



## **How Zelenskyy's Security Service Silences Peaceful Voices & the Ignorance of the Western Media**

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Welcome back and thank you for joining us for another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza and to really be talking about a case which is not receiving much traction in the Western media. And this case is about Yurii Sheliashenko, who's being charged by the Ukraine government for justifying the Russian war, even though he considers his stance as advocating for de-escalation and diplomacy. Yurii is the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement and a member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and World Beyond War. Yurii, welcome back to the show.

**Yurii Sheliashenko (YS):** Well, good day and thank you for the invitation.

**ZR:** Yurii, before we get into the details of your case, even though I briefly mentioned this in the introduction, could you very briefly introduce in your own words, your work and your policy stance towards the Ukrainian war?

**YS:** Well, first of all, I must say that now in this moment when we are recording this interview, I am risking my life. Not risking my life like people in the more "hot places" in Ukraine, but still there is an air raid alert in Kiev, there are rockets somewhere. And at any moment since I am not in shelter unfortunately – there is bad connection in the shelter. I must be here and tell the truth to the world. Even if some rockets [are a threat], because of the criminal Russian aggression I am right here. And even if people will see some sort of blow up of Putin's rockets instead, it is all for some new information, which I intend to give you. Well, all is in the hands of God. It depends on what is going on. But anyway, I am glad for this opportunity. Truth telling is the important part of our work, and we are talking about the distortions in perception of what is going on. Distortions, especially in the image of the enemy. And that is a usual problem in any conflict, especially in case of war.

When the propaganda says that the other side are demons and we are angels, so we can do anything even if it is a war crime or human rights violations, but all we are doing is good. The other side is bad, it deserves any crime which we commit. And this image of the enemy should be exposed. We are calling for a ceasefire and peace talks and for the advocacy of peace. It is important to reveal exaggerations of war propaganda. It is indeed a bad and criminal behavior, like the decision of the President of the Russian Federation to invade Ukraine, to bomb our cities, to kill the people, to destroy our cities. The suffering of people is unimaginable. Millions left Ukraine, but also millions left Ukraine not just because of this criminal aggression of the Russian regime, but also because of human rights violations resulting from the mobilization policy of our own government, which is not respecting human rights. When I am talking to people from the military, when I am writing to the Minister of Defense, to please ensure human rights to conscientious objection to military service, according to international human rights obligations of Ukraine, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the answer is: Well, we don't know. We don't like this human right. They do not recognize the international human rights obligations of Ukraine. And after a long chain of communications, I managed to receive an official letter from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, recognizing the international human rights obligations of Ukraine to ensure human rights to conscientious objection to military service, even with this letter, our military still insists, said, they're not respecting the right to refuse to kill. It is just wrong.

**ZR:** Let us now talk about your case in detail. The Ukrainian government has tried to silence you for advocating de-escalation of the Ukrainian war, which includes moving forward with a peaceful resolution achieved through diplomacy. They interpret this as justifying Russian aggression. Your house was raided and a court decided to put you under house arrest. Can you take us to the beginning and provide us details, how it all started and what has happened until now?

**YS:** On the 21st September last year, the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement adopted the statement Peace Agenda for Ukrainians and the World. It is a comprehensive statement, of course, recognizing that we are denouncing the Russian aggression and of course calling for a ceasefire and peace talks. Also, of course calling for the protection of the right to refuse to kill. I send this letter to the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets. And what they have done, instead of considering this petition for peace on the merits, they sent it to the security service of Ukraine. I have a copy of the letter from the office of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. [Oleksandr] Kononenko, and in this letter it is stated that our petition is a threat to national security. By the way, this position of the Secretary of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights has changed now because after many complaints, at least they informed [inaudible] that sent to the security service of Ukraine that this is an absurd denunciation. And I started to complain, resulting in that, personally, the Parliamentary

Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, sent a letter in which the international human rights obligations of Ukraine are recognized.

And by the way, in the annual report of the national human rights institution, human rights violations during mobilization were also recognized. But I don't know how our letter came from the Office of President Zelenskyy to the security service, as well as the statement for the Peace Agenda for Ukrainians. Because they just didn't tell me, they did not respond, they didn't reply to the complaints. Where is your response? Please reply. As I understand, they just sent it to the security service. It was a year ago. And, you know, according to procedural law, the security services could secretly surveil any person during a year, and after a year they should do something to legalize what they have done. Because if it was all in vain and without any proof for the threats to national security, of course it is evidence that human rights are violated. Their so-called secret operative work is a human rights violation.

Well, on the 3rd of August, like two weeks ago, some people came here to my home, which also functions as a small headquarters of our small organization, the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement. And some people started to bang against my door, knocking very loudly. So I asked, who is this? They said that this was the security service of Ukraine: Open. I said, well, if you are indeed the service of the security service of Ukraine, please say, what is your name? What is your purpose? They didn't say any names. And they also said that they have a court decision on the search. I said please read this court decision, which is allowing the search. They did not read the court decision. They didn't say their names. So I presumed it was absolutely something illegal. It might not even be coming from some official person. Well, I called the police, but I also called a lawyer. In case it was indeed the security service. Instead of waiting for the lawyer, I said to them: "My lawyer told me: 40 minutes and the lawyer [he] will be here. If you're indeed the security service, if you're acting legally, let my lawyer check what you have. If it is some sort of legal court decision, we will do everything which the law demands". But they did not act to the content of the law, they just broke into my apartment. They started their search without my lawyer, without the compliances of proper procedures. They turned my apartment upside down, they took my computer and my smartphone and some documents. And I even showed them what was on my computer. I said, if you're interested in something in particular, I will show you. But they came to take my computer and smartphone to obstruct my human rights activities and my advocacy of peace. The investigation was all an absurd pretext just to obstruct my human rights defending work and advocacy of peace. And I imagine, I think it is because the militaries are scared. There are growing voices for peace in the world. People in Ukraine are tired from war. Human rights violations regarding mobilization, such as abducting people on streets, stuffing them into vans and transporting people against their will to military recruitment centers, to military units, all of this is very painful. So they are scared of the delegitimization of war.

We pacifists believe that war is a crime against humanity, and therefore we should be determined not to support any kind of war and strive for the removal of all costs of war. And

of course, any ideas that war could be legitimate are by definition, laughable for pacifists. But even some sort of created image by the propaganda of legitimacy of "just war" vanishes when the political repression starts. It is why in the Russian Federation this war was illegitimate from the first day. Because of all of these repressions against peace movements, against human rights defenders, when, for example, our friends from the Russian Movements of Conscientious Objectors are declared so-called "foreign agents", it means that they can hardly operate legally in Russia. And all people whom they helped also could be called foreign agents. And there is a lot of scrutiny and a lot of risks related to this status. So in Russia, thankfully to Western media, the whole world knows how blatant the human rights violations of the Putin regime are, the war crimes of the Putin regime. When we are talking about Ukraine, of course, I must say that the scale of human rights violations and war crimes in Ukraine is much less, but it is under-reported in Western media.

**ZR:** We'll get to that in a second. I want to talk to you first more about your case and then we proceed with that topic. Who is responsible for the secret service? Who can be held accountable for that? And what happened after that whole incident with your lawyers? In what state are you today?

**YS:** Well, obviously it is political repression against the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement. Hence, to me, as a human rights defender and public advocate of peace. And this political repression is documented, is related to the office of the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. And unfortunately also some people in the Secretariat of Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, probably not Lubinets himself, but one of his underlings. Mr. Kononenko is responsible for the start of this political persecution. And from documents disclosed by investigators, when the request for home arrest was handed to me with its attachments I saw that this investigation was started because someone in the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights office just redirected all my complaints on violations of human rights to conscientious objection. They redirected it to the security service of Ukraine under this pretext that it is some sort of threat to national security. And as the result of a year of surveillance– they probably listened to my phone, they probably read my correspondence, they probably also monitored financial transactions – they found nothing. On my computer, on my smartphone, they found no SMS from Putin, nothing like 30 silver pieces from Putin. But they sent the Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World, a well thought and complicated document which envisages some real approaches on how to build peace not this so-called formula of peace by Zelenskyy which is a formula of endless war. Because the key point of it is the Kiev security compact and the Kiev security compact is about decades of weapon supplies, decades of defensive war and the total mobilization of people in Ukraine for war. Plus this Kiev security compact, plus some ultimatums to Putin, like head off with your troops, return our territories, don't threaten our ecology, don't threaten our nuclear power stations. And you know, in this aspect, I totally agree with the official position of Ukraine. Now, our goal should be to get Russia out of Ukraine and NATO out of existence. Russia out of Ukraine, NATO out of existence. I want

not only a removal of this gang of killers, this Russian army, from Ukraine, I want a world without arms. I want a world with nonviolent governance. And we should work on these big changes, transformations in the world by education, by informing people about the threats and unrealistic visions of the world, by archaic cultures of militarism and violence. There is no alternative to big changes. The only alternative, proposed by propaganda, seems like a total victory: we will eliminate all enemies, but this cannot happen. Because when you choose such unrealistic, such maximalist goals, when you pursue maximalist goals, you are hurting a lot of people. And in eliminating enemies, you create tens, hundreds of new enemies. And another idea, also an unrealistic idea is a return to status quo. You know, let's make it what it was like in the nineties. This is also unfortunately impossible because this war is the result of structural problems of militarizing the global economy. Also a result, of course, of a lack of awareness about such problems, like climate change. Instead of the increasing welfare of suffering people and suffering nature, we are killing each other, which is absolute madness. This should stop.

**ZR:** And I would also like to talk about the peace movement inside of Ukraine, as well as the state of the media. First, how big is the peace movement in Ukraine and how are they treated? And secondly, does the media in Ukraine provide a platform for people advocating for peace or voicing for ceasefire?

**YS:** You know in Ukraine, any mention of peace is presented as some sort of object of fear and hate. So they are trying to press on us to have peace, they are trying to deprive us of our territories and so on, but we will not give up even an inch of our sacred land and so on and so on. It is a totally false agenda of the demonization of peace voices as part of an enemy propaganda. And it is, of course, one of the results of the creation of the demonized unrealistic image of the enemy. When instead of resisting the bad behavior without violence or this minimum minimum of it, when you're starting to see enemies around it inevitably leads to excessive violence and an absolutely crazy worldview. And this is what you could see in the official war propaganda. And there are not many alternatives to this official war propaganda. Of course people have access to the Internet. But since people mostly know Ukrainian language or Russian language, not English, English speaking alternative media, which are more or less balanced – they are criticizing the Russian aggression, they are also criticizing the human rights violations in Ukraine, they are calling for peace– but in Ukraine people mostly have no choice to read alternative Western media. They mostly have a choice between the Ukrainians speaking propaganda of war and of Russians speaking propaganda of war, too. They have two sorts of propaganda: the propaganda of Putin's criminal war and the propaganda of Ukrainian defensive war. And so part of this propaganda is, of course, restricted.

And people could also be punished for trying to access at least an official version of the other side or discussing it. Because this so-called justification of war is, to be precise, this article of the criminal court in which I was accused, is article number 436/2 of the Criminal Code of

Ukraine; the justification, negation of the Russian aggression and the glorification of participants. This article was adopted in the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and one could understand, of course, this reaction. If people are glorifying those who are killing Ukrainians here, thousands of people, of course, there is something wrong with those who are doing it. It should be some sort of propaganda of war and propaganda of war, of course, should be criminal. On the other hand, this term "justification" is very vague and it is not linked to, for example, the definition of aggression adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1974. It is just a justification. And the only evidence in my case, apart from the text of the Peace Agenda for Ukrainians and the World, is a so-called "expert opinion". And this expert opinion, the expert is not a lawyer, and probably even knows very little about laws. It is a so-called "linguistic, semantic textual expertise". So it is based, according to this expert, on some sort of dictionaries. Well, some of them were published even before the definition of aggression was adopted, before 1974. And in this statement, it is said that we condemn the creation of an unrealistic image of the enemy. So authors of this statement consider the aggression state Russia as a fictional enemy and in this way they apologize or justify the Russian aggression. It is nonsense because there is a big difference between what Russia has done, it invaded Ukraine. And indeed it is an example of what is relevant to the definition of aggression. It is of course, aggression; real actions of Russia on one side. And on another side a demonized image of the enemy, when the propaganda says they are not human, they are like Orcs, like some mythical, absolutely irrational, very bad creatures. You can not negotiate with them. You can't reason [with them]. They only rape, kill, so they should be exterminated. There should be no Russian state on the map. It should be totally destroyed to secure Ukraine. Of course, these maximalist goals are not adding security.

And by the way, what is the difference between the notion of peace and the notion of security? It is very important. You feel secure, you feel safe. It is subjective. Peace is a common security; when everybody feels secure. Not because it's some sort of subjective feeling, not because of some old superstitions. Like to be secure, I could have an atomic bomb and I could be able to kill all life on the planet and everybody will be scared and nobody will dare to touch me. It doesn't mean security, because many people with many bombs, someone will out of recklessness, press the bottom and well, all life will be extinguished. It is not security. So now, for example, when many political actors say it is for Ukraine to decide how the war will end, have they lost their mind?! Because security should be common security. So how will this war end? It now affects all economies in Europe, in the United States, in the Global South. When more people in Africa are dying from hunger because of obstructions of grain supply from Ukraine, because of the obstruction of fertilizer supply from Russia. And it is not going to be stopped, it is exacerbated because some people are making money on the war. Some war profiteers are selling their weapons to American people, so it is shipped to Ukraine. Iran, North Korea is selling weapons to Russia. Some people are making money, but at what cost?! Tens of thousands of people killed, cities destroyed, hopes lost, minds lost. The war profiteering is immoral and it should be stopped and war should be stopped.

**ZR:** In May 2023, Ukrainian president Zelenskyy extended martial law, which banned men between the age of 18 to 60 from leaving the country. Despite these strict policies, The Guardian recently reported that men are hiding in their homes or are paying bribes to get out of the country in Ukraine. Given that you're living in Ukraine, how has the general appetite towards the war evolved from last year up until now? Keep it brief because we have one more question and just 10 minutes remaining.

**YS:** Oh, well, The Guardian writes the truth, because indeed, many people are avoiding any meeting or any acquaintance with the military recruiters. And the military recruiters are becoming more aggressive. The laws are changing to force people to go to recruitment centers because you can't even have a marriage without military registration. Military registration is a result of going to a recruitment center or going through a medical examination. And after that, you could easily be sent to the front line. And there is no respect for the right to refuse to kill. This political persecution, as I said, started not because we demanded this right, but because we successfully uphold the right. We helped the prisoner of conscience Vitaly Alekseenko. The Supreme Court released him, we provided legal aid to him. And by the way, today Vitaly Alexekseenko sent a constitutional complaint, asking the constitutional court to review all outdated law or an alternative in a military service, in view of Article 35 of constitution of Ukraine regarding the right to alternative services for people who cannot serve in the army because of their religious beliefs.

Another constitutional complaint was lodged by myself, several days after this illegal search because I experienced the arbitrariness of application of this new article of the criminal code on justification of aggression. I started to read what was going on. I understood how vague this form of law is, discussed it with colleagues and I prepared and submitted my complaint to the Constitutional Court. And by the way, it passed through an initial filter. And you can find on the website of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine my constitutional complaint regarding this new article. This new article, by the way, is widely used to persecute opponents of Zelenskyy's regime. So I think this worldwide scandal regarding my persecution for political reasons probably could also help other persecuted people.

Another important case is the lawsuit of a very brave member of Ukrainian Pacifist Movement Andrii Vyshnevetsky, taken to army against his religious beliefs. He is a Christian pacifist. He asked for a discharge from military service on the grounds of conscience. He is at the front line. He didn't flee, he didn't avoid that, but he declared conscientious objection. And he lodged a lawsuit to President Zelenskyy, asking the court, the Supreme Court of Ukraine, to order President Zelenskyy to establish a procedure of discharge from military service on the ground of conscience. Because now, there is no such procedure and it is a violation of international human rights standards, including the human rights standards set by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the recommendations regarding human rights of military personnel. We will not succumb to pressure to this political

repression under the absurd pretext of the justification of the Russian aggression, which we condemned many times, including in this statement, this Agenda for Ukrainians and the World. We will uphold our right to refuse to kill. It is a basic human right and it is an important way to stop the war.

**ZR:** Following the invasion of the war on Ukraine, the Russian government passed censorship laws which prohibited anti-war statements and called for sanctions. According to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, these laws criminalize any criticism of Russia's war on Ukraine or questioning the official narrative. This law was not only criticized by Western politicians, but also by Western media and human rights organizations. In addition, when something happens to peace activists or opposition figures such as Alexei Navalny in Russia, the Western media immediately reports on it and provides in-depth accounts and coverage. How has the Western media, on the other hand, reacted to your case and your colleagues' cases so far? Has any other media outlet from Germany or the US contacted you so far and offered you a platform? Very briefly.

**YS:** First of all, thank you for your reporting on this case. I must also express gratitude to some of your colleagues, for example, to Amy Goodman from Democracy Now! though, who indeed reported on this situation. Some alternative media dedicated to standards of journalism are reporting human rights violations. And it is good. In Ukraine my situation was ignored by most media. Initially, one human rights media reported it in some biased way, but still they tried to some degree to comply with journalist standards. It is so painful to see how people are convinced that I am the enemy, and are trying to also be objective journalists and they only tell the truth partially. So I am grateful to ZMINA human rights website at least for coming to the court hearings but their news were disseminated by some propagandist media, totally erasing all the facts and my point of view; presenting it like another enemy is punished or could be punished at last. So in this matter you are right.

Another very important thing, today human rights defenders and peace activists is a very dangerous way of life. We are persecuted everywhere, and among the many persecutions of human rights defenders and peace activists in the world, my home arrest is not the gravest one. So many people are killed for their advocacy of peace and human rights, imprisoned. I am at risk of imprisonment because of sanctions in my case, according to the criminal court of Ukraine, there should be up to five years in prison, and the risk of confiscation of property. But now I am under a night house arrest. Some people in Russia, in similar situations, according to their article of the so-called "discreditation of the Russian army", could be jailed immediately and treated in jail very badly. And you know, also, I am grateful to the International Peace Bureau for their decision to nominate our brave Russian friends, the Russian movement of Conscientious Objectors, our brave Belarussian friends, Nash Dom, also our Ukrainian Pacifist Movement for the advocacy of right to the conscientious objection to military service. The International Peace Bureau nominated us for the Nobel Peace Prize. It indeed brings popular attention to problems of Conscientious Objectors and the peace



movement. And in the previous year, the Nobel Peace Prize was given, for example, to an Ukrainian organization leader, Mrs. Oleksandra Matviichuk, who publicly rejected the notion of universal peace and brotherhood. She felt that receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for exactly that, for strengthening the universal human brotherhood, she should explicitly deny that notion very dear to Alfred Nobel.

I hope that humankind will come to common sense and truth and love, which unite people and the ideal of universal human brotherhood and sisterhood, enshrined in particular in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, will be respected and actively promoted again. Because human rights are the fundament of a nonviolent way of life. A nonviolent way of life is a fundament of democracy. There should be no democracy without nonviolent governance. Democracy is nonviolent governance. It is governance not by beating and killing, but by dialog, discussion and peace journalism. A Journalism not increasing hate, but journalism, which is telling the truth and helping people to find common ground. Lies, propaganda, making people enemies, is like dividing people. And the truth unites people. Your profession is very important. Telling truth to the people. Help people to understand what is going on and together, building peace.

**ZR:** I think, in my view, people from Germany and the West who support the Ukrainian government with their taxes through military and financial aid will find this interview quite disturbing given that peace activists like you that are on one hand very objective, critical of the invasion, but on the other hand also keeping an eye on how the Ukraine government is violating free speech and civil liberties. So I thank you for taking part in this interview today, despite all the risk. And we wish you all the best. Please let our viewers know before we leave where they can stay up to date with your case. A link or anything, please share that with us very shortly.

**YS:** I will do it. Thank you. And since you mentioned weapons, I must say that the right to self-defense is important but the best way to defend yourself is nonviolent resistance, unarmed civilian protection, and the only hope to build a better world without wars is to learn how to resist violence without violence.

**ZR:** Yurii, executive secretary for the Ukraine Pacifist Movement. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**YS:** Thank you.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. Don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. Youtube, which is owned by Google, has a long history of shadow banning and censoring alternative voices. So if you want to receive our content in the future, make sure to join these channels as a precaution. Also, if you're watching our content regularly, make sure to donate. Even though we have 141,000

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