



Colonel Wilkerson on Ukraine, NATO, Assange and Israel's war

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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. Today, I'll be talking to Lawrence Wilkerson about the latest developments surrounding the war in Ukraine, the Julian Assange case, and Israel and Gaza. Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired colonel who served in the U.S. Army for 31 years. He also served as the Chief of Staff with then Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2000 to 2005. He's now a senior fellow at the Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Lawrence, welcome back.

Lawrence Wilkerson (LW): Thanks for having me back.

ZR: The 24th of February 2024 marked the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In my observation, many reports and documentaries that were published in the German mainstream media commemorating this event focused strongly on the horrors of wars that the Russian invasion caused – and rightfully so, in my opinion. According to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 10,582 civilians have died since the war began, which includes 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers, a statistic that the Ukrainian President Zelensky recently made public. However, when the 20th of March comes every year, the day the U.S. invaded Iraq basically live weapons of mass destruction that kill almost 8 to 9 times the amount of people with conservative estimates documenting around 300,000 to 350,000 civilians killed, the war being also more brutal in nature compared to the Ukraine war, we see no such qualitative and quantitative in-depth coverage. When it comes to Ukraine the media uses the colors of the Ukrainian flag, focusing on the detailed accounts and stories of the victims. They show solidarity by taking a clear moral stance against the aggressors, both morally and legally. No such coverage takes place for Iraq. In fact, most of the leading U.S. politicians such as Colin Powell, Dick Cheney and George Bush have been rehabilitated in the public by the media instead of being held accountable. As someone who has served as Secretary of State for Colin Powell Chief of Staff during the Iraq War, could you comment on the second anniversary of the Ukraine war and also talk about this discrepancy in media coverage and what it reveals?

LW: I think you're always going to see a discrepancy in media coverage, particularly when one of your sources you're looking at is Western media. And by that I mean not only the United States, but also London in particular, but others, too. And I would characterize London of late as abjectly Washington's poodle. I think it's going to probably cost the Prime Minister's job sooner or later; sooner would be better with me. But the media in this country is lashed to the war machine, and it's been lashed to the war machine, ostensibly – or I shouldn't say ostensibly. In every real sense since the first Gulf War, when George H.W. Bush took the UN's imprimatur, the singular difference between it and the second war and essentially kicks Saddam Hussein's army out of Kuwait and then stop, ever since that time, Democrat or Republican, Bill Clinton or George W Bush or Barack Obama, a little bit of a hiatus under Barack Obama, but not much, the United States has been a country of sanctions and war. War and sanctions; that's our only foreign policy. And that's a grievous error, in my view. And not only in the sense that it's inhuman, but also because it's taking the empire down and ultimately it's going to ruin, what arguably after World War two was the New Rome with an opportunity to do all manner of good in the world. Some of that materialized, but in essence, it's now gone to the point where bombs, bullets, bayonets, and sanctions are the root of American foreign policy. And Iraq is just a reflection of that, and that there's been no accountability for it, whether it's state sponsored torture or it's all the deaths you spoke of. And we're not even talking about the millions that were displaced, either internally or externally, that are still displaced in some cases. I suspect if you talk to the average individual man or woman on the streets of Baghdad today, they would tell you they were better off under Saddam Hussein. So we wreak that havoc.

But having said that, that's no reason for those of us who understand that and who would prefer it not happen elsewhere, that's no reason for us not to criticize the conflict in Ukraine, which is bordering on insanity. And when you think about all the world leaders involved in it, from Joe Biden to Jens Stoltenberg at NATO, it is double the insanity because these people should and probably do in their heart of hearts, their brain of brains, no better. But they continue to pursue this policy. They're caught up in it. Ray McGovern and I recently published in Consortium News an op-ed that quoted president after president, including Joe Biden, including Secretary Blinken, when he was Joe Biden's national security advisor, including Bill Burns when he was ambassador to Mexico. We quoted them, talk about accountability. They said Ukraine and the U.S. defense of Ukraine or participation in the defense of Ukraine would be a disaster. And they said it in no uncertain terms, terms that I can realize today and I realized all along. And you talk about Zelensky admitting 31,000. Well, even the CIA, blessed souls that they are, say it's double that. They say it's over 60,000. And they say the civilian toll is double what Zelensky has grudgingly admitted to as well. So we're looking at a country that was doomed from the start. The country of roughly 35 to 40 million, against a country of roughly 145 to 150 million, with eleven time zones of strategic depth and an industrial base just waiting for something like this to revive it, which it has done. I looked at the graphs the other day from a trustworthy source on an economic analysis of the effects of our sanctions, and what you saw was the graphs reverse themselves. For example, the graph of trade with the United States and Russia was like this. And the graph of China and India was like this, with the line being here in the middle. Well, it flipped. It's now

India and China that are on top. And by the way, exceeding US Russia trade; and US Russia trade is on the bottom with almost nothing. So they've just replaced us with India and China. If you've heard the individuals from India who have a little bit of courage and have been speaking out lately, including their foreign minister, you understand it. They understand this. And I won't say they're happy with it, but they're certainly not discontented with it. They're doing fine, and Russia's doing fine. Maybe 2.6 to 3% growth last year, which is not a real measurement. But the real measurement is, look at their industrial base and look, what it's doing now. It's far exceeding actually the capacity of our own industrial base, which is why Biden and others have started this massive movement, which I think is partly misdirected to revive the U.S. industrial base. Whether it's shipbuilding or artillery manufacture, artillery round manufacturing, whatever it might be in the defense industrial base, they're seeking to revive it with billions of dollars starting at it. What they're going to do is make the predatory capitalists that now dominate that base even richer. But that's how they are frightened of what's happening. And that's how much Russia is towering now over Ukraine. And I think what I heard the other day from Zelensky, it was muted, to be sure, but I think he is saying to Putin publicly, probably privately, even more stridently: Let's talk. And I hope that we're not holding him back on that; we or Germany or London or whomever might be. Boris going off to Istanbul to essentially tell them not to ink the agreement that they had agreed to, that sort of thing. We need to get this stopped. That's the bottom line, and it needs to stop. We're killing young men and women, and we do not need to be; both Ukrainian and Russian, but now predominantly Ukrainian. And there's no prospect of success whatsoever. So the first, the old adage is when you're digging a hole and you're down in the bottom of it, the first rule is stop digging. And that's what Ukraine and its supporters need to do.

ZR: You mentioned the war machine. I would like to dig deeper into that aspect. The finance ministers of the European Union met recently, in the city of Ghent in Belgium, to discuss how to improve military spending in Europe. One of the proposals was to involve the European Investment Bank (EIB) to boost military spending, which under the current rules, is not allowed. The EIB raises money through capital markets and currently invests in climate environments, small and medium sized enterprises, as well as infrastructure. However, the finance ministers of various EU states claim that they're compelled to not go in this direction due to Russia's aggression, which they claim threatens the security of Europe. The move is being discussed at a time when 18 out of 31 NATO member states will meet the 2% military spending target this year. A record number, as well as a six fold increase from 2014. The Hungarian parliament also recently approved Sweden's admission to NATO. Now, nothing stands in the way of Sweden becoming part of this military alliance, which will grow to 32 members. Furthermore, according to the German Press Agency, the German government will spend a record amount of €73 billion this year on its military and defense. The Finance Minister of Germany, Christian Lindner, also stated that if we need more money in the military, we should cut back on social spending and subsidies for the industry. From someone who has seen the military industrial complex from the inside of the United States, and has also seen it expand over decades, can you talk about what all of this military spending and expansion means for the European people? Will it make them more safe and sound,

especially given the fact that all of this is taking place based on the justification of an imminent threat from Russia?

LW: It will not make them more safe. It will make them imminently more unsafe. And I say that for a number of reasons. But the broad, overarching reason I say that is, any money is going for this sort of defense, if you will, preposterous, though it is, because Russia has no intent whatsoever of invading NATO or any NATO country, the negatives of this, huge negatives of this, it means that money is not going for the things it should be going for. The money's not going first and foremost, for a new energy future, for the kinds of moves we have to make, governments all across the globe in order to combat what's rolling down the pike at us. And we commonly refer to it as climate change, but I like to call the climate crisis because it is the ultimate crisis. I was just reading a book, *The Silk Roads*. It's a marvelous book by an Oxford scholar who does a sweep of history, but he focuses on what the West never really focuses on. And that's Central Asia and how it once was the envy of the world, if you can say that because there were not that many communications outside of that area at the time. But it was an incredible place, just teeming with trade and commerce. And, the fact that – another Oxford scholar points this out in his book – the fact that the Turkic base of all the languages from Mongolia all the way to the Eastern Mediterranean, allowed trade; you could communicate. Basic communications were possible. And so you had these incredible developments that suddenly came to a screeching end when the step hordes, the Huns featured most prominently, came down and began to beat up on everybody, including both the Eastern and Western Roman Empire, and probably more powerful than they were at that time – maybe the Eastern Empire was the equal of Persia – but the Persian Empire. And we're looking at moments like that again, and it's really kind of stunning to see in there, that climate change had something to do with these forces. Because things were changing in terms of the climate, not as dramatically and life threatening as it's going to change now and will change through the end of this century, but this is something that they finally figured out and had to do something about. And they salvaged a little bit of their empires and a little bit of their commerce and trade, and arguably set the stage for – going into more of it later – in developing Europe.

One of this author's points is how undeveloped Europe was, and how incredibly backward it was to all these regions. Now we look at it and call it incredibly backward. It's astonishing how the wave of history moved over all of this. It's moving over us again, but this time it's moving over us, I think, in an existential way for all of us. And when I say that, I mean the climate and I also mean nuclear weapons. They did not have to contend with nuclear weapons then, God forbid that they should have given in to some of the antagonisms that existed. But today we do have to deal with them. And instead of dealing with them as we started to post-Cold War and bringing the amounts down and trying to make some sense of those small amounts we might keep in terms of deterrence and such and maybe even aiming ultimately at zero, because these are life extinguishing weapons, too, we are going back up again and we're building more sophisticated ones, and we're building more dangerous ones. Every time one nation gains a lead, so to speak, in nuclear weaponry and especially in technology associated with that weaponry, the other nations go berserk and they start building programs to try and

equal that one. Well, there's always that enticement too, while you are the nation with the technological lead to get it over with; you know, get it on and get it over with and then you come up... And militaries are talking that way again, especially the American military.

So these are two things we need to deal with. And you cannot deal with them if you're diverting your resources to a pitiless, unwinnable conflict in Ukraine. And if you decide, as I've heard, these indistinct rumors of – especially coming out of London, I think sometimes they're insane there now, just like we are in Washington. But if you think that you're going to put NATO troops into this fray, NATO equipment, NATO airplanes flown by NATO partners, you are opening Pandora's box to total destruction, because it's going to go nuclear. So you're going to merge these existential threats in Ukraine if you're not careful. That's the true danger here. We need to get this over. We need to get it over. I think it was Pope Francis I was listening to yesterday – I listened to Netanyahu on CBS, I mean, what a parody that was of a world leader of consequence – but Pope Francis essentially said it needs to stop. The war needs to stop. I wish he'd said it even more dramatically than he did. And he's right. He's right for all kinds of geostrategic and geopolitical reasons, and he's right for all manner of humanitarian reasons. And he's right because of what I've just said. If we don't stop it, it could lead us to much worse. So that's the bottom line on Ukraine, I think.

ZR: Let us switch gears and talk about the Julian Assange case. Britain's High Court last week finished two days of court hearings on the question of whether to grant the WikiLeaks founder and award winning journalist Julian Assange an appeal against his extradition to the United States, where he will face espionage charges. Just to step back a bit and provide a recap. Previously, a judge had blocked Assange's extradition due to concerns for his health, in particular that he might kill himself if he's extradited to the U.S.. However, the U.K. High Court reversed that decision following a 2022 appeal by the United States that gave reassurances that it would not transfer Assange to a maximum security prison called ADX Florence or subject him to harsh regimen known as special administrative measures and perhaps in the future transfer him to Australia. Human rights organizations, as well as major media organizations, including the Australian Parliament, have condemned the persecution under the 1917 Espionage Act, which they claim would set a new precedent and criminalize journalism that is critical of U.S. national security. This case took place in the same month where one of the fiercest critics of the Russian president Putin, Alexei Navalny, died of mysterious circumstances in a prison in the Arctic. Like Assange, Navalny also published material about corruption, however, in his case in Russia, and was very vocal on social media, openly criticizing the Russian establishment. In the case of Navalny, however, the media and political uproar was humongous. So far, the United States and European Union implemented hundreds of new sanctions, with the U.S. alone adding 600. White House national security spokesman John Kirby stated that this is just the start and more action will be undertaken soon. Can you comment on these two cases and do you think they should be treated differently?

LW: I do not. There are differences, of course, as there always are. But I was struck this morning in a conversation I had with another individual almost at first light, it just came out

of the blue. He asked me the question. He said: "What's the difference between Alexei Navalny and his situation and Julian Assange?" And so we had a conversation about it, and both of us agreed at the end of the conversation, – and this is no shrinking violet to whom I was talking – it's not that different. We've got Navalny on the one side being hailed as a hero by those in the West, particularly in the United States. And we got Assange with lots of people on his side, most intellectually, because of the spectre of the attack on journalists. And I think that is a genuine concern. When you punish a journalist – and that's what WikiLeaks and that's what Julian Assange were engaged in, journalism – when you punish them the way we're talking about it, using the draconian rhetoric of World War One and relic of Woodrow Wilson's bent to fascism from time to time, you are just resurrecting hell for the present. And, to do this and then to extoll Alexei Navalny on the other side, that's utter, utter hypocrisy. It's total hypocrisy. What you were saying is the truth. And the truth is Julian Assange exposed the crimes of the American government, particularly the Pentagon, and that videotape of the Apache helicopter murdering those innocent civilians in Iraq and so much else. And everyone I know in the security complex in this country has said, some grudgingly, to be sure, that nothing that he revealed, that WikiLeaks revealed, caused anything more than embarrassment. There were no real hard security problems with what he revealed.

And on the other hand, we go after Vladimir Putin, the terrible nemesis of the world for going after Navalny. And I'm not trying to excuse him, I'm just pointing out the hypocrisy here. You go after him for that and you go after Julian Assange and you go after him the same way Putin went after Navalny. I mean, with no real reason to go after him other than perhaps the threat to your reputation, your government, and the embarrassment that's been caused. This is preposterous, but that's what we're engaged in today. Of all the things that troubled me nowadays and, you know, I've read about the William Randolph Hearst time when the Yellow Press got all the wars that we wanted and all the other things that occurred post-Civil War and even pre-Civil War in this country, I can read about them and I can say, Yeah, that was wrong. But there has been progress since then; otherwise, what the hell are any of us doing in this world? And yet, we don't seem to be able to prevent ourselves from resorting to the very worst practices of our evil past. Whether it's prosecuting the Indians from one end of the country to the other and ethnically cleansing them, or whether it's the way we treated Black Americans for so long and in some cases, economic mostly, we still treat them, the way Netanyahu treats non-Jewish citizens of Israel, for example, and then goes on television and claims that those people have the same rights as Israeli citizens. Are you kidding me, Mr. Prime Minister? Have you been to Nazareth lately? That's the only place I know of where they really are fairly well off. About 25% are Christians, and about 70% are Muslims of a 75,000 population center. But that's it Mr. Prime Minister. Everywhere else – and those aren't even full citizens; not really. So we lie to ourselves. We are classic hypocrites. But in the case of Ukraine and Julian Assange and Alexei Navalny, and in the case of Gaza, it's costing thousands of lives and it's costing justice. There is no justice to bringing Julian Assange back to the United States under extradition. There is only injustice, and we will perpetuate it.

ZR: You mentioned Gaza; this was going to be my next question. Let me first recap the situation for our viewers. Since October 7th attack of Hamas that killed at least 1200 Israelis,

which included around 370 military personnel, Israel launched an air and ground assault in Gaza, first in the north and then towards Khan Younis in the south, which this thus far has killed at least 30,000 Palestinians and wounded 70,000 more, majority of them being women and children. Despite receiving major international condemnation it is expected that Israel will set a ground offensive in Rafah soon. The Israeli Defense Force IDF recently presented to the War Cabinet its plan to both evacuate Palestinian civilians from Rafah and to militarily destroy what they claim are some of the last Hamas battalions. Around 1.4 million people who fled the north, a country trapped there, and have nowhere to go. How do you assess Israel's military goal of eliminating Hamas thus far, and in your view, will the military objective in Rafah move Israel closer to its stated objective?

LW: I watched Netanyahu's interview with great interest on Face the Nation a day ago, I guess it was now. She did, the interviewer, did not give him too much wiggle room, and he continued to state his major points over and over again, which included his objectives for going after Rafah. Those objectives are nonsense, except for the one where he sort of elided into: Well, we're going to protect civilians. That's a genuine humanitarian objective, and I applaud that one. I don't believe for a moment that he means it, but I applaud it nonetheless. Here's what I'm hearing: The IDF is so stretched after what it's done in Gaza, that there's no way they can mount the sort of ground offensive they want to on Rafah. So he is seeking and in his remarks, I saw evidence of that, he is seeking a space of breathing room. I've been told it could be as long as three weeks that he needs to either do one or two things, or perhaps both: Reposition troops in Gaza so that he has enough to do the kind of ground offensive he wants to in Rafah or call up thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of new Israeli reservists to flesh out the ranks. Maybe both, if he really wants to conduct the kind of offensive that he keeps talking about within his cabinet that he wants to conduct. And here's something that troubles me, too. Even people like a fellow whom I might have thought was a hope, a faint hope but a hope, Benny Gantz, agrees, apparently; publicly, he said he agrees with this philosophy. So here we are getting this time that is really necessary for redeployment or call up or both of the Israeli Defense Force. So he needs all this time. He also needs all this time because he's got to work out, and he seems to think he's going to from his remarks on Face the Nation, the return of the remainder of the hostages, or at least many of them. And what he might do in concert with Hamas in terms of releasing Hamas prisoners, to make sure they're not too dangerous and to make sure that he doesn't look – and this is more important than they're not too dangerous, I think – make sure they're not a blight on his political standing in Israel. Because the Israelis will know pretty much that he's relieved some pretty dangerous people. So he's got all this to mix and mingle, and he's got a tenuous hold, I think, on his position in Likud and ultimately in the prime ministership, which he wants to maintain at all costs because he's going to go to jail if he doesn't.

This is all a stew out of which a number of possibilities exist, I think. Some of them are really disquieting. One is, there are signs of this already developing that he widens the war and he uses Hezbollah in order to do that. He would also, I think, ultimately like to widen the war by getting the United States to conduct strikes against Iran, not its militia in Syria or Iraq, but against Iran proper. Maybe it would be air attacks, relentless air attacks carried out from both

Al Udeid in Qatar, and also from carriers based in the North Arabian Ocean, against Iran's nuclear facilities, at a minimum. He wants the war widened and he wants Iran taking on. He's wanted that ever since he gained the prime ministership. He waxes hot and cold on it, but he's wanted the U.S. to do Israel's job vis-a-vis Iran. He thinks Iran is the big threat in the region. He would love to see this war get them involved. The Houthis being involved has thrown a little bit of a wrench in that, because they have gotten involved, primarily because – and they said yesterday that they will stop immediately if Gaza ceases, if the killing of civilians in Gaza ceases. That's the reason they got involved. So he started that. I'm not sure he wanted that. But if it gets the United States ultimately to react against Iran itself, then he will accomplish his purpose. So in this period of waiting, where ostensibly, as he said on Face the Nation, we're waiting for a good deal for the hostages, we're waiting for the situation in Rafah to stabilize to the point where he can do what he needs to do. One of the things he said there, which I don't believe for a second, and she caught him in this and he could not answer, well: where are they going? Because he said he's going to reposition the 1.4 million Gazans, so they don't take too many casualties. Where are they going? First, he said, in the north Gaza. Then he corrected himself – she got tongue tied a little bit, so he corrected himself or corrected her, whichever way to look at it – and he said, they're just going north of Rafah. North of Rafah. He did not mean they're going back into North Gaza. They can't go back to the North of Gaza. Ben-Gvir and the settlers are getting ready to start settlement development there, and they are ready to do it with modern Israeli weapons, not with their shotguns and, you know, axes and shovels and everything like they did in the West Bank. They're going to use real weapons now, and they're going to settle. They're going to begin settling in Gaza. I don't know how this is going to turn out, but I do know that this is a real mix of things that he described some carefully, some not so carefully; like, where is he going to move them. When she said, "Well, you can't move them into Egypt", oh, he went on about it: "Egypt knows the peace treaties; good for both of us. They won't violate that. They won't do anything". Well, the assumption there was, well, you might push some into Egypt, hmm? Because you're saying it won't bother Egypt? No. I'm going to put them just north of Rafah, while I destroy Rafah. Where are they going to go after that?

All these questions, and then he comes down to the three things he's going to accomplish. One of which is the utter and complete destruction of Hamas. I'm sorry, Mr. Prime Minister, if you really think that, you need some brain pills. You are not going to destroy Hamas. All of my intelligence sources tell me, and they're not just U.S. sources, they tell me that Hamas is in pretty damn good shape. That they really haven't taken all that many serious casualties, nor have they taken a serious diminution of their capacities; whether it's ammunition, water, food, whatever, tunnel strength, whatever, they still have a formidable power. So it boils down to him putting this patina, this cosmetic patina, of I've solved all your problems, Israelis, so leave me in power. I'm going to finish solving them in Rafa, watch me do it. It takes all of that and it says, and you're going to be at the end of this with maybe 30 to 40,000 civilians, half of whom probably are children and women dead. And you're going to be at a point where it can start over again in less than a decade, and most assuredly will. Because your comments on the two state solution, whether it's a proposal being binded by Biden and Blinken or being sort of, you know, tentatively agreed to by Saudi Arabia and others, it isn't going to make any

difference. They're going to come back. As long as you leave the Palestinians, those that are left hanging out on a limb with no place to go and leave Hamas with capacity, you are going to have to deal with it again. But he looks at it this way, the same way American politicians looked at Guantanamo Bay when Donald Rumsfeld said, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. You know, Will Taft, Powell's lawyer, said, What are you going to do? You got a 16 year old down there. You're going to keep him in jail for 70 years? He might live that long. And Rumsfeld said, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Rumsfeld died. He didn't have to cross that bridge. We still have people down there. That's what Netanyahu is looking at. I'll be out of here when this next attack occurs. And so someone else will have to deal with it. That's a hell of a statesman isn't it?! A hell of a statement. But I have to say, it's matched. It's matched, in my view, by London, Berlin, Paris. Oh, Macron saying he thinks maybe France ought to go into Ukraine and help the Ukrainians. NATO should go in. Come on guys. When is somebody with adult brain power going to enter this fray?

ZR: Lawrence Wilkseron, retired Army colonel. Thank you so much for your time today.

LW: Thank you, Zain.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Please don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel. And more importantly, to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. YouTube, which is owned by Google, can censor or shadow ban us at any time, especially in times of crisis where we are providing another perspective. So make sure to join these platforms. You will find the link to them in the description of this video. And if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure to donate a small amount today via Patreon, PayPal, or bank account. There's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera light audio, in the case of our German videos, translation, voice-over, correction. If all of our 145,000 subscribers would donate just a few euros every month via Patreon or our bank account, we will be able to cover costs for the next four to five years. I'm your host, Zain Raza. See you next time.

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