



The Truth About Ukraine's "Rejected" NATO Membership, w/ Michael Tracey

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Glenn Greenwald (GG): Let's start with the NATO conference that just took place in Lithuania. And before we get to the substance...

Michael Tracey (MT): Summit, they call it a summit, very pompous.

GG: Yes, it was a summit.

GG: ... All come together. You have covered I don't know if you covered the NATO summit previously, but you covered similar NATO meetings.

MT: Oh, I did.

GG: Yes. You covered the NATO summit last year. One of the things we wanted you to do was to go this year and cover the summit for our program, where you could be a journalist who has credentials to attend the press conferences and the like and report on what's happening for our program. You made an application to get your credentials. Tell the audience what happened.

MT: Yeah. So last year I did cover the NATO summit held in Madrid, Spain as a credentialed member of the media. I was actually a bit surprised that I was allowed to attend last year, given my track record of taking a fairly sceptical line on NATO policy, especially vis a vis the war in Ukraine. And so, you know, it was pleasantly surprising that they did allow that. And so I got a fair amount of access. You know, I was able to interview/ question everybody from Erdogan to Canadian officials and all kinds of European diplomats and so forth. And it was useful and I have it at my Substack and I published it elsewhere. And so the idea this year was that given that your show launched last December and I'm a fairly frequent guest, I might

do some reports for your show on the NATO summit firsthand. So I had plans to travel to Lithuania where the summit was held and it was going to be a correspondence of sorts. And then at the last minute, my application for the media accreditation process was rejected. And I was told by NATO specifically that no explanation would be provided. So before I even asked for an explanation as to why I had been rejected, they went out of their way to tell me in no uncertain terms that they were not going to provide an explanation, so don't bother asking for it. Which is odd that you would kind of make that disclaimer out of nowhere without even being prompted to do so. And now can I say with absolute certainty that it was a function of my putting in the application that I was going to be operating, at least in part as a correspondent for Glenn Greenwald's System Update show on Rumble? No, I can't say that that was the decisive variable that led to the rejection, but I think it's probably a fair inference or a fair surmise that that might have had something to do with it. Because the accreditation process for media is actually run with the host country in conjunction with NATO. So Lithuanian authorities were participants in the accreditation process, you know, to approve or deny certain media. And whereas I guess in Spain they might have had a more laissez faire approach, in Lithuania, which as you might know, is kind of a bastion of the more hardline sentiment within NATO to take increasingly more bellicose action toward Russia, to basically cut off all remaining ties as minimal as they are with Russia, they seemingly apply that same mindset to their deliberative process around media accreditation. So there was at least one fewer person there who had anything like a sceptical attitude toward the proceedings and could maybe take a more critical approach. And I think that's to the detriment of everyone who wants, you know, a kind of robust media and a robust, you know, accountability imposed on people in positions of huge power, which I think definitely applies to the NATO summit.

GG: Absolutely. And my reaction when you told me that you had been rejected and that you were rejected under the circumstances, what has been said, I was not only unsurprised, I would have been surprised had you gotten these credentials, because not only you, but also myself, obviously are outspoken opponents of the US involvement in Ukraine in the broader attempt to fuel this proxy war. Something that is extremely important to NATO, probably the, not probably, certainly the leading foreign policy priority of the alliance of the CIA and particularly the Eastern European states, who, as you say, tend to be even more fanatical about it, perhaps for valid historical reasons. But they most definitely are these hard line anti-Russia states that are vehement in their support for Ukraine and contemptuous of anybody who raises dissenting voices. And I think the prevailing ethos in the West very much has become this idea that dissent simply is not tolerated. One of the first things that EU states did or the EU did when the Russians invaded was ban any platform from hosting Russian state media. Even if they think that people should hear from them, you're no longer allowed legally to provide that. So this kind of crushing of dissent, this prohibition of dissent, including denying credentials to any journalist that might actually ask hard questions, is very much aligned with the mentality. Now, let me ask you about the substance. One of the things that was on the table is NATO's membership for Ukraine. That, of course, is one of the things why Putin cited as the reason why Russia invaded. It's been a kind of known fact for years in

Washington, that as that famous memo by the current CIA Director Bill Burns to Condoleezza Rice put it, when the Bush administration was thinking about expanding NATO into Ukraine, that he said: "Everybody in Moscow, not just Putin, but anti-Putin liberals, consider an Ukrainian membership in NATO to be a red line, something they would go to war in order to prevent." When Joe Biden was asked shortly before the summit if he was ready to give Ukraine membership to NATO, he said: "Not yet. I don't think they're ready. But eventually I think that is something that should happen." The consensus seemed to be that once the war is over, Ukraine should get membership. You've made the point, though, that in a lot of ways it almost is like a technicality that in reality NATO has already subsumed or absorbed Ukraine. So what is your view on NATO membership and why do you think that in kind of a deep factor way, NATO has already swallowed up Ukraine?

MT: Yeah. Newsweek actually asked me to write a piece exactly on this that came out a couple of days ago. So people can look that up if they're interested in further detail. But the short of it is, whether or not Ukraine ascends to formal NATO membership status now is almost a red herring. It's almost a way in which the Biden administration in particular can say, Oh, we're taking a moderate so measured approach, in contrast with some, let's say, some of these more hardline Eastern European states, whether it's the Baltics or Poland, who wants immediate instatements of Ukraine as a full fledged formal member. Because bear in mind, one of the benefits that comes with full fledged NATO membership is that there is a collective security guarantee that kicks in whereby countries are treaty bound in theory, to come to the defence of any country that's attacked, that's a member of the alliance. But never is it spelled out exactly how that is supposed to work or what precise obligations are operative that are applicable to the NATO member states in the event of some country being attacked. So the only time this was invoked was after 9/11 on behalf of the United States, when NATO did initiate Article five proceedings. And then all that led to for a lot of countries was sending a handful of maybe advisors or whatever to Afghanistan for this kind of NATO subsidiary mission in the Afghanistan war. So it very easily could be the case that Ukraine is already receiving what would effectively be the benefits of full fledged NATO membership, given the incredibly expansive weapons funnelling operation and combat operation, participation that NATO in the US are already engaged in in Ukraine. So it's a bit of a distraction or a deflection, because in the aftermath of this summit, you see people say, Oh, the NATO betrayed Ukraine because it was dangling membership over their heads and then pulled it away. Whereas in reality, if you read the communique that they put out and if you look at the substance of what was actually offered to Ukraine in terms of increasing the incorporation of Ukraine into the structures of NATO, Ukraine is even more absorbed by NATO than it's ever been. It's historically far more integrated into the infrastructure of NATO than it's ever been. So, in other words, as you mentioned, the process that Vladimir Putin cited as a precipitating factor for why he claimed that he launched the invasion in the first place, that process has drastically accelerated with or without NATO conferring formal membership status. And so the bottom line is that the formality of the membership bestowal is kind of a moot point because more and more what has being done is that Ukraine has been

gradually integrated drastically more than could have been conceived two years ago into the firmament of NATO. And that's really the trend that's underway.

GG: I want to ask...

MT: ... dismissed that as not amounting to full membership status, therefore, that's a betrayal. It's a misunderstanding of what the substance was that was actually offered and what's underway in terms of integrating NATO into the security architecture.

GG: Okay. So first of all, here's the Newsweek article that Michael wrote about that exact topic, about why effectively NATO has already swallowed Ukraine. There you see it on the screen. "Should Ukraine Join NATO? Don't Kid Yourself: It Already Has.' That's by Michael Tracey at Newsweek, so you can read that. He essentially makes the argument he just explained here. I wanted to ask you something, Michael, about the kind of psychology of this war in the West in particular. I recall in the first couple of weeks, I wrote a couple of articles and made a couple of videos and I can see a lot of this coming where the energy and the emotion was of such intensity when the Russians invaded. The kind of reaction was so visceral across the entire West. Even if you go and look at the people who ultimately came to be sceptical of the war, voted even No on the authorisation in those first few days, the things they were saying were so homogenised that you could just anticipate that this war was going to be very difficult to wine down ever without defeating the Russians, because the rhetoric was so maximalist about the moral component of this war. And one of the things that has surprised me is that the pundit class in the West has been, I think, more aggressive about this war than even the war in Iraq. Certainly the other wars in the West, in Libya, in Syria and Yemen.

MT: ... the TV networks. That the American network television devoted more blanket coverage to the initial phase of the Ukraine invasion than it did to the initial phase of the invasion of Iraq.

GG: Right, and there's no...

MT: ... But it's true.

GG: Not only do I believe that – I'm very comfortable in saying there's no question that there was less dissent included in the coverage in the West about the war in Ukraine for those first few weeks than there was about the war in Iraq, even though the war in Iraq was notoriously propagandised in the sense that reporters who had questions were relegated to the back pages of the paper if they could even make it in at all. There were at least mainstream figures questioning and even opposing that. Paul Krugman in The New York Times is one example. Half the Democrats in the Senate in the Democratic caucus voted against authorising.

MT: Your old friend Russ Feingold.

GG: Who?

MT: Your old friend, Russ Feingold.

GG: My old friend Russ Feingold was against the war. There were a lot of people who were against it, way more so than in Ukraine. And this has really become the animating, spiritual mission of the West is to get greater glory and victory for the Ukrainians. I mean, the way people speak of this war, especially when I hear Germans speaking about how Russia must be defeated and this war will never end until victory is ours. While the German tanks roll to the Russian part of the border for the third time in basically 110 years, I find it deeply alarming. And I do think there's a very psychologically potent component to this war, which is that if you remove religion and other kinds of spiritual, organisational missions from people, they will search for spiritual fulfilment in the form of politics and especially war. And Adam Smith wrote about this in 1776. I've cited this before, but I want to read it because it's amazingly applicable. It was in the Wealth of Nations and this is what he wrote about the dangers of people cheering war, especially when their country or they themselves don't have to fight in the actual battles. He wrote, quote, "In great empires, the people who live in the capital and the provinces remote from the scene of action, feel many of them scarce any inconveniences from the war, but enjoy at their ease the amusement of reading in the newspaper the exploits of their own fleets and armies. To them, this amusement compensates for the small difference between the taxes which they pay on account of the war and those which they have been accustomed to pay in time of peace. They are commonly dissatisfied with the return of peace, which puts an end to their amusement and to a thousand visionary hopes of conquest and national glory, from a longer continuance of the war." And if you look at the way in which Western pundits and the British are particularly pathological about this, they love nothing more than to don their Churchill voice and talk about the glories of war, not only is there no dissent over this war, there's no intention or desire to see it end diplomatically. There's no pressure at all, not at all, to talk about how this war can end. I just want to, along those lines, show you this video of Jamie Dimon, who is the insanely wealthy head of JP Morgan. He was President Obama's favourite banker. Here he was talking...

MT: ...was running for president?

GG: I think he was toying with running for president in 2016 when it was Hillary versus...

MT: No, I know. But I heard he's toying now. This year.

GG: I wouldn't be surprised. He's the kind of person who definitely has that high of opinion of himself. And here he is giving an interview on Ukraine and listen to his comments.

GG: This is somebody who has several children, none of whom have ever fought in the military or fought war. He has never fought war. He's been a supporter of every war, even though he's never got near the front lines. And this is what he's saying about the current war in Ukraine.

Moderator: There is bipartisan support for American engagement, for American global leadership. Now, if you look, certainly the Republican Party, there's a growing isolationist wing in that party, and it's not at all clear what a future President Donald Trump might do in terms of American leadership. If you're outside America, if you're, I live in London, we're worried about this.

Jamie Dimon: I wouldn't worry about it.

GG: Just to be clear, what she's worried about is that there are people in the Republican Party, including potentially President Trump, who don't support endless warfare in Ukraine. She asked him whether he's worried about that, too. And this is what he said.

Moderator: We're worried about this.

Jamie Dimon: I would worry about another Trump presidency, too, by the way. But I think there's always been an isolation element. It took a lot to get us into World War One, it took a lot to get us to World War Two. But I think if you go to Washington, D.C., when it comes to Ukraine, it's been pretty tight, Republicans and Democrats. So when it was needed, it was there. And I think the other thing we have to explain to the American public is, we're doing it for America. So, of course, you have America first. I mean, you know, can you imagine someone running for president saying to America second? But we're doing this for America. If America gets isolated, you know, if autocratic nations kind of cherry pick the world in security and food and economics and development finance, you know, the Chinese are all over Latin America, which they are in Africa, we're not there. That's a huge mistake for America. So America should be doing this for itself. We have to explain to the American public...

GG: So he's not wrong at the end of the day, the Republican and Democratic parties always come together and provide whatever support is needed, even when there's growing anti-war sentiment in one of the parties that there is now, as he points out, in the Republican Party. But what do you think about this psychological aspect of providing such an important sense of purpose and strength to a Western culture that otherwise lacks it?

MT: Yeah, well, I think even the location of the NATO summit this year itself, meaning Vilnius, Lithuania, that it was held there in the first place, is an indication of where the spiritual moorings are coming from that undergird this sprawling war effort. Remember, it was almost unthinkable not too long ago that the faction calling the shots of NATO overall

would be these more kind of bellicose Eastern European statelets. And that it would have been taken away from, you know, France and Germany as to who's calling the shots, really. But now the members of NATO are very explicit often that they are happy to transfer over the spiritual leadership of NATO to these Eastern European states and Poland in particular, which is becoming perhaps the most strong military or most well equipped and most heavily resourced military in NATO overall in Europe anyway. And so, yeah, this tells you what kind of a transformation has been happening. Emmanuel Macron, the president of France a month or two ago gave a speech in Prague where he said that Europe is making up for its past historical wrongs or the past historical injustices that it's inflicted upon Eastern Europe by kind of conceding this quasi leadership, spiritualistic status to the Eastern European flank NATO. And handing itself over to their prerogatives as to how to handle a conflict like Ukraine. And I think that kind of gives Europe, part of the European establishment, the security establishment, anyway, this sort of sense of historical correction that they're undertaking by taking on this far more belligerent attitude toward Ukraine. And going to what Jamie Dimon said, think of how just genuinely repugnant that is to totally neglect the actual real world impact of what this policy has done, which is produce, you know, the estimates vary, but at the very least, what we can say is there have been tens of thousands – I am sorry, there's mayhem going on outside my window at the moment. I have no air conditioning, so I'm sweating like a pig at the moment with the windows open. But at the very least, what we know is that there have been tens of thousands of, you know, 20 something Ukrainians and Russians that have been conscripted by their respective governments to just be obliterated on the killing fields of the Donbas. And to Jamie Dimon, you know, that's something that's just great for American national interest that we should, you know, press forward with no regard for the human toll of that insanity. I mean, it is genuine barbarism to look at that level of death among your most kind of potentially well resourced, well, your most precious assets, which are people in the prime of their lives being shipped off to just kill each other in World War One style trench warfare. And Jamie Dimon looks at that as some sign of optimism as to what America can gain out of this conflict?! Yeah, I mean, you know, it shows that they've supplanted any genuine sense of the suffering that's being wrought by this with this abstraction of whose interests can be advanced. Well, if your interests are advanced by that level of death and destruction, then maybe you ought to recalibrate what your interests even consist of in the first place.

GG: Thanks for watching this clip from System Update, our live show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. Eastern, exclusively on Rumble. You can catch the full nightly shows live or view the backlog of episodes for free on our Rumble page. You can also find full episodes the morning after they air across all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and Apple. All the information you need is linked below. We hope to see you there.

END