



Col. Wilkerson on F-16 jets and diminishing public opinion in support of Ukraine

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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 the war in Ukraine. Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired colonel who served in the U.S. Army for 31 years. His last position in the government was as Chief of Staff of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2000 to 2005. He's now a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Lawrence Wilkerson, welcome back to the show.

Lawrence Wilkerson (LW): Thank you for having me.

ZR: Throughout the year, Western politicians, as well as the mainstream media, were hyping Ukraine's counteroffensive with weapons such as the Leopard 2 and Abrams tanks, as well as other advanced equipment. On the other hand, independent and alternative commentators such as yourself are warning that these advanced weapons will not change the tide in favor of Ukraine and will cost more Ukrainian and Russian lives, making a peaceful resolution even harder to achieve. Their counter-offensive started in June and now even leading Western media outlets like The Washington Post, which many commentators see as pro-war and pro NATO recently came out with an article in which it stated, quote, "Ukraine appears to be running out of options in a counter-offensive that officials originally framed as Kiev's crucial operation to retake significant territory from occupying Russian forces this year. More than two months into the fight, the counter-offensive shows signs of stalling", unquote. This month, the German government discusses sending 5.5 billion in military aid to Ukraine until 2027 and is also contemplating sending Taurus cruise missiles, which have a range of more than 500 kilometers. The U.S. in addition recently approved sending cluster bombs and F-16 advanced fighter jets. In your assessment, will these advanced weapons now make a decisive difference in Ukraine's ability to win the war?

LW: No, they will not. But they might make a difference in the strategic calculus that the parties on both sides of this conflict make. I call your attention to Sergey Karaganov's peace reviewed by none other than my old buddy, Larry Korb, former Assistant Secretary of Defense and a member of our All-Volunteer Force Formed today, and Stephen Cimbala in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, where they reviewed what he said. He was an advisor to the Kremlin, a very close adviser. And he's speculating about the utility of and the viability of – strategic and tactical – using nuclear weapons. Now, you could say that, as they say, is this strategic clarity or is this strategic delusion? I think it's both; clarity on the side of those like we have in the United States who would argue that there is utility to contemplating using technological weapons on the battlefield. But it's also delusion. And it's delusion that could lead to victory for neither side and a loss for the world. So I'm very concerned. I think what he's doing is he's fostering for Putin. He may not be a Kremlin advisor anymore, but he's fostering for Putin and trying to put the conflict in a perspective that will be more conducive to diplomacy. I don't fault that, but I fault the methodology. This is not something you should be exciting the Victoria Nuland's and John Bolton's and Danielle Pletka's in the United States about. Because we've got people that believe that way, too.

Your point about the F-16s from Denmark and Holland and Greece doing the training and so forth is well taken, it's not going to change a thing. Except it'll put another element into this conflict that is potentially escalatory and lead to what Karaganov was just talking about, a serious contemplation of using tactical nuclear weapons. And I don't just attribute that to Moscow. I attribute that to Washington and other capitals within NATO, too. Washington, of course, leading the way. So it's still the dangerous situation it's always been, getting more so every day. And what the United States is doing, and I will reiterate again and again and again, is making money and helping Biden's chances for re-election, domestically speaking, and bringing Russia down, if you will. Which seems to be the motivation of a lot of these people; Victoria Nuland at the head of the pack. And this is not something we should be pursuing, not the way we are now, not with the deadly force we are now, not with the potential for nuclear use.

ZR: According to a recent poll conducted by CNN, most Americans oppose the government in sending additional funding to support Ukraine in its war with Russia. The result of the poll showed that 55% of Americans are of the opinion that the U.S. Congress should not authorize additional funding to support Ukraine, as opposed to 45% who say Congress should continue the funding. More, the poll revealed that 51% say that the U.S. has done already enough to help Ukraine, while 48% say, it should do more. What is the significance of this poll, in your opinion? And why do you think the mood in the United States is shifting despite the political and media establishment in the U.S. continue to stand by and large committed to supporting the war in Ukraine?

LW: Fundamentally, the American people are war weary, and it's not just the percentages that are cited in the media, it's the majority of them. I think it's probably in excess of 65-70%.

They have different reasons for it, and they will state those reasons for being war weary; some of them are fiscal and some of them are just the fact that we haven't won a war in this country in so long. It boggles their minds and they hate people talking about it and they hate contemplating more of it. But here's the essence of the problem, I think. 90% of the American people want serious gun control. And the Congress has known that for a decade plus, and it does nothing about it. So the American people, unlike the founders of our republic, thought the House of Representatives being the people's representatives and therefore closest to them is absolutely nothing of the sort. They do not care anymore about American opinion. They care about money, power and being re-elected, which leads them to both. So the American people could be 100% for something and the American Congress, if they wanted that money and power calculus to be positive for them, would ignore the American people entirely. That's what they've been doing for two decades, arguably since Newt Gingrich's revolution in the House of Representatives, where it all started. They do not represent the American people anymore.

ZR: The Economist, a leading British weekly newspaper, which also many independent commentators claim is a pro-war and pro NATO paper, recently brought out an article titled "War in Ukraine has triggered a boom in Europe's defense industry". Throughout the West, we are seeing government military budgets increase, which is leading to billions of profits of private corporations producing all these weapons, while on the other hand there's a lot of debate and discussion happening in regards to social spending, when it comes to fighting poverty, children poverty, improving the local infrastructure, hospitals or anything of that sort. There's huge debates happening, but there's no debate when it comes to increasing the military budgets. As someone who has served in the military for three decades, what do you think is driving policy in Ukraine? Is it corporate greed and lobbying and profit incentive, or do you think it's due to political goals like weakening Russia and China.

LW: Corporate greed and profit making lead the list and bringing Russia down as it were is second. And that's a shame. But that's what's happening. And we have a situation where Ukrainians are dying in order to feed the Vice-Presidents and CEOs of Lockheed Grumman, Raytheon and a host of other defense contractors who are making fortunes off this conflict. Just look at what they're getting in terms of executive pay now; compare that to floor worker pay and you'll see some of the widest divergences in the predatory capitalist system that the United States is the leader of today in the world. That's what's happening. War is profitable. And as someone said very astutely, when war is profitable, you'll have more of it. And that's the reason the United States has been at war now for, what, 25 years and counting? It's profitable. It makes a lot of money.

Look at the F-16. Just as an example, Lockheed Martin bought the F-16 from its makers many years ago. It's gone through a number of modifications. It's probably one of the finest aircraft in the world today, not due to the military industrial complex, but due to John Boyd and his idea about what the fighter should look like. Be under 2 million, \$3 million, which is

what it originally came in at, compare that with the F-35 at 400 million. And the F-16 is a fabulous aircraft. How has it been kept going since about the time Lockheed took over everything. It's been kept going by foreign sales. Why did Bill Clinton and his committee decide to expand NATO? Bingo. Now you can sell F-16 to a lot of new people. You can open the production lines again and you can produce the aircraft again and you can make fortunes off this airplane. That's just one small example. Cluster bombs, depleted uranium, enhanced uranium, mines, all these other implements of war or other examples of how the United States makes tons of money off war. And as long as it makes tons of money off of war, President Biden and others like him are going to pursue war.

ZR: Let us switch to the geopolitical theater. Stian Jenssen, the Chief of Staff to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, at a panel event in Norway last week when it came to the discussion of a possible way to end the war and let me quote him here, quote, "I think a solution could be for Ukraine to give up territory and get NATO membership in return", unquote. For that, he received immediate backlash and was heavily criticized, so much so that he had to apologize a day later by saying, quote, "My statement about this war was part of a larger discussion about possible future scenarios in Ukraine. And I shouldn't have said it that way. It was a mistake", unquote. Do you think even despite this retraction, that within NATO, there's a sentiment growing that Ukraine cannot win this war and a possible peace deal would have to have some sort of territorial concession? Or do you think the West is adamant in continuing to make Ukraine win at all costs?

LW: The leadership of NATO would have to be utterly insane not to understand finally now that the battlefield situation is going against them. That's not to say they're going to wake up and do what they should do. I saw a picture this morning of Zelensky sitting in the cockpit of an F-16 and talking about how it was going to change the whole dynamic of the war. That is absolute poppycock. It's not going to change anything except it will probably eventually lead to other than Ukrainian pilots flying the aircraft and thus be majorly escalatory. The F-16 is not the easiest aircraft in the world to teach someone to fly. And the fact that Greece is going to do it sort of makes me want to laugh. This is an aircraft that takes a real touch to make it meet its full parameters. And it also will kill you if you don't have that real touch because it is so sensitive. It's wire driven, it's computer driven. And one of the problems it had in the beginning was pilots who were old pilots and had lots of experience thought they were smarter than the aircraft, and they crashed it quite often because of that. This is not an easy aircraft to teach people to fly. And besides, it's not going to be a game changer in the sense that the F-16 is going to be like, Oh, the weapon that won the war. Now you can put nuclear weapons on it, which it has hard points for.

And that's another escalatory issue here where you put this aircraft into the inventory of possible use; nuclear weapons, that's not good. We're back to the old argument I made in the beginning about escalation and the ultimate escalation. But this idea that some silver bullet is going to help Ukraine, a country now of probably less than 30 million against a country of

140 million in 11 time zones, it's risible. It would make me laugh if it weren't so sick and sad that we're doing this. And yes, NATO leaders are coming to some realization that they've been led down the primrose path by Washington and London and to a certain extent by Berlin in the present government. Yesterday, I was talking with some people from the Bundestag, and they're telling me that probably 70% of the German people right now are sick of this and they're contemplating their future. They're contemplating a heavy industry moving out of Germany. They're contemplating things that have been disrupted by the fact that their fuel has been cut off from Russia and they're having to buy the dirty gas from the United States at an enormously more expensive cost. And looking at that in the future, looking at coal fired plants firing up again, this is not making the German people happy. We're headed for a railroad crash with NATO ultimately. And these people, Stoltenberg, even, who's our animal, we picked him. We put him in his place. Even he has got some reservations that he's developing now. And, well, he should have, as should all the NATO leaders and all the countries that opted for NATO in the face of a fear of Putin expanding his conflict against them when that was absolutely preposterous. Putin has no desire to attack NATO.

ZR: The military budget of NATO combined was already humongous. Some estimates say it was close to \$1.3 trillion. Why was the budget before this war not enough to fend off Russia, given that Russia's budget was not even half of what NATO's combined military budget was?

LW: If you look at the comparison of budgets, it's mind boggling because you look at, for example, China's budget and you look at the US's budget and China's budget is dwarfed by the U.S. budget. Now there is some argument, and I subscribe to some of this argument, that China gets a lot more bang for its buck than the United States does. And the F-35, of course, is a perfect example of that. You could spend trillions of dollars and spend it unwisely, which is largely what the United States is doing these days with the monopolies that the defense contractors have created that sell you a lousy product at a maximum price. That's what Monopoly does. That's the reason we have laws in this country against Monopoly. Unfortunately, we aren't taking on the defense complex there. But you spend money and you buy things and then you don't win wars. That I'll tell you something, that is one of the things that's got the American people, I think. They connect these things in their minds, however incoherently and they say, Well, why are we spending \$400 million for, for example, for an F-35 or \$14 billion for an aircraft carrier and we haven't won a war in two decades?! Plus, why are we having problems in Ukraine when we're spending all this money on Ukraine? And Ukrainians are dying much faster than Russians are dying, especially considering their populations.

This doesn't make any sense. That should be weighing on the minds of the Congress. It should be weighing on the minds of the president. It's not necessarily because it's become so divorced from the American people what their legislators are doing. But the physical problem alone is going to catch them. And we haven't even talked about the fact you mentioned, and rightfully so, that this is opportunity cost full. That is to say we can't be doing things like

medical care, we can't be doing things like fixing the infrastructure. We can't be doing things like taking care of people. We are also avoiding the climate crisis. And look at what happened in Hawaii. Look at what's happened in Southern California now with all the rain they've gotten. Look at what's happening to my friend in Quarter Lane Idaho, waiting for his house to burn down from fires. And my friends in Canada are waiting for their homes to burn down, who've evacuated in front of the fires. We have real problems already. It's not coming mid-century; they're already with us. And look what we're doing. We're spending all these billions of dollars on killing people in the heart of Europe. This is insanity.

LW: Colonel Wilkerson, a retired Army colonel who served in the Army for 31 years. Thank you so much for your time.

LW: Thanks for having me on, Zain.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. If you're watching our content regularly, make sure to donate to our channel. Even though 140,000 subscribers, only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. There's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio and in the case of my German videos, translation, voice-over, correction. So if you want us to continue providing you with our independent and nonprofit news and analysis, make sure to go today on Patreon, PayPal, Betterplace or a bank account and donate a small amount ranging from 1 to €5. I am your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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