



Col. Wilkerson on Ukraine in NATO, Pentagon leaks and the Cold War with China

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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 Lawrence Wilkerson on US foreign policy with a focus on China, the Korean Peninsula and Ukraine. Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired colonel who served in the US Army for 31 years. He was also chief of staff for then Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2000 to 2005. He's now a senior fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Lawrence Wilkerson, welcome back to the show.

Lawrence Wilkerson (LW): Thanks for having me on.

ZR: Let us begin this interview with China. China has become a major global player and has been on a diplomatic offensive for brokering a peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March and now also offering to facilitate talks between Israel and Palestine, where violence and tension have been escalating greatly this year. China's president, Xi Jinping, also recently called Ukraine's president Zelensky for the first time. Zelensky viewed this initiative as positive as well. And let me quote him here, "long and meaningful". How do you assess China's emerging role and what significance does it have on global security?

LW: I have absolutely no difficulty with China in any way, fashion or form, using the diplomatic instrument to try and solve some of the problems in the world. I would agree with

anyone who would say there may be some ulterior motive here, but I care not about that ulterior motive, as long as it's positive on the other side of the coin, that side being diplomacy that works. And it's about time somebody of consequence stepped into the Israeli-Palestinian issue, because the United States has for almost 70 years now, the last 20 in particular really messed it up badly. And it's messed it up badly because Israel is as much as a 51st state of the United States of America, or better said the United States of America is a province of Israel. So if China wants to deal with Bibi Netanyahu and the problems in Israel, more power to them. And as far as I'm concerned, that's true about Wang Yi and the other members of a very competent Ministry of Foreign Affairs in almost any problem in the world that seems now insoluble. And if Jinping and Wang Yi and others in China want to bring their diplomatic prowess, their good offices to try and solve it, I'm all for it.

ZR: Can you talk specifically about China's brokered peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as the offer to have Israel and Palestine come to a solution and what it means within the context of US imperialism.

LW: I don't care what it says about US imperialism in the Middle East that's been so blatantly apparent to the rest of the world that there are probably 3 or 4 billion people in that world that would like to see the United States replaced in the Levant. That said, we aren't going to be replaced any time soon. We still have more than 50,000 of our troops there, which is a larger troop lay down than anybody else in the world other than indigenous countries like Saudi Arabia. So I don't have any problem with them working there either – the Chinese, I mean. I think it's a significant development that the powers in the region and I mean powers like Tehran and Riyadh to a lesser extent, possibly the Emirates, and maybe if we want to throw in Israel, although with Netanyahu that's a poisonous throw in, I have no problem with them doing some of the things they should be doing for themselves, such as trying to reach some sort of reasonable regional security agreement. I mean, if we weren't in it, that would be fine with me. If all it's required is our acknowledgment of its existence and our support for it, I doubt we get that, but I don't have a problem with that either. It's time that some of these areas of contestation, if you will, of conflict, began to take some responsibility, substantive responsibility for their own security. And in that region, of course, that means there's got to be some sort of more powerful than now, more powerful than the Abraham Accords, for example, agreement between Tehran and Riyadh with Israel as a partner in that. Otherwise, it's a nonstarter.

ZR: Don't you think China getting involved in the Middle East will already anger the United States and could lead to further provocation? We're already seeing that the United States has a problem with China within its own area in the region and Taiwan in the South China Sea. Why would the United States not also see this as a confrontation when China is now acting with initiatives on the global stage or just the regions in the Middle East?

LW: But China's not acting with the kind of power projection that we do. And the best example of that is they haven't steamed a battle group through the Gulf of Mexico 12 miles off the coast of Texas. When they do that, then I'll start getting worried because we do that all the time to them and our allies as well. I have no problem with China's feeling some angst about, for example, the Iranians fast roping down on a tanker and capturing it. It might be a Chinese tanker. They have a very extensive need for energy. And that region of the world is a place where they're going to get their energy, just as we have for much of our post-World War two existence until recently when we started being an oil producer ourselves again. It's a very vital region for China, and to have a few ships in that region, to have interest in that region diplomatically, in other words, is perfectly explicable to me. And it's not a threat to the United States or anybody else in the region. So I'm somewhat curious as to why we're thinking the way we are. I think I can say why we are because I know how – we are so paranoid about other powers in the world, particularly China, and yet they're acting completely in their interest and in a way that is not injurious to our interests if we'll just shut up and listen and watch. Now back to Ukraine. It's my understanding, and I recently acquired some affirmation of this understanding from some people who I met when I was working with the Central Party School in China in the early 2000. China had planned very much that Ukraine would be an entrepot for their Belt and Road initiative. Now, that probably is opposed by the United States because they see that as a too powerful relationship ultimately with Europe. We're trying to wean Germany off China, for example. Lots of luck with that one. You're not going to wean Germany, the leading power in Europe, off the leading economic power in the world now, China. I'm sorry you're not going to do that, but we're trying to do that. But that's China's outlook, I think. It's economic. It's financial, it's business. It's trade. That's what they want to do. And, you know, we can compete on that field. After all, we're the ones who started this whole business of predatory capitalism which the Chinese have taken over with a vengeance. And Europe was our field, if you will, for a long time. I think that our support of Ukraine is, in part, our attempt to reestablish our ultimate hegemony over Europe, particularly Germany. And the Germans will figure that out pretty soon, and it'll be a little difficult for us to do it, I think. But I have no problem with sharing the world with China. No problem at all.

ZR: Earlier this year, the US and Philippines reached an agreement in which the US would station four additional military bases in the Philippines. The US is now building an arc on China, stretching from South Korea and Japan in the North to Australia in the south. Furthermore, beginning April, Politico reported that French President Macron, upon returning from his three day trip to China, stated and let me quote him here: "Europe must reduce its dependency on the United States and to avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan." The Group of Seven, also known as G7, that includes Canada, Japan, the US, as well as European countries such as France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, recently met in Japan and demanded that China stop its aggressive power ambitions in the South China Sea. Europe seems to be in a very contradictory position. On the one hand, it is aligning with the US policy to curb so-called Chinese aggression. But on

the other hand, it recognizes its importance of its economic ties with China, as well as dependency on the US. How do you see US relations with China developing in the future, given the situation in Taiwan? And how do you think Europe will balance this contradiction?

LW: To your first point, Macron is acting a bit like Charles de Gaulle. And I, again, I really have no problem with France or Germany or for that matter, any European power, but they're the two key ones, asserting themselves a little bit more in the world and backing away from the United States a bit. I think it's inevitable. As my former boss, now passed away, Colin Powell said in 1989, "Hey, when Mitterrand and Kohl and Thatcher and Major and all those war born people in Europe are gone, watch out. Europe will grow up and back away from the transatlantic relationship." I think that's inevitable. That's the way power works in the world. At the same time, I agree with Macron that we are treating China and we have her surrounded virtually like she were a pariah or something, rather than the very competitive strategic, economic, trade, finance and even military power that she is. As long as she's not projecting that power in a way that threatens us on the high seas or anywhere else, I don't have a significant problem with that. If we can't compete in the field that we generated and created really the capitalist free trade world, if we can't compete, we ought to go back and hide somewhere. So that's the way I feel about it. Now, there are other aspects of it, and you touched on a couple of them that bother me a bit, and that's, I think, what Japan and others are concerned about, and that is the fact that China has gained hegemony in Northeast Asia. There's no question about that. The only thing that could disrupt that majorly is, if Japan made the decision to go completely nuclear, that is to have a full panoply of nuclear weapons. That would be a balancer, par excellence. And then I would not say China has completed hegemony, but they do. We can test that hegemony with battlegroups that sail in and out of the area every now and then with the Japanese maritime self-defense force complement or a British complement, usually one ship or whatever. But they have hegemony and they need to be careful with that. Whether they're fishing, whether they're cowing, the Filipinos, whether they're threatening other countries like Vietnam, they need to be careful with that because they will become a pariah in their own hegemonic sphere. And that's not where China should be going. And I hope they get better leadership soon than Xi Jinping perhaps, and they understand that. Now, do you get better leadership than Xi Jinping? I think you can. I think there are possible Chinese leaders who wouldn't be quite as nationalistic and use that nationalism to keep his people on the right track because communism is dead. I think they're better leaders for China and we need to just hold on and come upon one. That said, I'm still a little bit worried about how they push their hegemony almost with some arrogance in that region of the world, because there are a lot of people there that aren't going to take that. Including the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese whom the last time I looked at history gave the Chinese the bloody nose when they tried to invade, I believe it was 79. The Vietnamese are not going to take that from China.

ZR: I want to move to another development in the region, namely the Korean Peninsula. For the first time since 1981, the US plans to deploy nuclear armed submarines to South Korea

with the aim of conquering North Korea and preventing a possible attack. Each of the Ohio class submarines carry a maximum of 20 Trident II ballistic missiles and have a range of 7400 kilometers, meaning they're capable of hitting any city in North Korea from the Pacific, Indian or Arctic Oceans. Do you think these actions would prevent North Korea from pursuing nuclear weapons and finally bring them to the table to negotiate peace with the South Koreans?

LW: Well, the North Koreans are a fait accompli. They already have nuclear weapons. And I was recently told they probably have between 30 and 50 now. And though it is extremely expensive, Kim Jong-un and others have basically shown they will spend all their money if they have to on this technology. So that's a done deal. They are a nuclear weapons state, period. I think when the new South Korean president began to speculate about whether he wanted to go nuclear weapons state himself, and he probably ran into a buzzsaw of all manner of problems, like there isn't a province in Korea that's going to let him store his nuclear waste, there isn't a province in Korea that is going to let him test, so those are real problems. And he's got dirty plutonium in his civilian reactors. So he'd have to have a reprocessing effort that would take two or three years, very expensive, or buy plutonium from someone else. And that's a precarious situation, too. France can tell you all about that. So I think what I recently heard about is transferring nuclear weapons back to the peninsula during my administration, if you will, not the George W Bush administration, the George H.W. Bush administration and Colin Powell as chairman, we pulled our nuclear weapons off the peninsula. I think I'm hearing we're going to send them back. I even saw that in the public press recently, and I think that's to get the South Korean president not to think about his own nuclear weapon capability. And I think that was probably his purpose in announcing what he did, which was to get us to bring them back. That's not necessarily a bad move because it tells the guy in Pyongyang, "I'm sorry, we're taking your hand. You've got them. We've got them. We got more than you do". And that's a part of deterrence. I wish North Korea hadn't gone nuclear, but that's a part of deterrence. So I think the situation on the peninsula is manageable.

ZR: Let us move to recent developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. NATO's General Secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, recently visited Ukraine. Speaking alongside Ukraine President Zelensky in Kiev, he said, and let me quote him here: "Ukraine's rightful place is in the Euro Atlantic family. Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO". Finland recently joined NATO and IT IS expected that Sweden will also join sometime in the future. And now it appears with this statement that Ukraine will, too, at some point. 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? NATO has only grown stronger and united.

LW: For the time being. I do not believe that NATO is growing into 32 countries, including such countries as Albania and Montenegro, and I could name a few others too, like Poland. If you want, a graveyard of empires check Poland. Matches Afghanistan in terms of its record

on destruction of empires on its ground. Now, most of the time Poland was being stopped by those empires. But Poland in NATO worries me. 32 countries worry me. So NATO may be larger, but it's not stronger. And as far as I'm concerned, Jens Stoltenberg is a tool of the United States of America. We engineer his rise to the secretary generalship. He's a tool of the United States. All that said, I think we're going to go through a period of really tough times with regard to European security and Putin with his invasion of Ukraine, which was unnecessary – I don't fault him for the geostrategic reasons that he felt it was necessary, but I fault him for doing it. Now, that's not because I love Vladimir Putin or any of the others that are right around him right now. It's because I understand the geostrategic realities of what NATO did. He showed us in Georgia, he showed us in Georgia what he would do. When my president, George H. W. Bush went to Tbilisi and publicly said Georgia would be a member of NATO in the future, Putin used his military. He could have gone to Tbilisi and taken the whole damn country. He didn't, but he's still very influential in that area up there where he does not want any NATO relationships. He did the same thing in Ukraine. We should have seen that coming and we should have done everything we could to prevent it. We didn't. We, as Angela Merkel leaked, we violated the Minsk Agreement so that Ukraine could have time to rearm. And that's absolutely true. So I think we're in for a tough time and I think we're in for an eventual collapse of the transatlantic relationship and maybe even of NATO. I'm not sure that would be unhealthy. The European Union is now 740 million people. If it could get its political act together, its GDP is the equivalent of ours, 22 to \$23 trillion. If it could get its political act together, it'd be a formidable power in the world. And it ought to be a power with 148 million Russians in it. I'm sorry, that's the reality of the world today. That doesn't mean we can't have a good, positive relationship. Trade, financial and so forth with Europe. But it's about time the United States quit being the guarantor of Europe's security and they guaranteed their own. And I think that's inevitable. That's just going to happen. As John Mearsheimer says: "I'm sorry, that's the way the world works."

ZR: I want to examine another recent development. In mid-April, 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 include the US government 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 in the war, that includes how US intelligence agencies have deeply penetrated the Russian military, obtaining vital information of Russian war operational plans. It also exposes how 97 Special forces from NATO countries, including from the US, are active inside Ukraine. Another document reveals how the US has been spying on President Zelensky, fearing Ukraine might start striking Russian territory if Washington provided the long range missiles. Can you talk about the significance of these leaks?

LW: There are a lot of points there. Let me cover a few of. First of all, it is utterly ridiculous that the United States of America cannot control its classified material. One of the biggest reasons is because we have 840,000 security clearances. I was just with Valerie Plame, if you know the name, out in New Mexico, and she was telling me about her book Fair Game, and she was talking about what she discovered about security clearances and so forth. And of course, I read the Bill Arkin and Dana Priest article in The Washington Post talking about these 840,000. Well, I learned there were 200,000 more now. That's over a million. Many of these are top secret code word clearances. Many of these are contractors. Many of these are 21 and 22 year olds. We trust them to go die for our country. We might as well trust them to keep security secrets classified and safe. So the first thing we need to do is get a hold of our problem. And our problem is way too many people knowing top secret and even code word information. The second thing is, I think there were some orchestrations of some of this leak. I really do. It's just too strategic at points that I don't see the hand of the CIA in there?! Now is this young man complicit with that? No, I think not. They just knew what he was doing and manipulated it a little bit. And they also made sure that most of the things that he leaked didn't do major national security damage. Now, that's speculation on my part, but I've been there. I've been in these deep secret, compartmented working groups with the agency, and I know the way they think and I know the way we do things. And blowing up the Nord Stream pipeline leads me to believe that we're really, you know, doing some pretty heady things now. The third point I'd make is that, I think we're in a situation in Ukraine right now, not only where we need to stop immediately, but we're at a point where we could. It'd be tough. It'd be very tough. And we're at a point we're going to be at in a year with maybe 100,000 plus more casualties. And we're going to do it. We're going to have to do it. That is, if we don't escalate and go nuclear in the interim, and that scares me. That really frightens me because there is the potential for that to happen. So why wait that year and take all those dead people? Well, so Lockheed Martin can make billions more dollars, so the United States can, you know, push Germany in ways that it reestablishes its hegemony. All of these factors are at play here. And we have two domestic situations that are really difficult to deal with. Biden is hoist upon his own petard. Biden can't be seen as backing away and hopes to be reelected because the media and he have made this such a popular war. Putin is in a position where if he makes any concession in a negotiation, he'll probably be unseated and some real tough guys will take over. So we're at a point where it would take real finesse. It would take what I call exquisite diplomacy, lose-lose diplomacy where neither side loses too much. But we need to do it because it isn't going to get any better in a year. Yeah though, the sides will be more weary, they'll be bloodied, they'll be in even worse shape, especially Ukraine, but why wait a year and do that? Let's get to the table right now. Let's work it out. Whatever we have to do. DMZ's, UN troops, referenda, whatever, recognition of Crimea as Russian recognition of Kosovo by Moscow as a state, and get your troops out of the northern portion of Kosovo so the Kosovars can make something happen in that country. All these things can be worked out. But we have to talk and we have to start. And I see this obtuse position on both sides, and I see Zelensky exacerbating it. I understand why he's doing that. But when you go around pronouncing that not an inch will be given and that everything has to be returned and we will

be NATO and Stoltenberg saying they will be in NATO that's bull. That's crap. Don't tell me you're establishing a firm negotiating position. You're idiots. Stop. Let's get to the talks and let's be reasonable.

ZR: The argument against diplomacy and to justify sending more weapons to Ukraine by intergovernmental organizations such as the E.U., G7, and even NATO regularly cite Russia violating international order and law. And that diplomacy that takes into account territorial concessions will only incentivize as well as send false signals to authoritative states that they can invade any country whenever they want without any repercussions. And therefore, it is vital for the West to resort to sanctions and send more weapons. How do you respond to this argument?

LW: In a perfect world, I'd say let the International Criminal Court or some World Global Justice Forum bring the United States and Russia before them and accuse them of war crimes, of torture, of invading sovereign countries, etc., etc., and let us both go to jail for it. But we are utter hypocrites in this country to talk about Russia – guilty as she is – when we have done the very same thing, very same thing in two different countries, Afghanistan and Iraq. It might have been justified in the beginning in Afghanistan, but the rape, pillage and plunder that took place for 20 years was not justified. And all the positive impacts that we had were peripheral, peripheral, not substantive impacts, as we're seeing right now as the Taliban reverse almost all of them. So take us both before a world tribunal. Don't just take Russia.

ZR: Also, the argument that is made against sending weapons, and let me correct me if I'm wrong here, by experts such as yourself, is that it could lead to a potential nuclear escalation. However, in the German media, it is always argued that, look, when we were sending defensive weapons the same argument about nuclear catastrophe was made and nothing happened. Then we sent offensive weapons and nothing happened. Now we're sending advanced offensive weapons and even if you send jets, Putin will very unlikely to be able to use nuclear weapons because, of course, the nuclear fallout will also affect his country. Do you think invoking nuclear catastrophe is a void argument?

LW: Here's the way this works in my view, and I've been at it for over 50 years. Well, that didn't do it. Well, that didn't do it. Well, that didn't do it. ThaE didn't do it. That won't do it. Oh, it did it. When you get to that point where you do do it, you are out of luck, brother. You are badly out of luck because now you have a nuclear war and no one wins that. So I'm all for this, you know, constantly saying, well, that might bring on nuclear war because it just might. And when you get to the point where it does, you cannot back up.

ZR: On May 3rd, it was World Press Freedom Day. The United States and the West, especially the media, were voicing great concerns about journalists facing suppression in authoritative countries. There was a lot of focus on Navalny. However, little to no focus was

paid on the case of Julian Assange. Could you talk about the significance of the case of Julian Assange and his work?

LW: I think, again, we're dealing in volumes of hypocrisy where we protest the treatment of this or that journalist, usually one of our own overseas by other countries, and we do what we do. Julian Assange as far as I know, and I am pretty much plugged in to the knowledge I need to say this caused about zero real national security damage to the United States. On the other hand, he revealed a lot of crime, both international and domestic, and a lot of really immoral, unethical actions on the part of so many people, which is the real reason we do not like him. And when I say we, Washington primarily. If you look at the allegations that were made and then you go talk to experts about those allegations, you will find almost without exception, No, there was no real damage done there. The question that was asked this morning by one of the outlets, I forget which one it was – I'm sort of hung over from a flight that only got in at midnight last night – the person posed this question, it might have been James Bamford, who's a terrific writer and reveals all kinds of secrets. He asked the question in the audience of the speaker: "Okay, so when the Apache helicopter killed those innocent people in Iraq and the video came out that was injurious to US national security? I think not. I think that was revelatory of US criminal activity, heinous criminal activity." That's why they're worried about Julian Assange and that's why they want a punishing. If there had been real national security damage and Julian Assange were truly a spy or whatever, they'd just be moving pro forma. They'd be after him, but they'd just be moving performances. But because he embarrassed them, because he embarrassed so many people, diplomats and others, sending these cables back and forth and such, they want him. They want him with a bloodlust. But he is a journalist. And when you do to that journalist you will do to other journalists. So we have no platform to stand upon that isn't clay under our feet to talk about persecution of journalists in the world when we are doing it par excellence.

ZR: Lawrence Wilkerson, retired Army colonel and former chief of staff to then Secretary of State Colin Powell. Thank you so much for your time today.

LW: Thanks for having me.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. We're switching away from YouTube because YouTube is owned by Google and can shadowban or censor our work at any time. So if you want to receive our information in the future, be sure to join us on our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. And if you're watching these videos, be sure to take into account that there is an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, in the case of German videos translation, voice-over, editing, correction. So make sure to donate today so we can continue to provide you with independent and nonprofit news and analysis. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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