate the negative. Sometimes we accurately present it, but sometimes we overstate the negative. The third thing that we do in the West, I'm talking here about the media and the political elites, is we fabricate things that are completely untrue and that have been debunked. For example, the claim that Putin stole the 2016 election in eight states, which is just a crazy conspiracy theory, if you ask me. And the final thing that we do is we treat matters, which could be true, but at the end of the day, are purely speculative as being proven propositions. And so we don't demand proof for the claims that are being made. And when you add all of this up, what you have is a grotesquely one sided narrative in the West about what is happening in Russia. I came here not to lecture people because we do that all the time in the West. We lecture the Russians and we lecture their government. I didn't come here primarily to speak with critics of the government, although I will do that. And the reason why I'm not focusing on them is because we hear about them all the time in the West. What I want to do is I want to speak to the silent majority. In the West, the majority of the Russian people who do support the Putin government are almost never heard from. And the majority of them, according to polls, do support this war effort in Ukraine for good or ill. And I want to understand why that's the case with a view to creating a dialog in any way that I can, because at the end of the day, it's in the interests of all of us that this war be brought to an end.

**ZR:** We'll talk about Crimea, but before I do that, let's take a step back again and talk a little bit about the history of this region, particularly Crimea's history with the Soviet Union and then after to Russia and how it changed after a US backed coup in Ukraine in 2014.

**DL:** Crimea has a very long and complicated and diverse history. It was first in recorded history, it was actually settled by Greeks. And in fact here in Sevastopol, where I am, one of the original Greek communities is called Alonissos. Parts of it are still in existence today, I visited it the other day. And for about 2000 years it remained an important part of the culture of Crimea. And then I think it was around the 1450s when the Byzantine Empire fell that the Ottomans came and dominated Crimea for some 200 to 300 years, I believe it was. And interestingly, a major source of commerce during that time was slavery. There were frequent raids into Russia for the purpose of capturing slaves and selling them on to the global slave market. And then I believe it was around 1750, Catherine the Great defeated the Ottoman Empire and incorporated Crimea into the Russian Empire. And it remained there. And I think this was a very salient fact until about 1954. And of course, at that point in time, the Soviet Union was in existence and Crimea was a part of the Russian Soviet Republic. But Khrushchev, who was, I believe, ethnically Ukrainian for reasons that are not entirely clear, decided to transfer Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. And one of the theories, which is a plausible theory for why he did that was because the vast majority of the population in Crimea was Russian. And he felt that by putting Crimea in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, he would increase Moscow's control over Ukraine. Because there would be more Russians that would form part of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. That's one theory, a plausible theory. But at the end of the day, I think it's fair to say that when that happened in 1954, nobody was contemplating that the Soviet Union was going to break up. And of course it did some 35 years later. And when that happened, all of a sudden Crimea found itself part of the independent state of Ukraine. And for all appearances, all intents and purposes, the people of Crimea are willing to deal with that. They were willing to endure that situation up until the moment in time in 2014, when a president of Ukraine who had been democratically elected, he definitely was a flawed president, but he had been democratically elected and the bulk of his support came from the predominantly Russian speaking parts of the country, including Crimea. He was removed by a coup. His name was Viktor Yanukovich. And there's ample evidence that that coup was encouraged, facilitated and even orchestrated by the US government and European governments. And at that point, the Russian government seized Crimea, took back what it regarded as being rightfully its own territory. There was a referendum held before the actual seizure. And of course the results of the referendum are hotly disputed by the West. But officially they showed that some 97% of the population of Crimea supported the merger with Russia and that the turnout was about 83%. And then immediately the Ukrainian government reacted by imposing collective punishment on the people in Crimea. And the primary way it did that was by cutting off Crimea's water supply from the Dnipro river. It built a dam that blocked a canal that was a precious source of water for the peninsula, much of which is arid. And interestingly, when the Russians last year

seized control of the Kherson region where this dam was situated, they blew up the dam and reestablished the flow of water from the Dnipro river. And now there's a huge reservoir beside Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, which I saw myself. I drove by it, which was full, [although it had] completely dried up. So what you have here in Crimea at this time, I think it's fair to say it's unclear exactly what the level of support was for Russia, but I think it's probable that a significant majority of the people of Crimea living here today passionately want to remain part of Russia.

**ZR:** In a last interview, you had just arrived in Russia and we were talking about your experiences in and around Moscow. You were planning to go to Crimea and now you've been there. Talk about your notable observations that you came across and anything that stands out that you would like to share with our viewers.

**DL:** Moscow was quite a surprise for me. First of all, let me qualify what I'm going to tell you by saying that I never actually spent any real time outside of the central part of Moscow. And by the way the central part of Moscow is quite big. It's a city of some 50 million people. I probably walked over the course of ten days an excess of 120 kilometers, probably closer to 150 kilometers. So I saw a lot of the central part of the city, which is quite large, but I saw very little of the suburbs. And so, of course, it behooves me to say that what I saw in central Moscow might not be at all representative of what you find in the suburbs or in other parts of the country. That being said, what I saw was a remarkably beautiful and well managed city in central Moscow. The architecture was majestic. It was extraordinarily diverse. It was well-preserved. The streets were and I am comparing what I saw, by the way, to what I'm accustomed to living in North America, particularly Montreal. I saw a city that was much cleaner. In the entire ten days that I was there I was actually counting the number of people I saw who appeared to me to be homeless. The number was five. You know, when I walk in downtown Montreal, I see five homeless people in the space of 30 minutes. Sometimes I'll see ten or 15 homeless people in the same space of 30 minutes. In fact, that's what I see in every major city in Canada. So at least from what I saw in central Moscow, the level of homelessness was much lower than what I'm accustomed to in Canadian cities. I was also expecting to see a very high level of police presence, and there may well be many plainclothes police officers in Moscow. Obviously, I wouldn't have noticed them. But in terms of uniformed police, I saw far fewer uniformed police than I normally see in North American [and European] cities, especially in Athens, where I spent a lot of time. There are police everywhere in Athens, including, wearing riot gear. I saw almost none of that in Moscow. Another interesting fact I'll give you is that about two weeks before I arrived in Moscow, I was in Damascus for a day. First time I'd ever been to Syria. And it struck me from the moment I crossed the border from Beirut that the image of Bashar al-Assad was everywhere. You couldn't escape it. It was in shops. It was on the balconies of apartments. It was in government buildings, it was on billboards. It was on the money. I got to Moscow expecting to see because, of course, we hear that Vladimir Putin is a dictator and a tyrant, something comparable. But I almost never saw his image. I almost never saw conspicuous

displays of patriotism. And I certainly didn't see any signs of an economic crisis. So for me, it was quite a surprise and it helped me to understand better why, for the entire time that Vladimir Putin has been in power, a significant majority of the population has supported him, according to the polls in Russia. It's now easier for me to understand that.

**ZR:** Let us move to your trip to the Crimea. What did you visit there and what were your observations in that part of the European continent?

**DL:** Well my observations have varied widely from depending on where I've been. So I spent a good bit of time in Yalta, which is, I think probably the primary resort destination within what Russia considers to be the Russian Federation, today. I saw absolutely no signs of war there at all. It's really stunningly beautiful. It's kind of like a more modest version of Monte Carlo. Interestingly, there was very little festivity. Maybe that's because I was there at Easter time. But I asked people about this and they told me, look, people don't feel it's appropriate to be engaged in festivities in a time of war. But other than that, other than the fact that it seemed relatively somber and quiet, I saw no signs of war and it really was stunningly beautiful. Then I went through Simferopol, which is inland- delta is on the southern coast, and Simferopol is the capital. There I saw a lot of construction, a lot of new apartment buildings. I saw a brand new state of the art hospital, a very large mosque being constructed. And I mentioned I saw that reservoir, which has been just replenished since the Russians seized the Kherson region. I saw some military vehicles there, but no signs of actual combat. Then I came to Sevastopol, where I am now. Yesterday there were explosions in the sky. I think that the air defense systems were activated probably by a surveillance drone. And so that lasted about an hour. But people didn't seem to react to that as though it was an unusual experience, which was kind of surreal. There are, of course, you know, naval vessels everywhere. There are a lot of military personnel on the streets. You kind of feel the war here, but you also, it could pass for peace time. If you didn't know there was a war going on, you wouldn't necessarily conclude that from spending time in Sevastopol. And finally, the place where the war was obvious, it was inescapable, was when I visited a refugee camp on the border between Crimea and Kherson, run by Russian volunteers. And so this was really on the edge of the war zone. And there it was obvious that there was a war going on, although I didn't see any, you know, death or destruction. The level of military activity, the nature of the military equipment I saw, the security measures that were taken, the overflights of fighter aircrafts, it was absolutely crystal clear that there was a war going on. And the people I spoke to there, as I mentioned, are volunteers. They come from all over Russia. And their purpose is basically to take refugees across the border from Kherson and direct them where they want to go. And a significant percentage of them, they told me, don't want to stay in Russia. Most of them apparently do, that's what I was told, but a significant percentage want to go to other parts of Europe and the reason why they cross into Kherson or into Crimea rather than attempt to enter Poland from the Ukraine-Poland border, I was told, is because if you're a male, you are likely going to be seized at the border by Ukrainian forces and forced into military service. And so rather than go directly into, you know, a western part of Ukraine, or

a western part of Europe, they do a circuitous route through Crimea and then try to come into Western Europe without having to encounter Ukrainian forces, which I thought was quite telling. And the last thing I'll say is that the refugee center, I asked them about this claim, the allegation that the International Criminal Court has made against the Russian government separating children, Ukrainian children from their parents. For what it's worth, the people I interviewed there said it was fake news. They said they would never do that. They are not aware of any instances in which that was done. I was told there was one case and only one case they were aware of where a 15 year old crossed the border willingly alone without her parents and they did what they felt was appropriate. They directed that youngster to a refugee facility. But that youngster, as far as they could tell, was acting voluntarily. And they certainly weren't trying to separate that young person from her parents.

**ZR:** What about the atmosphere there? Is there a sense of oppression in Russia and Crimea, for example, are you being followed by state agents? Or are people afraid to call the Russian invasion a war? How did you feel in terms of the atmosphere?

**DL:** So I personally have not ever felt that I was under surveillance. I've seen no evidence of that. But at the same time, I would be surprised if that's not going on just because this country is in a war and its government regards the war as existential. And I've been very public about being here. So I would imagine that at a bare minimum, the Russian government is monitoring what I'm saying and generally what my movements are. But I must say that I've never actually seen any sign of overt surveillance. I've never felt under threat. I've never encountered it, even though almost nobody speaks English, which is interesting, even in Moscow, and it was obvious from the moment I opened my mouth that I'm from North America. I've never encountered even the slightest hint of hostility from any Russian people. And most of the people I've dealt with are not government officials. They're civil society. In terms of their honesty and frankly, it's difficult to gauge, Zain, because, you know, it is dangerous here to condemn the war. The government doesn't have a lot of, based on all accounts and the laws that have been adopted recently, it doesn't have a lot of tolerance for criticism of the war. I have heard criticism of Putin from a number of citizens. But interestingly, it's not the criticism you hear in the West. The criticism I've been hearing is why didn't the Russian government intervene militarily years ago? Why did it allow Ukraine and NATO to build up the Ukrainian military's destructive capacity? And the other criticism I've heard is that the Russian government is not being aggressive enough in bringing this war to an end and that it should be more forceful before things get out of hand. The one criticism I've heard from, I guess you would call it a left wing perspective and interestingly, it happened in the last day or so. I was told by a number of people who support the Russian government that the one segment of Russian society where there's a lot of opposition to Putin is amongst young people. And I managed to have a conversation with two young people in the last 24 hours where it was very interesting. I wish I was able to report it, but they weren't really interested in having it recorded. They were very artfully and elegantly telling me that they would rather live in Ukraine the way it used to be, not the way it is now, but the way it

was before the war, and that they felt as though as young people, they didn't have - again, I'm interpreting what they were saying because they were being careful- but they as young people, they didn't have the same opportunities in Russia at this particular moment as they had in Ukraine before the war. But they also acknowledged that Ukraine today is not what it was before the war for a whole bunch of reasons. So I would say that on the whole, the people I've spoken to are supportive of the Russian government. There is some dissent, but it's muted.

**ZR:** Let us move to some recent developments and switch gears here. NATO general secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, is currently visiting Ukraine. Speaking alongside Ukraine, President Zelensky in Kiev, he said, quote, "We do not know when this war will end, but we know that Russian aggression is a toxic pattern that must be stopped. So we must continue to strengthen Ukraine's armed forces", unquote. He went further to state, quote, "Ukraine's rightful place is in the Euro Atlantic family. Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO", unquote. Finland recently joined NATO and it is expected that Sweden will also join sometime in the future. It now appears with these statements that Ukraine will too. When you look at these developments and look at the long term strategic picture, regardless of who wins the war, don't you think that Russia's war to essentially demilitarize Ukraine has backfired and Putin gravely miscalculated?

**DL:** Well, let's just start by acknowledging Jens Stoltenberg as a double faced liar. I mean, they've been telling the Ukrainian people since 2008 they were going to become a member of NATO. The Ukrainian government in the last several months has been adamant that Ukraine should be made a member of NATO now. And NATO powers have been equally adamant in telling the Ukrainians that there's no prospect of them becoming a member of NATO until this war is over. So you have Stoltenberg talking at the both sides of his mouth. He's saying on the one hand, you know, Ukraine belongs in NATO and this war is going to go on and on until we achieve victory. And on the other hand, they're telling you, Well, Ukraine, you can't be part of NATO until this war is over. And by that point in time, there may be no Ukraine left. And I think that Stoltenberg knows this perfectly well. Now in terms of whether, you know, Russia catastrophically miscalculated. Look, I think it's far too early for us to say one way or another whether, in fact that's the case. We can talk about the state of the battlefield now and the trend and the trend remains that Russia is winning. I've said this repeatedly. I've seen nothing since you and I last spoke to change my assessment of that. There's absolutely-people here in Crimea regard the idea that Ukraine is going to recover Crimea militarily as a joke. No, nobody even takes it seriously. They just laugh. And if you go up to the Crimenian border and you see the fortifications that the Russians have built and you just look at the lay of the land and how difficult it would be for the Ukrainian forces to enter there, you understand that this is really impossible. In terms of what's happening in the other four Oblasts, particularly the Donbas, you know, every day there are reports, including in the Western media, you can go see them, for example, at the website of the Institute of the Study of War that Russian forces and the Wagner control more and more of the key strategic city of

Bakhmut. And I think that the Ukrainians are now down to about 10% in the western suburbs of the city. And it's clear that that city is going to fall entirely to the Russians. And then after that, it's unclear whether the Ukrainian forces are going to be able to put up meaningful resistance to a Russian advance all the way to the Dnipro river. And, you know, these documents that were leaked out recently, I don't know how anybody can look at those top secret documents objectively and come to the conclusion that Ukraine is winning this war. Clearly Ukraine is not winning. It's barely capable of mounting an offensive. The kill ratio that the Russians have is very much in their favor. They have massively greater supplies of air defenses, of artillery, and the West is running out of weaponry. You can hear military leaders in Western governments, for example, the UK saying the cover is almost bare and we don't have the industrial capacity to stock up the Ukrainians anytime soon. So I don't know how anybody can say that militarily this is a disaster for Russia at this particular stage. And certainly economically, as I said, Zain, I saw no indication of an economic crisis in Moscow. And the IMF is predicting in the current year economic growth for Moscow and relatively low inflation. So certainly the trend is not towards the Ukrainian/ NATO victory. If anything, it's in favor of Russia.

**ZR:** I want to dig a bit deeper into this. The second point of China's peace proposal for Ukraine was to abandon the Cold War mentality. And let me read from their text, quote, "The security of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others. The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs. The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly." Do you think, given Jens Stoltenberg's reaffirmation of Ukraine's future in NATO, that the Chinese peace plan or any plan for that matter that takes into account Russian security interests is essentially void? What alternatives do remain if NATO becomes part of Ukraine?

**DL:** Well, I think that given the statements coming out of Stoltenberg and the Western governments, the only and I think this is an absolute tragedy for the Ukrainian people, I think from here on in it's likely to get much worse for them territorially in terms of infrastructure, in terms of casualty rates. But I do not see any appetite in the West for meaningful compromise, and it is ultimately the United States and its allies who will determine when and on what terms this war will be resolved. It will not be the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainian government is now entirely at the mercy of Western support. And there are two ways, I think, in which the Western attitude might change, realistically. I hope I'm wrong, Zain, and I hope that they actually come to their senses for the good of the Ukrainian people and to minimize the risk of nuclear war. But I just, realistically I don't see it happening. I think there are two ways, realistically, in which the Western posture might change. The first one is a decisive defeat of the Ukrainian military, which obviously would be extremely painful for Ukraine. And the other is the removal of these warmongers from political office. You know, Biden being removed from political office. You know, Olaf Scholz and Annalena Baerbock - who I think is the most shameless warmonger in Europe today. Probably you may also need to see a change of government in Poland. But certainly in Germany and the United



States, I think you will need to see a change of government in order to see a change of approach to this war. These people are now so heavily invested politically that it's almost impossible for them to imagine changing course, it seems. If they did that, it would be an absolute disgrace. They would be completely discredited. So they're just doubling down and doubling down... So either we're going to rise up as a people here in Europe and the United States and Canada and say enough is enough, we want you out of office, we want new people to come in and clean up this disastrous mess. Or the Russians, sadly, are going to need to inflict a decisive defeat on the Ukrainian military, and only then will a negotiated resolution be realistically possible. I think that's the terrible and sad reality that we're currently confronting.

**ZR:** You already mentioned this briefly before. This week, the FBI arrested a 21 year old Airforce guardsman who was responsible for one of the most significant US government leaks in recent history. The leaks were reported in the German mainstream media, but the facts that were quite critical of the prevailing narrative around Ukraine were not highlighted sufficiently. Notable leaks included the US government's understanding that Ukraine has a little chance of defeating Russia and that the fighting in the Donbas region is heading into a stalemate. In addition, documents reveal NATO's direct involvement in the war that include how US intelligence agencies have been deeply penetrating the Russian military obtaining vital information of Russian operational plans. It also exposes how 97 Special forces from NATO countries, including the US, are active inside Ukraine. Another document reveals how the US has been spying on President Zelensky fearing Ukraine might strike Russia's territory if Washington provides it with long range missiles. Can you talk about the significance of these leaks?

**DL:** Well, I've been listening to military and intelligence observers from the West about these leaks, and one of them, who strikes me as making a very persuasive case - his name is Larry Johnson, a former C.I.A. analyst - says that he does not believe, in fact, he finds it unbelievable, that this 21 year old National Guardsman had access to some of this material. Somebody provided it to him, somebody who was in a very, very senior position within the US intelligence community. And, you know, Mr. Johnson suggested that perhaps the National Guardsmen is a patsy just to discredit the Biden administration's policies without compromising US security unduly. So I don't know whether that's true, but I do know that the way this is being handled, particularly the way in which the Western media, the very organizations in the media that are most cooperative with the US intelligence community, the way they've gone about hunting down and exposing this leaker, very unseemly thing for the press to be doing to put it mildly, it arouses my suspicion. I think that a lot of the information at the end of day, whatever is going on here, I think a lot of the information of that documentation is true. And some of it I think the casualty figures are a complete fabrication. One thing is for sure, those documents do not support the mainstream narrative in the West about this war, whether they are a genuine leak or they are a controlled leak, whether there's, you know, this 21 year old National Guardsman is a patsy or is the actual source of the

information, I don't know how anybody with a straight face can say those documents support the Western mainstream narrative about this war. And, you know, the shocking thing about it and there was an excellent article, I think, by Branko Marcetic in Jacobin in the last couple days about this, is that the mainstream media are not focused on those aspects of these documents. The story for them is the leaker, you know, and all the nasty things that they can find out about the leaker's identity in the past. We're not talking about the fact that these fundamentals contradict what the West has been telling us, the Western governments, and prove Joe Biden to be a liar.

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

**DL:** Thank you again, Zain. Always a pleasure.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. Don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. Youtube can shadowban or censor us at any time. So if you want to receive our information safely in the future, make sure to join us on these alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. And if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure you take into account that there is an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, in the case of our German videos translation, voice-over, correction. So if you want us to continue providing you with independent nonprofit news and analysis, make sure to donate a small amount today. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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