

Ukraine's Counteroffensive, NATO's Slip-up & the Taurus Cruise Missile

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thanks again for joining us today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host Zain Raza and today we'll be talking with Professor Peter Kuznick about the latest developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. Peter Kuznick is professor of history and the director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at American University. He's also the author of several books, one of them being *The Untold History of the United States*, which he wrote together with film producer and director Oliver Stone. Peter Kuznick, welcome back to the show.

Peter Kuznick (PK): Hey Zain, good to see you.

ZR: I want to begin this interview with some recent military developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. The German finance minister, Christian Lindner, made his first visit to Ukraine recently in which he pledged a further €12 billion worth of military aid to Ukraine. Regarding the war, he stated, quote, "This is about the future of European order of peace and freedom" unquote. And also, he quite boldly said, quote, "Ukraine must not lose". Furthermore, the German government is contemplating sending the Tauros to Ukraine. The Taurus is an advanced Swedish German made air launch cruise missile with a range of 500 kilometres. In the same visit, the German finance minister stated regarding Taurus, and let me quote him here once again, quote, "Knowing that many are sympathetic to such support as I am, I hope to see this issue resolved very soon". In your estimation, would the Taurus cruise missiles change the tide of voting in favour of Ukraine? And also, why do you think that the demand for more advanced weapons keeps growing by Ukraine? Could this be an indication that its summer counter-offensive has failed?

PK: Ukraine is actually not succeeding on the battlefield. They're making very, very small gains. They're making claims that the gains are bigger because there's growing pressure right now from the West for negotiations. We know that the Global South has been pushing for negotiations for quite some time now. I'm just back from Italy at a conference where there were several top officials from the Vatican. And the Vatican, Pope Francis, has been outspoken about the need for diplomacy. The Chinese have been outspoken. Lula in Brazil has been outspoken. Guterres, the United Nations, seven at least or more African countries. Overall, the Global South sees this as a, in many ways Western NATO fuelled crisis that's affecting the world economy and creating great havoc and destruction inside Ukraine. However, there are certain forces that – look at the recent statement by a top official in NATO who acknowledged that negotiations are going to be necessary and that Ukraine will very likely have to give up territory. Immediately Stoltenberg, the head of NATO, refuted that, rejected that, saying it's entirely up to the Ukrainians to decide when they want to negotiate and what terms they want to negotiate.

We know, however, that Ukraine is pretty desperate right now. They're totally dependent militarily. They're totally dependent financially on Western aid and Western weapons. And so they're in a very difficult position because Zelensky has staked his claim to the presidency in large part on the idea that they're not going to give up an inch of Ukrainian territory. They're going to drive Russia out of all of Ukraine, including Crimea. Almost nobody believes that. Military officials in the West have been saying, acknowledging that that's very unlikely. Milley has said this for a long time, that it's going to end up in negotiations. And so the pressure is mounting, and especially as the counter-offensive has sputtered, the counter-offensive, they've gained back, what? 100 square miles or something? And then Russia is making gains in other areas. So they're trying to push through in the south. But Russia is entrenched. They're dug in, they've learned a lot. And also it's much easier to be on the defensive than to be on the offensive. So the Russians are dug in. The Russians have air superiority. And then the debate in the West is, Okay, do we give them longer range missiles so they can hit Russia behind the lines? Do we give them the F-16s so they can try to redress the imbalance in the air? But the amount of training that that would take, it would be months and months and months before they would even be viable on the battlefield.

So Ukraine is in a difficult position. And what many people fear is that it's going to be a year from now and they're going to be a quarter million and a half million more dead on both sides. And it would be the exact same place or approximately the same place. So we're hearing from more and more sources that in this fall or this winter, the Western pressure is going to be enormous on Ukraine to negotiate. That might mean the end of Zelensky's presidency, because we know that back in early in 2022, in March of 2022 when he was willing to negotiate there were threats to lynch him, to assassinate him. And there's a strong nationalist element inside Ukraine who wants no compromise, who wants to defeat Russia. And we're hearing these cries now from top officials in the Ukrainian defence ministry and

government, saying that we're going to win this war. You know, maybe it would be just if they could, but they can't. And the broader picture in terms of NATO and NATO encroachment and the position that it put Russia in means that both sides have legitimate claims to moral superiority in this case.

Clearly, there is no ultimate excuse for Putin's invasion. And that kind of military action has got to be condemned. But Russia now controls somewhere between 20 and 23% of Ukrainian territory. They had 7% when the fighting began. Now they've tripled that. So is Putin going to give that up? No. Is Zelensky going to negotiate? He says not. So we're in this stalemate and it's a meat grinder. And I'm seeing these horrible reports about Ukrainian amputees and the Western media is talking about Ukrainians bribing people to stay out of the fighting, Ukrainians hiding. Young Ukrainians doing anything they can to avoid fighting. It's a miserable war. It's a bloody war. In many ways it reflects, it receives a recall of what happened during World War One with trench warfare. So I don't blame the Ukrainians who don't want to fight. I don't blame the Ukrainians who want to fight, you know. But it's an untenable situation. The West does not want to get militarily involved. They've already got Finland and Sweden; Sweden likely and NATO. NATO has expanded. It's a strategic defeat for Putin in that regard. Militarily, it has not going well for the Russians. They've learned a lot, but their standing in the world has not improved.

But we have to put this again in the broader context. And what's happening is the Global South is mobilising. They don't want this war. We've got the BRICS meeting coming up August 22nd within five days to August 24th in South Africa. And BRICS is posing an alternative to the G-7 and the Western domination, the US domination, the post-war world, the US hegemony. And BRICS now has five official members, but they've got 22 more countries who've applied for membership and more than 40 countries that would like to become members. And so what we see now is an alternative developing to the US dominated world, hegemonic position. And BRICS, they're talking about alternative currencies. They're talking about trade relations. And, you know, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa now, but there are so many countries – Saudi Arabia wants to join, Argentina wants to join. When we go through the list, it really does pose a bigger economic bloc than the G7. So people do not like the world order. They don't not like neoliberalism. They do not like neo-colonialism. We see coups taking place in Africa. We see China. You know, the Africans, the situation in Africa, you've got these neo colonial regimes that are in many ways loyal to the United States and France in the Western powers, and they're being overthrown.

And so we see the world situation changing. And in that context, supporting Ukraine the way Germany continues to do, you know, it's not only a losing proposition right now, but it's bucking the tide of international change. But you've got the Greens in many ways running Germany's foreign policy. And Baerbock's plane might not be doing very well at the moment. But Germany is a very wealthy country and they're suffering as a result of the war in Ukraine, but they still want to pour more money in there. The United States has committed a lot more

money. 345 million, the latest amount of money. And the thing about this recent deal the US made is they're not taking it out of future manufacturing from the defence sector. They're taking it out of the US stockpile. This latest \$345 million in military aid to Ukraine. And the US promises to Ukraine are really delayed right now. But the thing about that RAND issued that report, *Avoiding a Long War*, which said that America's real interest is not Ukraine and Russia, it is China. China poses the real threat. But the United States is four years behind in military delivery to Taiwan. So, again, the broader context and we see this going on. So we've got two meetings going on that are really important. One is the BRICS meeting in South Africa. The other is a meeting at Camp David here in the United States where Biden is hosting Kishida, the Japanese prime minister, and Yoon, the president of South Korea, and trying to solidify this military alliance. The New York Times headline makes it clear. What's this about? Opposing China. And so you've got Russia, which in some ways has lost stature but is gaining ground. And you've got China, which is economically also having a hard time right now. But China keeps expanding its influence, and that's why Africa becomes so important, because Russia and China are opposing an alternative to the US, France and Europe in Africa. And where they've got this neo colonial tradition there that the people of Africa are rejecting. And so you've got China moving in there. Russia just had this big summit with the African countries. They're posing an alternative again to the neo liberal economic policies and neocolonial arrangements in Africa. This is going on globally now.

And so we're seeing a new world order. And is it dangerous? In some ways, Yeah. In some ways it does represent a growing threat of conflict and possibly military conflict, as both sides seem to be digging in their heels. And the momentum is clearly with the Global South and Russia and China. India is a key player because Modi recently visited the United States. But even then, Biden cannot get him to agree to supporting the Western military alliances. Economically, sure, India wants to play both sides. India is now population wise, the biggest country in the world. I think they've now surpassed China. But through the BRICS though, more than half of the world's population is with the BRICS and their allies at this point. So we see a lot of things changing.

ZR: You mentioned a senior NATO official mentioning a possible scenario for peace. I want to dig deeper into that. Stian Jenssen, the chief of staff to the NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, he was the person at a panel event in Norway who said this week when it came to discussion of possible ways 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, as you mentioned, also, he received immediate backlash and was heavily criticised, so much so that he had to apologise a day later by saying, quote, "My statement about this was a part of a larger discussion about future scenarios in Ukraine, and I shouldn't have said it that way. It was a mistake." Do you think our peace is even possible now? What compromises do you think Ukraine and Russia would have to make? And are these compromises not politically impossible, as you've mentioned, that Zelensky might be assassinated. And on the other hand, Putin is also facing a lot of political pressure.

PK: Yeah. The interesting thing is they're both facing pressure from the right. There is little peace movement in Russia right now. The voices of the left have been stifled. It's a very repressive situation. The little bit of democracy that Russia had, I'm sad to say, has disappeared. There is no alternative media, really. I mean, I get on in Russia still and I criticise Putin, but not like I used to. And there's very little dissent in terms of pressure for peace in Russia. And a lot of the people, the losses are heavy, but they're mostly coming not from Saint Petersburg and Moscow, they're coming from the rural areas where they're not mounting much pressure. The pressure on Putin is coming from the right, from the nationalists, the ultra nationalists, and they want more aggressive military policies. They want a full scale mobilisation. Some of them want to use tactical nuclear weapons, the idiots that they are. And so Zelensky's pressure is also coming from the right. You know, it's the Azov types, the neo fascist there, and the right wingers who don't want to cede an inch of territory. The statement by the NATO official talked about Ukraine joining NATO in exchange for giving up territory. I don't think that's a deal that Putin can or will accept.

You know, the original discussions backed the Minsk II Agreements which were sabotaged by the West and by Ukraine. Putin was all in on that, or mostly in on that. And but Hollande and Merkel were not sincere in negotiating that. Then in March of 2022, it looked like Zelensky was willing to negotiate again, Ukrainian neutrality. That would be, I'm afraid, one of the essential points that Russia will demand, is Ukrainian neutrality. Maybe they'll allow Ukraine or they won't object to Ukraine joining the EU. But in terms of military alliances and NATO weapons and NATO trainers and troops, they don't want that. So they're still talking about demilitarisation and denazification. The denazification issue is being, in my opinion, for what I've read, exaggerated. But the demilitarisation issue is real. And so I don't think that Ukraine joining NATO is going to be part of that discussion. But they are going to have to get security guarantees. But Russia now has had referendums in four different provinces, so it's no longer just Luhansk and Donetsk, it's also Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. And so Putin says that they're part of Russia now. That's where people get worried about the possible threat of the use of nuclear weapons. Because how does Russia define an existential threat now?

You know, one of the things that you and I were going to talk about today is Dan Ellsberg. Who wanted to come with me to visit you in Munich and wanted to come speak and passed away very sadly recently. But Dan Ellsberg is not only a renowned whistleblower, a renowned peacenik, Dan Ellsberg was the strongest voice warning about the threat of nuclear war. He and Noam Chomsky to some extent, because they both understand and understood, Dan as a top defence planner and nuclear planner, you know, his book, *The Doomsday Machine*, is subtitled *Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*. And Dan was in charge of command and control really, was a leading expert on command and control in the sixties. And he was very worried that even a limited use of nuclear weapons would lead to a full scale nuclear war. Which he was warning about; the threat of nuclear winter. And Dan was a leading voice warning about the threat of nuclear winter because Dan understood that the

NATO and US doctrine is for first use of nuclear weapons. I mean, that's what it's all predicated upon. And, you know, China has disavowed first use. India officially does, but nobody quite knows what that means for India. And the United States and Russia have not. And so that is terrifying. Biden came to office saying that he was going to seriously consider and was committed to no first use. But Biden has become more hawkish by the day since he's been in power.

And when we're talking about world crises right now, what's going on in the United States is absolutely in the forefront, because the United States now with the fourth indictment of Trump is really a polarised country. The United States, I don't know if we are on the cusp of civil war, but American democracy is really threatened as well. You know, we talk about the threat to democracy around the other parts of the world. Right wing governments in Italy and Sweden and elsewhere, and neo-nazi forces on the rise. And I'm glad they were dealt a blow in the last election in Germany. But the situation with these neo populists, which tend to be in some cases neo fascist movements, really represents a threat. You know, I think democracy is important. And in the United States, the Trump forces do represent a serious threat. But what we're seeing in the United States now is the more indictments, the more Trump really is threatened with going to prison, the more desperate he's becoming, the more his supporters are dug in, but the more that the independents are fleeing him. And so Trump as an electoral force, Trump is really in a weaker and weaker position now. But the ability to mobilise might still represent a real threat in the United States. We've got his forces making threats to judges, to witnesses, to elected officials, and these people are armed to the teeth. You know, we've got a situation, as you know, in the United States where the right wing is very, very heavily armed and really has no commitment to democracy. But what the Trump forces represent is a blind will to power. Germany knew what the wheels of power once looked like. And some of those same forces are certainly on the march in the United States.

So we've got serious problems around the world with the world economy, with the militaries, with the pressure. Japan is a good example. So Biden, with this summit, with Kishida and Yoon – in South Korea 70% of the people want to see South Korea develop its own nuclear weapons. This is not like South Korea under the Moon government, which was peaceful and reaching out to North Korea. The South Korean government is not doing that. Kishida in Japan; Japan has got a massive amount of plutonium. We like to say that, we don't like to say, but we do say that Japan is one screwdriver twist away from developing nuclear weapons, as Dan Ellsberg used to say. And there's a lot of pressure from the right wing in Japan to develop their own nuclear weapons. Japan was the most anti-nuclear country in the world. Now they're doubling their military spending. Now, as Japan and South Korea have both pledged to come militarily to Taiwan's aid if there's a military confrontation with China over Taiwan. The United States position is supposed to be ambiguous, but Biden has said on four separate occasions that the US will militarily come to Taiwan's aid.

Overall as a planetary civilisation, we're in a precarious situation. It gets worse. And what do we really have to deal with? Look what's happening in Maui in Hawaii. Island nations everywhere are threatened right now with fire, with rising sea levels, and global warming. We're feeling it in real terms across the planet, with fires, with smoke, with soot, with rising sea levels, melting ice caps. The temperature is the hottest year on record again, year after year after year. Why don't we get the message? And that's why we've got real problems to deal with. And to be doubling Japan's military spending or Germany sending more and more arms or the USA sending more and more arms to keep this war going is the opposite of what humanity needs right now. And we're seeing that and people are getting it and realising it. But a lot is falling on deaf ears as we have militarists in power, nation after nation and we have octogenarians in power. You know, we need the younger generation, we need new blood, we need new thinking. We don't need Putin in there forever and he should not be in there forever and Biden not in there forever and Modin ot in there forever. You know, Merkel finally stepped down, but I'm not sure that the folks have taken over for her are even quite as peaceful as she was.

ZR: Peter, let's pause this discussion and continue the next part with Daniel Ellsberg. Thank you so much for taking part in this discussion part one.

PK: My pleasure Zain. You take care.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Please don't forget to donate to our channel if you're watching our videos regularly. Even though we have 140,000 subscribers on our channel, only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. If you're watching our videos, make sure to take into account that an entire team is working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, in the case of our German videos, translation, correction, voice-over. So make sure that you're donating on a regular basis just 1 to €5 a month via Patron, PayPal or bank account. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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