



Leaked Pentagon docs reveal Ukraine has little chance of winning & NATO involvement (PART 2)

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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. This is the second part of our discussion with Katrina vanden Heuvel on the war in Ukraine. In the first part, we had a fundamental and contextual discussion, and in this segment we will be focusing on the most recent developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. Katrina vanden Heuvel is the editorial director and publisher of The Nation. She's also a member of the American Committee for US-Russian Accord and a columnist for The Washington Post. She's also the author of numerous books. Some of them include "Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers." And "Is Capitalism Broken?" Katrina vanden Heuvel, thank you so much for your time today.

Katrina vanden Heuvel (KVH): Thank you.

ZR: This week, the FBI arrested a 21 year old Air Force Guardsman who was responsible for one of the most significant US government leaks in recent memory. The leaks were reported in the German mainstream media, but the facts that were quite critical of the prevailing narrative around the Ukraine war but not highlighted sufficiently. Notable leaks included the US government's understanding that Ukraine has little chance of defeating Russia and that the fighting in the Donbas region is heading into a stalemate. In addition, the documents reveal NATO's direct involvement of war, which you also mentioned in Part one that includes how US intelligence agencies have been deeply penetrating Russian military, obtaining vital information of Russian war operational plans, as well as at 97 Special forces from NATO countries, including from the US, are active inside Ukraine. Can you talk about the significance of these leaks?

KVH: One of the remarkable parts of - well, the significance - is the real time nature of the leak. We've seen Snowden, Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. That was more coming after the events. This is possibly impacting. Real time. A war - and not just a war. We can talk about

some other issues, but certainly the two central pieces and one that was less well known is that NATO and US trainers are more deeply enmeshed. Now, if you read news stories about US assistance in Ukrainian targeting of Russians, this was not a full shock, but it is documentation. And the other is the civilian, the nature of the civilian casualties and those killed in action. That number, those numbers have been deeply contested. But it looks like there's a radical deep asymmetry between Ukrainians killed and Russians, some 4:1. What you also see is how those in power, and this is interesting because the left often likes to organize so as to speak truth to power. Well, the interesting thing is that those in power often know the truth. And I mean, it is fairly clear that General Milley, for example, the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when he spoke out in February, and it was interesting, he said this "may be a battle of attrition, I think we need to find a way forward. It's not sustainable." He's been looking at these figures. I mean, he knows the radical asymmetry. He knows how dangerous this is, if it escalates. So I think the documents are very important in real time. It's interesting that those in power, like Biden, have tried to diminish the impact. But what's stunning and I don't know enough about this world - I'm sure you've had people on, Zain - but the chat rooms, the provenance of these documents, if in fact it's the case that you had a junior 21 year old, airman with very low - I'm sure - security provisions able to access these documents, to bring to chatrooms, to educate - anyway, we'll learn more. But it's quite powerful. Now, we did an interview, my late husband and I, with Snowden in Moscow about six, seven years ago. And, you know, he came from a patriotic family. They'd all been in like the Marines. And, you know, he was not against surveillance. He was against illegal warrantless mass surveillance. How leakers are treated in the United States is a very interesting subject, a different subject. But Daniel Ellsberg, who you may have had on in your program, is 90 but he's failing in health. Now he's become a star and a saint. But he was not such in his years when he was on trial. So there's a shifting.

ZR: As you just mentioned, there's a discrepancy between what Western politicians and the media are telling the public and what Western politicians and governments actually know. Why do you think that they are not providing the public with accurate information and selling us a narrative that Ukraine is on the verge of winning and can even take over territories or regions like Crimea? And why do the mainstream media play along this line instead of fulfilling their task, which is in a sense, to ask critical questions and scrutinise those in authority?

KVH: Do you have a few days? I mean, this is a big question. I think I'll just take a small part of the media but there is a policing of the parameters of what's permissible to talk about. And the parameters are quite narrow and defined by The Washington Post, The New York Times. And I think what's happened is there is - kind of on TV, Zain, you see people - the parameters are very acute on TV and it's even worse where you have people where you don't have anyone really speaking in a different way outside the parameters. In fact, you have people who have a vested interest. So many generals, ex-generals financially invested. But I think that there is a wariness of challenging power. There is an adherence to access

journalism where you can't take on power aggressively. And this is about public interest. It's not vengeance. But I do think we're seeing the very deep limits of TV. Now, what's happening is, you know, there are new formats. I worked with Matt Taibbi many, many years ago, who's become quite controversial because of the Twitter files. That story, by the way, should not become tit for tat. Matt Taibbi is a very good journalist, but it shouldn't be his debate with a TV host. It should be looked at, as we hope to do, about how private companies have become enmeshed in the national security state. And I think there's more intertwining than we know. There's deep reporting to be done. But it is a formative tectonic shift in time where we're seeing, you know, the limits of media in political ways, but the corporatization at new levels which pose a threat to news in the public interest.

ZR: Let us switch gears here and move to another recent topic. In February, world renowned Pulitzer Prize investigative journalist Seymour Hersh released an article based on anonymous sources, on multiple anonymous sources, that detail how the US bombed the Nord Stream pipeline. A few weeks later, The New York Times released an article based on anonymous US intelligence sources that claimed a rogue group used a yacht from Rostock to bomb the Nord Stream pipeline. They even found traces of explosive material, as well as fake IDs on the yacht. However, they ruled out any involvement of British and American citizens following The New York Times article, the German media, immediately followed by Die Zeit, Der Spiegel conducted their own investigations and more or less came to the same conclusions that the perpetrators may be a rogue Ukrainian group that is not affiliated with the Ukraine government or some anti-Putin Russian group. There's even talk by some senior officials in Germany that it may be possibly a false flag operation intended to blame Ukraine with the intention to damage its relations with the West. How do you evaluate the story of Seymour Hersh versus the mainstream media story? And which one do you think is more plausible?

KVH: So let me begin with Sy Hersh, Seymour Hersh. What's so fascinating in terms of a new media is Sy Hersh began in breaking My Lai many years ago during the Vietnam War, and he couldn't get it into mainstream press. So he worked with an alternative media, which existed then. And that's what broke the story. So, Sy Hersh has, in essence, gone back to this kind of form because he's been booted out of many of the places he worked because of controversy. One was The New Yorker. Then he was at the London Review of Books. So he's big - and he's become controversial because of his work on Syria. And it allows people to say, well, it's Sy Hersh. That's not adequate. You can't just say, you know, he is one source. I mean that's been the reaction of many media institutions. Instead of digging, The New York Times and the rogue operator - it seemed like it was trying to avoid Sy Hersh with a leak a little bit from the government to deflect from truly investigating the Sy Hersh story. Now, that may happen. My understanding was there was an attempt in the German Bundestag to have an inquiry. I know of Sevim Dağdelen, who's an interesting force in the Parliament. But there should be inquiry and not dismissal and not necessarily quick alternatives presented. But that is to be investigated. Now, yesterday Sy Hersh, or two days ago, published a piece on his

substack, which in and of itself is a media development about corruption in Ukraine. You know, I have to say this is not a shocker. There's corruption everywhere. Different countries have different kinds of corruption. But Ukraine was a deeply corrupt country, and it's not shocking that those in government are taking some money because there's a lot of money floating around in these times, military money, money for weapons. But I think Sy Hersh plays on the balance of the important role of trying to keep the mainstream media honest and breaking stories. And you can argue about his sourcing. But I think instead of dismissing, it poses a challenge to the mainstream media to do better.

ZR: Let's look at another recent development. According to the German mainstream media network, Deutsche Welle, Germany recently approved a Polish request to send Ukraine five MiG-29 jets. The approval from Berlin comes just hours upon receiving the application. This comes on top of the German Leopard 2 tanks and the American Abrams tanks that are set to go operational in Ukraine at any moment. Do you think sending all these weapons will end the war and will lead to long lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine?

KVH: I don't think weapons ever resolve or lead to peace, but I do think what we're witnessing is kind of immoral. The files and, you know, other conversations show that the West is intent on supporting Ukraine's spring offensive. But is also aware, according to the files, that there may not be any resolution on the battlefield and it will be a war of attrition. So essentially, it's like a last gasp of weapons. More people will be killed. More weapons will be used. Toward what? Now, here is where it diverges. Some think that the war needs to go on, but others see it as a precondition toward whether it's a cease fire, an armistice. There are lots of different constructions. But why? Why send all these new weapons when in fact energy should be on an escalation of some kind of agreement and not more weapons. And I'm also, you know, we haven't talked about it, but the nuclear issue is not to be ignored. I don't think Putin intentionally would use a nuke because I think relations with China, with countries which are supporting Russia to some extent, would break down. He'd be a rogue pariah. And the mainstreaming and normalizing of nukes is a horrific thing. But calculation, miscalculation, accidents. The longer this war goes on, it's possible. So I do think the escalation should be to build down. Not send more weapons. It is interesting, by the way, how Poland has become a central player, because just a year ago there was a lot on the Left about the violation of laws, the kind of extremist legal framework in Poland. Now it's been given a pass in a sense, because it's become the great ally in the war.

ZR: So I'd like to make a counter argument to diplomacy and the statement that weapons cannot lead to peace. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz or foreign minister Annalena Baerbock usually state, and let me quote Annalena Baerbock here: "negotiations cannot take place from a position of subjugation, and until Ukraine does not win back its territory, it is unjust and immoral." How would you respond to this sort of thought?

KVH: The tragedy is that any kind of peace cease fire will be ungainly, will be difficult, will be painful for different sides. There is no question that Ukraine has united in the face of war, mostly united. And there's an anger, justified. There's fury. But I mean, you want to come to the table with a certain amount of strength. What's key is that the United States come to the table because the previous accords, as you may know, the Minsk Accords and Normandy Agreement were kind of subverted by the United States. So, yes, Ukraine, what does it mean that Ukraine comes from a position of strength? The longer the war goes on, the more dependent it becomes on other countries for rebuilding it, which isn't to deny its agency. There should be a secure and democratic free Ukraine, but it may mean some kind of organization of Donbas that is unwelcome. There may be some agreements. Now, the key, I'm sure, in Germany - I mean, The Nation opposed the League of Nations - but that was an extractive peace agreement that subjugated the defeated and led to an anger that contributed to another war. So a bad peace is not a good thing. I agree with that. But there are variations. It may not be a good peace, but a sustainable one?

ZR: Leading figures in the European Union, such as the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, regularly say Russia is violating international order and law and diplomacy that takes into consideration territorial concessions, will only incentivize as well as send false signals to other authoritarian states - implicitly meaning China - that they can invade any country whenever they want without repercussions. Therefore, they state that the West has a moral obligation to ensure that we punish and sanction these countries. And no decision can be made without Ukraine's consent. How do you respond to this sort of argument?

KVH: I do believe that you're not going to have even a sustainable peace if any outcome is done without Ukraine's, if not consent, but participation. But, you know, there is a hypocrisy here that is astonishing. I mean, this is not to justify Ukraine, but can we talk about Iraq? I mean, Iraq, in my mind, was the greatest foreign policy debacle, maybe greater than Vietnam. And that was a violation of sovereignty. That was a violation of all the codes and norms. So all of this talk about a rules based order - whose rules? I mean, yes, rules-based in my mind means the United Nations, international law. All flawed, but they're real. And so when I hear these words, there is a hypocrisy that I'm sure many others feel in other parts of this world that kind of lead not to what people wish, which is more respect for democracy, but defaming democracy by citing examples without a full picture. On China, China is very wary, I think. They're for sovereignty. They're not for violations of sovereignty. But what is happening, it seems to me, is a failure of US policy, which for years has tried to keep Russia and China apart. I mean, what's happening with the collateral consequences of this war... Ukraine is driving Russia and China closer together. But I think it's a wary partnership. It's not a full friendship by any means. But, you know, look at all these countries that are animated to try and find a peaceful way, like Brazil, India, Turkey, South Africa. They're not ready to, you know, buy the idea that the US NATO rules of the road are the ones they're going to adhere to.

ZR: You mentioned that the United States has to come to the table also and play a role in ensuring peace in Ukraine. Why do you think the United States has not done this so far? What are its foreign policy objectives in Ukraine and in terms of the entire region?

KVH: Very good question. Very big question. I think the expansion of NATO reveals some of the issues. But there's a long relationship with the Soviet Union, with Russia. It's not clear if this is about ensuring a free and democratic Ukraine. How much of it is about rolling back Russia or contesting Russia's role in the region, weakening Russia? You know, in the beginning of the Cold War, and I'm not sure what to call what we have now, but there were two concepts in foreign policy, US foreign policy, rollback and containment. And we've lived with containment -ala George Kennan, the esteemed diplomat - for many years. And détente. But there is a kind of new energy behind a 21st century rollback, which, you know, there are some people who do imagine a regime change, a weakened Russia. And I think that, again, comes out of 2007 where Putin says, we're back. We're not on our knees like we were during the Yeltsin years. And a lot of American policymakers don't want that.

ZR: On March 17, 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Putin. He's, among other issues, allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of children from Ukraine. Last month also marked the 20th anniversary of the US war of aggression in Iraq, which you just mentioned, that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. That war also included rendition and a global torture program, as well as the detention of people, including teenagers as young as 14 at Guantanamo Bay. In addition, the US war on terror included a drone program where thousands of people were murdered, most of them being civilians. As a journalist covering topics on US foreign policy and Russia, how do you assess the double standards on the ICC's actions, as well as the media? And what does it say about our international legal system?

KVH: Well, I think it diminishes the power of our international legal system, that it is selective. It is viewed as selective justice. I said earlier, you know, it's a flawed institution, but I'm a believer in the United Nations. The ICC is somewhat - the International Criminal Court is not fully part of the U.N. - but I do think there is a role for international law. But it's so often violated that it's hard to talk about it with a straight face. I mean, there were efforts during the Iraq war to arrest Rumsfeld in Germany, which did not succeed. I edited a piece called Prosecuting Putin, which was by an international law scholar. And he concluded by noting, as you know, the United States is not a signatory to the ICC. Neither is Russia. So in using this construct, this instrument, there's a hypocrisy which shouldn't deny the possible power someday of this international system, but it's not real. And I think it also suggests that there's no real interest in negotiations with Russia if Putin is the leader and he's criminalised. Now, that doesn't mean there aren't other instruments to bring judgement to those who have been part of this situation with children. But the ICC - hypocrisy can defeat quite a bit in the eyes of people, if they know. But I do think there was a lot of extrajudicial nonprofit work

that came to the ICC. There's been a lot of filming in Ukraine and a lot of private participation on the part of groups, like Bellingcat or even the head of USAID, Samantha Power, has funded a lot of video work to bring such a case before the court.

ZR: To my last question, we have a significant English viewership in Germany that watches our channel. I've been following The Nation for a long time. Can you talk more about your work at The Nation and also what this publication represents and what differentiates it from the mainstream media?

KVH: So The Nation was founded in 1865 by abolitionists committed to ending slavery. And since that time, I believe we've been a journalistic beacon exposing injustice where we find it. Proposing justice, committed to social movements. As a believer that social movements allied with those of good spirit in power make change. More recently, we've been allied with the kind of emergence of progressive Democrats. We endorse Bernie Sanders, which I think was an important political change in our country. But we are independent. We are non-corporate. We call it like it is. And I'm committed to issues of war and peace. And I fear that that has not been at the central nexus of progressive politics. But we're going to make it so. And yeah, I've covered many wars and impeachments, but Russia has been a part of my life. And I think I began studying Russia because I was interested in the impact of the McCarthy period in this country. And I do think in another conversation there was a kind of neo-McCarthyism and a demonization of those who speak outside the accepted parameters. And we contest that as best we can.

ZR: Katrina vanden Heuvel, we will be sure to be in touch with you, editorial director and publisher of The Nation. Thank you so much for your time today.

KVH: Thank you.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube, which is owned by Google, can shadow ban or censor us at any time. So it is essential as a precaution that you join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. And don't forget to donate. There's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light and audio. In the case of our German videos, translation, voice over, video editing. So if you want us to continue providing you with independent nonprofit news, be sure to donate. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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