



Ukrainian Counteroffensive Gains, Depleted Uranium & Russian Regional Elections

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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 Dimitri Lascaris about the latest developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. Dimitri Lascaris is an independent journalist and lawyer who specializes 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): Pleasure to be here, Zain. And let me apologize to our audience for having to do this interview from the mezzanine of a hotel in Athens. But please don't mind the background, this is the best we can do today.

ZR: No problem, Dimitri. Let's start the interview with the latest developments on the battlefield in Ukraine. The leading German daily news channel Tagesschau reported on September 4th that the Ukraine counteroffensive has made notable progress, making gains in Zaporizhzhia Oblast and breaking through the first Russian defense line in Robotyne. Now the Ukrainian military is targeting Tokmak and Melitopol. If they're able to pull that off, it will enable them to reach the Sea of Azov, successfully splitting the Russian defense lines. Following the success, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, and let me quote him here, „We have seen good progress on the counter offensive, which is very encouraging“. In your view, given this quote, „notable success“ in Zaporizhzhia, has the tide not turned in favor of Ukraine?

DL: I think that, to be perfectly honest, saying it, is a delusional interpretation of the events. And I'm going to start my response by talking about the big picture. Let's imagine for a

moment that Ukraine achieved its objective in this counteroffensive. What was its objective? Its objective was to reach the city you mentioned, Melitopol, and to take it from the Russians. And before then it would have to take a smaller city, well-fortified called Tokmak, which you also mentioned. If it had done that, it would not be at the Sea of Azov. It would still be significantly to the north of the Sea of Azov. The theory was that if it got close enough to the Sea of Azov, it would exercise fire control from Melitopol all over the roads between the Sea of Azov and Melitopol and sever the land bridge to Crimea. So the first question we should ask is assuming that they were able to achieve that goal, what would that mean for the overall strategic picture? Volodymyr Zelensky has defined victory as the recovery of all territories controlled by Russia that were part of Ukraine when it became independent in 1991. If they sever the land bridge from Crimea to mainland Russia, they would be very, very far away from achieving that goal. Russia would still control Crimea, it would still control much of the Donbas, it would still control large portions of Kherson region and Zaporizhzhia region. And now somebody may say, Well, if they severed the land bridge, the rest of the controlled areas would collapse. But from 2014 to 2022, Russia controlled Crimea completely with no serious challenge to its control, even though there was no land bridge at all. During that same period, pro-Russian rebels controlled the Donbas, largely controlled the Donbass with no serious challenge to their control, with no land bridge from Crimea to mainland Russia. So even if they achieve this goal, they would be very, very far from the overall definition of victory, as laid out by the Zelensky government and they are nowhere close to achieving this goal. They are not even on the outskirts of Tokmak, let alone having taken Tokmak. This idea that they've broken through the first line of defense is simply not reflective of reality. What's happened is apparently small numbers of infantry have managed to navigate their way through the dragon's teeth and other tank obstacles that they've set up in the first line of defense, but armored vehicles have not managed to breach the first line of defense. And then you have a second line of defense and then you have a third line of defense. If they get through that, they have to take Tokmak. If they get Tokmak, they have to take Melitopol. So if you look and the last thing I'll say about this is go to the website of the Institute for the Study of War, which is a neoconservative, fiercely pro-Ukrainian website and look at the map of assessed control of these particular regions and you'll see that, in fact, Ukraine has achieved very, very modest success; they have not captured any town or city of significance, they have not breached the defense lines and they have taken horrific casualties, the appropriate thing to do is to stop this offence now. They are literally wasting life in industrial quantities and it's a tragedy to behold.

ZR: According to Deutsche Welle, the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, in his recent visit to Ukraine, unveiled a new aid package worth \$1 billion for Ukraine. This will also include 120 millimeter depleted uranium rounds that would be used by US made M-1 Abrams tanks that will be delivered at the end of the year. This comes at the top of the cluster munitions and F-16 that the US committed over the summer. Given that the Ukraine counteroffensive has made some gains as you even admitted – it's not major gains but some

gains – will these weapons give them an edge over Russia's military and help them conquer these cities?

DL: Why would we think that that would be the case?! They told us that the Patriot missiles were a game changer. Nobody talks about the Patriot missile defense system anymore; it has disappeared from the discussion. They told us the HIMARS artillery system was going to be a game changer. They're being used on the battlefield every day, they certainly haven't changed the trajectory of this war. They told us that the Challenger tanks were invincible and they were a game changer. Now we see that, in fact, they're not invincible. At least one, if not two have been destroyed and only 14 were given to Ukraine. We were told that the Leopard tanks were a game changer and we've seen in this offensive, you know, well over ten Leopard tanks burning on the battlefield. The problem that Ukraine is confronting, is not rocket science. Ukraine cannot replenish its military forces at nearly the same rate as the Russians. They have a much smaller population, number one. Number two, they have a huge disadvantage in artillery. And artillery is overwhelmingly the thing that is killing and wounding the soldiers the most. It's not the tanks. It's not the machine guns. It's not the missile systems. It's the artillery. And even the Western media have consistently acknowledged that Russia has a massive advantage in artillery. Just by virtue of those two facts alone; Russia has a much larger population to draw upon, and it has anywhere from five to ten times as much artillery. It is inevitable that Ukraine will lose what is clearly becoming a war of attrition. So let's stop, you know, hoping for some dramatic change in the outcome of the war because of the latest wonder weapon that the West provides and face the terrible math that the Ukrainian people confront.

ZR: Russia just wrapped up regional elections, which also include the new occupied territories of Ukraine, such as Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Kheron and Luhansk. Putin's United Russia Party won overwhelmingly with 70% votes in these regions. According to a report released today by the Tagesschau, Germany's leading daily news channel, these elections are, quote, „mock elections“; they state that there were no independent observers on the ground and citizens were forced to take part in these elections. The US State Department also released a statement prior to the elections in which they stated, quote, „Russia's actions demonstrate its blatant disregard for UN charter principles like respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity, which underpin global security and stability“. How do you assess these elections, given all these irregularities in Russian military presence? Can they be even considered legitimate?

DL: Well, I think that there are legitimate concerns about whether these elections reflect the will of the people because there is a war going on. There is a heavy Russian military presence. Also a factor, which you didn't mention, is that many of the people who used to live in these regions have fled and presumably were not in a position to exercise their right to vote. A good number of them, by the way, went to Russia, willingly went to Russia, but many of them fled to areas controlled by Ukraine and others went even further West, to Western

European countries. So these are legitimate questions. Now, having said that, the people who criticize these elections and who also criticize the referendum that were held on the question of annexation by Russia, they never talk about an alternative way of assessing the will of the people. So one thing that I've been advocating for is if we can bring the hostilities to an end, let's have internationally supervised plebiscites according to rules that are mutually agreed by Ukraine's government and Russia's government, so that we can say with confidence what the will of the people actually is. But nobody in the West seems to be remotely interested. All they do is question the integrity of any votes that are held in areas controlled by Russia. But they never suggest that we should actually do something in a much more transparent and balanced manner, which gives us confidence that we are actually learning the will of the people who live there. That's what I think the answer is. So let's talk about a way to structure a vote that we can all believe in, rather than simply saying, you know, any vote held in the current circumstances is illegitimate.

ZR: I would like to now turn to how the Ukraine war is affecting economies like Germany. According to the new \$445.7 billion budget released by the German finance minister, Christian Lindner, all departments except the Defense Ministry will face spending cuts after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A special fund of €100 billion was created to revive the German military in the face of the threat posed by Russia. This special fund for the military has even been criticized by the Federal Court of Auditors because it not only takes money away from important sectors of the economy, but also creates a new external budget outside the conventional budget, for which debt must be incurred to finance it. How do you view the rampant rise in militarization across the West? Is it justified, given the rising power of autocratic states such as Russia and China?

DL: Well, I question whether Russia and China are any more autocratic than Western governments, frankly, and particularly the United States government. In many ways, the U.S. government is a horrifically autocratic government. But let's put that aside. It seems to me that Germany, sadly, is going the path of the United States, where the one part of the budget, which is ever ballooning and which is sacrosanct, which is untouchable, is the military budget, and everything else suffers as a consequence; Germany is doing this. Germany is moving towards a military centric budgetary model in an environment in which NATO is spending, even with recent increases in Russia's military spending, something in the range of 15 times as much as Russia. It is spending over three times as much as Russia and China combined. And we've talked about this before, Zain, no one has ever explained why that level of spending is not adequate to counter the military budgets of Russia and China, which are a fraction of those of NATO. In fact, Russia and China have a military budget together, which is less than 50% of the U.S. military budget— putting aside the NATO military budget. Why isn't that adequate? Well, one of the reasons it's not adequate is because this military spending is not actually intended to protect us. What it's intended to do is to enrich military contractors, and particularly U.S. military contractors. That's where most of this military spending, or at least a very hefty part of it, is going to go. This is emblematic of the fact that the German

government and other European governments have effectively become, I hate to use the word, but it is an entirely appropriate word, vassals of the United States government. They are adopting budgetary and economic policies which serve the interests of the American elite– not the American people – the American elite to the detriment of the German people, the French people and the other peoples of Europe. I would hope that the people of Germany stand up and say enough is enough. And the last thing I want to say on this is today I saw a chart issued by J.P. Morgan Chase showing the Purchasing Managers Index, an important measure of economic activity for a number of large economies in the month of August. Germany was rock bottom out of 20 states, whereas Russia was fourth from the top. What does that tell you about whose interests are being served by these sanctions and this military spending? It certainly isn't in the interests of the German people, I can tell you that.

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

DL: Pleasure as always. Zain, thank you.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today, please don't forget to donate to our channel if you're watching our videos regularly. We are an independent and nonprofit organization who does not take any money from corporations or governments. We only depend on you to continue our journalism. Even though we have 140,000 subscribers, only a few percent donate to us regularly. There's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, in the case of our German videos, translation, voice-over, correction. So if you want us to continue with our journalism and create awareness worldwide, make sure to donate today. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you next time.

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