

Nord Stream Update, Ukraine's Counteroffensive Gains & Dispute with Poland

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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 today, I'll be talking to Dimitri Lascaris about the one year anniversary of the bombing of the Nord Stream pipeline, as well as the latest developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. Dimitri Lascaris is an independent journalist and lawyer who specialises in class actions, human rights and international law. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada finishing second. Dimitri, welcome back.

Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Thank you for having me, Zain. Always a pleasure.

ZR: The 26th of September marked the one year anniversary of the bombing of the Nord Stream pipeline. The majority of the German media allocated coverage on a theory surfaced by the mainstream media and rarely, if at all, addressed a piece of Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh. In February this year, Seymour Hersh claimed the US was responsible for destroying the Nord Stream pipeline. However, a month later, the prevailing theory that has resided until today came from anonymous US intelligence sources in The New York Times, which was that a rogue Ukrainian group conducted the bombing using the Andromeda yacht. At the same time, this prompted the German mainstream media network to investigate and report with some divergence following more or less the same conclusion. Moving forward to June of this year, The Washington Post then reported that attacks were conducted by the knowledge and order of the Ukrainian military and that U.S. and European intelligence had known about the details of this plan. One year later, how do you dissect all this contradictory information about the Nord Stream pipeline? And which theory do you think holds most plausible?

DL: Well, I begin as a lawyer, by asking the question, *Cui bono*, who benefits? And it seems absolutely clear that the overwhelming beneficiary of the destruction of Nord Stream has been the United States government. First of all, the United States government for decades

was pressuring - not years, but decades - was pressuring Germany to sever its energy relationship with Russia. Because, first of all, that gave Russia a significant degree of influence over European governments - their reliance on Russian energy resources. But secondly, it was to the detriment of American energy corporations, particularly in the petroleum sector. Secondly, this would hurt Russia, which had become increasingly strong under the Putin government from an economic and military perspective. The loss of revenue from the sale of gas to Europe would be a significantly negative development for the Russian economy. And the United States government wanted to weaken a geopolitical rival. And finally, it wanted to increase its level of control over the European government. So it clearly was the primary beneficiary. Russia certainly didn't benefit from this in any way, shape or form, and the Ukrainians didn't benefit anywhere nearly to the same degree. I mean, certainly didn't help their situation on the battlefield, the fact that Nord Stream was destroyed. And secondly, who had the capacity to do it? Clearly, the American government. This was a complex operation which had to be carried out in a clandestine manner to avoid detection. Clearly, the United States government and military and intelligence agencies had the sophistication to pull it off. I don't think anybody denies that. And finally, you have Joe Biden saying expressly that if Russia invades, we are going to bring an end to Nord Stream. I mean, how could you possibly have a greater declaration of intent than that? So when you add it all up, even before the legendary Sy Hersh came out with his article, it was clear, I think, that the primary suspect was the United States.

ZR: Denmark, Germany and Sweden - the three countries currently investigating the incident have still not released any significant information a year later. On the surface, it appears that they are unwilling to get to the bottom of the matter. Moreover, there is no pressure from the Western media or the public to force the government to act. When German left wing parliamentarian Sahra Wagenknecht requested more information from the German federal government last year in October, she received the following response, quote: "The requested information affects confidentiality, interests worthy of protection to such an extent that the national interest outweighs the parliamentary right to information and the right of members of Parliament to ask questions must exceptionally take a back seat to the confidentially interests of the Federal Government." What is your assessment of the state of the investigation and why do you think Western governments and media are not inclined to press ahead with it?

DL: Well, I think it's beyond the realm of imagination that if the German government or any NATO government had compelling evidence that Russia was behind the destruction of Nord Stream, that they would invoke confidentiality. I mean, they've done everything conceivable to make the Russian government look bad. What better way to add to the villainy that they've projected onto the Russian government than to produce compelling evidence that it destroyed the Nord Stream pipeline, which not only was an act of economic terrorism, it was an act of environmental terrorism. So clearly, they don't have any evidence, I think, of that. And they're not even claiming it anymore that it's the Russian government. They gave that up a long time ago. So that really leaves two possibilities. The one is the Ukrainian military or the United

States government. I can see the German government having a motive not to reveal that the Ukrainian military is behind the destruction of Nord Stream because, of course, the German government has sacrificed a great deal to support the military and the government of Ukraine. However, if it were the Ukrainians, how in good conscience could the government of Olaf Scholz continue to supply military equipment to Ukraine? That just doesn't make a lot of sense to me. So it comes back to what we said, what I was saying earlier, and what Sy Hersh has reported in great detail, that really it was the Biden administration behind this, the most plausible interpretation of the refusal of Western governments. And it's not just the governments you mentioned, Zain. The United States government itself stated very clearly afterwards that it was going to investigate this thoroughly. And as Sy Hersh mentions in his most recent report, there is absolutely no indication that they even attempted to investigate who did this, let alone that they withheld the results of their investigation from the public because they know who did it. They have no interest in conducting an investigation. All roads lead to Rome. This was very clearly the United States government. And what is most troubling from my perspective, if I were a citizen of Germany, is what Sy Hersh has to say about what Olaf Scholz knew about it. I think that that is really the explosive part of this most recent report.

ZR: Let's change gears here and look at the latest developments on the battlefield in Ukraine. We talked about Ukraine's territorial gains in the south of Zaporizhzhia and Robotyne last week, but now Ukraine has made more gains, recently capturing the village of Andriivka to the east in Bakhmut. On September 19th, Tagesschau, Germany's leading news channel, invited a military expert named Nico Lange in their prime time segment who claimed that Russian troops had been retreating for weeks and Ukraine was slowly advancing. How significant are the gains in Bakhmut and do you agree with this military experts' assessment?

DL: Well, it's interesting that the language he used, it really doesn't provide any concrete sense of the extent of the gains or the extent of the retreat. I think it's fair to say that there have been advances. It would be astonishing if after nearly four months of offensive, using tens of billions of dollars of weaponry, the Ukrainians hadn't gained at least some territory. They appear to have expelled the Russians from Klishchiivka, from Andriivka, and also from Robotyne in the South in the Zaporizhzhia direction. But these are all extremely small settlements, and they have been razed to the ground. And the fact that they've been razed to the ground - in large part not just because of Russian artillery, but because of Ukrainian artillery - means that they can't be held. They are now in the gray zone. No one can control them because if you send forces in there and they remain stationary, they're going to be obliterated. They have no meaningful cover. So now what you have basically are these open spaces where Russians enter at some point - Russian forces, Ukrainian forces, but nobody truly controls the area. In the Bakhmut area, the Russians have retreated behind a railway line. Militarily, you know, it is very difficult to take your forces, particularly armored forces, across a railway track, and they appear to be holding that line very carefully. So there's absolutely no reason to believe that the Ukrainians are on the verge of retaking Bakhmut. The

Russians are fully in control of Bakhmut. It would be astonishing if the Ukrainians ever recovered Bakhmut. And the overall, I think picture on the battlefield, Zain, is - particularly if you look at the South, is that the Ukrainians are running out of forces. They now have stopped attacking in large armored fists and they're sending small groups of infantry to try to take pieces of territory and hold them, small pieces of territory. In the Zaporizhzhia direction, which everybody thought was the main theater of battle in this offensive because they wanted to sever the land bridge to Crimea has become remarkably quiet relative to what was happening there previously. I think this offensive is all but over, frankly, and there may be very marginal gains here and there. But the real issue is going to be how is Ukraine going to survive this winter, particularly if the Russians begin to resume heavy attacks upon the already battered Ukrainian energy grid. This is going to be, tragically for the Ukrainian people, I fear, a very, very grim winter.

ZR: Let's look at the larger picture in Europe. There are some recent developments in Europe that suggest support for Ukraine is waning on the continent. For example, Poland, one of Ukraine's staunchest allies, recently announced it would stop supplying arms to Ukraine, a day after President Zelensky accused Warsaw of playing into Russia's hands by banning Ukrainian grain imports. Secondly, three time former Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has a chance to return to power in a few days as he is ahead in the election polls. Fico is opposed to escalating the conflict, fearing it could lead to a major war on the European continent. It is anticipated that Slovakia could form an alliance with Hungary, whose head is Viktor Orban, and that could cause a shift in support for Ukraine. How do you assess both developments in Poland and Slovakia?

DL: Well, these are clearly adverse developments for Ukraine, but we must also bear in mind that Slovakia is not exactly a heavyweight in NATO or in the European Union. I think that a Slovakian government that aligns itself with respect to Ukraine with Viktor Orban would have some impact upon European public opinion. It certainly wouldn't help the Ukrainian cause, but I don't think that that in and of itself is going to be a devastating development for Ukraine. Poland is a much more significant matter because Poland has provided - I believe the estimate that the Polish gave was somewhere in the vicinity of \$20 billion of aid, which is actually twice the amount of aid that Canada has provided. And Canada has a significantly larger economy. But mostly Poland's importance is that it is a transit point for the massive amount of weaponry. Most of the weaponry that's entering Ukraine, without which the Ukrainian army could not survive. And it is also a point that is used in order to repair the weaponry. Because the Ukrainians can't safely repair this weaponry themselves. They have neither the capacity nor the facilities to do that. All of their repair facilities are subject to attack by the Russian forces. So if Poland begins to be truly uncooperative on the military front, that would be a devastating development for Ukraine, potentially. What remains to be seen is how serious the Poles are about this commitment not to arm Ukraine any further. The Polish government is heading into an election. It relies very, very heavily upon farmers for its electoral support. They are extremely opposed to Ukrainian grain imports for obvious

reasons. So I think that once the election's over, if this government secures a majority in particular, or at least remains in power in a coalition government, it may soften its stance significantly vis a vis Ukraine. Time will tell. But overall, it's important to look at the overall trends throughout the West overall, because there is a clear, distinct diminution in the levels of public support for arming and funding the Ukrainian government. So whatever happens in Poland, whatever happens in Slovakia, the trend is not favorable for Ukraine.

ZR: Talking about public support going to end this war - however, when I read Western media reports, whether it's on Slovakia or Poland or even the US, what is usually mentioned is that only right wing sentiment is against the war and it's not the reflection of the general population. That's the impression I get when I look at the German media. How would you dissect this? Is it true that it's only coming from the right wing, or do you think the public mood in general is changing towards this war?

DL: Well, I'm a leftist. I'm a self-declared socialist and have been for a long time. And I'm adamantly opposed to the funding of this war. And I know many people on the left who feel similarly to me. But I'll refer you to a poll that was done by CNN a couple of months ago in the United States, which showed that 55% of Americans were opposed to further support for Ukraine. So it couldn't possibly be because 55% of Americans don't align with the right. It couldn't possibly be that. That's a purely right wing sentiment in the United States. That's simply not true. And this is a tactic, by the way, that's used by the mainstream media and the mainstream political parties to discredit any point of view that they disagree with. They immediately, you know, characterize it as extremist. This is something I myself have had to confront whenever I criticize Canadian government policy with respect to Israel. You know, I'm characterized as having an extremist point of view. But if you look at the polling, there's a tremendous amount of sympathy for the Palestinian people amongst Canadians. And something similar is going on with Ukraine. At the end of the day, no one should have any illusions about the fact that this has been an extraordinarily costly war. The reality is catching up with the fake narrative we've been given. It's only a matter of time before people of all political stripes turn against this proxy war. And the real question is, as I've said many times, is the West going to continue to escalate or is it finally going to come to the conclusion that it needs to come to a compromise solution with the Russian government? That's the question and it has existential importance for all of us.

ZR: To my last question, don't you think it's politically impossible even for the West, given that Biden has an election next year in the United States to now shift gears, especially given how much political capital he has invested in supporting Ukraine? I mean, the Republicans will tear him apart by saying, look at this U-turn that you just made at the last second. Do you see any prospects of peace? And I know we've talked about this before, but since we've gained a lot of new viewers, what would a sustainable peace look like?

DL: Well, as a matter of fact, I read today for the very first time - I'll deal with the second part of your question, first. A peace plan that was proposed by four German experts, one of which I understand is - he's a historian and he's the, I believe, the son or the grandson of Willy Brandt - and they published their peace plan on August 23rd. I had not seen it before because it's not been mentioned anywhere in the mainstream media in Canada or the United States, as far as I can tell. But somebody sent it to me and I thought it was an eminently sensible plan. And what they talk about, effectively, they couch it in diplomatic terms, first of all, a cease fire. Secondly, the creation of a demilitarized zone, protected by U.N. peacekeepers that extends 50 kilometers from the border of Russia into Ukraine. And then that demilitarized zone, which is protected by peacekeepers on either side of it, there would be a further sort of nonmilitary zone on the Russian side and the Ukrainian side of that demilitarized zone. And then you would have effectively, the Ukrainian government ceding, although they don't use this language, Russian sovereignty over Crimea, which for a number of reasons, which you and I have discussed, is an eminently sensible thing to do, it seems to me. And that there be a plebiscite held in the four Oblast that were annexed after the invasion began on terms agreed to by Ukraine and Russia, and that it would be internationally supervised and that both Ukraine and Russia commit to respect the results of the plebiscite. And they specify because this is an important issue, that people who left these areas and who lived there at the time that the invasion began be permitted to return and be eligible to vote whether or not they return. That is exactly the right thing to do. And then they also talk about there being a commitment by NATO about Ukraine to remain neutral in every sense of the word. Out of NATO, no foreign military forces on its soil. And finally, an international donors conference. I've been talking about essentially these same elements for months. And I'm not the only person who's been doing that. And it's really disappointing to me that when people of that stature come forward and put together such a well thought out and humane plan, that the media won't talk about it. But in terms of Biden, the first part of your question, the election - I have to say, Zain, that I'm extremely skeptical for the very reason you cited that any president, any prime minister or any chancellor who is invested in this war, as Biden and Trudeau and Scholz are, can at this stage come to the table and offer a meaningful compromise to the Russian Federation. It would be an absolute disgrace. I think that Biden - I'm hopeful that Biden at least will not further escalate the conflict between now and the election. But here is the reality. The reality is that if we're going to bring an end to this heinous war, save the people of Ukraine, eliminate or at least dramatically reduce the risk of a nuclear war between Russia and the West. These particular people, not just the ones I mentioned, but other Western leaders, will need to be removed from office and replaced by people who actually behave in the same and rational manner.

ZR: Dimitri Lascaris, independent journalist and lawyer, thank you so much for your time.

DL: Thank you again, Zain. Always a pleasure.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Please don't forget to donate to a channel if you're watching our videos regularly. We are a small, nonprofit, independent organization that does not take any money from corporations, governments, and we don't even allow advertisements to ensure that you get independent information free from external influence. We have 140,000 subscribers and only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. If everybody on our channel would only donate 1€, we would be able to finance ourselves for the next 4 to 5 years. I'm your host Zain Raza. See you next time.

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