



Ukraine assassinates Russian General, Nord Stream & West's Hypocrisy in Syria

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in, I'm your host Zain Raza. Before we begin this video, I'm pleased to share with you the second update to our crowdfunding campaign that we launched recently with the goal of raising €55,000 by January 10th so that we can continue with our independent and non-profit journalism in 2025. In last year's campaign we raised €53,000 thanks to 1710 donors and in this year's campaign we've managed to raise so far €20,600 thanks to 780 donors. In other words, we've reached 37 % of our target, and there's still 3 weeks to go. So if you're watching our videos regularly and have not donated this far, please take a few moments and just donate a small amount of three to five dollars or euros. If all of our 155,000 subscribers or even just the amount of people watching this video right now would donate that amount today, we'll not only be able to reach our crowdfunding target but also be able to improve our capacities for the coming year. Today I'll be talking to

independent journalist and author Fabian Scheidler. Fabian Scheidler has written several books, the latest being *The End of the Mega Machine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization*. Fabian, welcome back.

Fabian Scheidler (FS): Thanks for having me.

ZR: I would like to start the interview with the Nord Stream pipeline, especially given the fact that this story has by and large disappeared from the mainstream media, despite the bombing of the pipeline being the biggest act of sabotage and environmental disaster in recent European history. You were one of the first European journalists to interview Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh, who in 2023 broke the story that the US had blown the Nord Stream pipeline as a part of a secret CIA operation. Last month you wrote an article for *Le Monde diplomatique* entitled, quote: *Nord Stream Hide and Seek Deep Under the Baltic Sea*, unquote, in which you sought to trace the perpetrators as well as analyze the various narratives. First, could you summarize the prevailing narratives about the Nord Stream pipeline bombing and the question it raises? And secondly, can you talk about the German government's approach, in particular, whether it has gone far enough to bring those who it deems responsible for the attacks to justice?

FS: Yes. Basically, there have been three narratives around for the last two and a half years since the bombing, more than two years now. And the first one was Russia is responsible, which was ludicrous from the outset because they have no motives and there are no indications. And even the American administration or the secret services have said they have no indication that Russia is behind. The second narrative came up with Seymour Hersh's report, who said that it was the Biden administration. And the third story came up a month later with the idea that a sailboat with six persons was responsible for all of this. And there had been a lot of reporting on this third story, very little reporting, virtually no reporting on the Hersh story, but very much so on the Andromeda sailboat story. And the theory is that it was a Ukrainian operation. And some reports say that Volodymyr Zelensky knew about it or even was in favor of the operation, and that he does try to stop it, or another story is that he didn't know anything about it, but both of it is not credible. So we have basically two possible narratives here. One is Ukraine is responsible, the Ukrainian military and government or the US administration. And now the most interesting thing is that in both cases, either this way or that way or a combination of both, which is also possible, in either case, it was one of our closest allies who bombed German infrastructure; crucial energy infrastructure. Now, given the fact, that extraordinary fact, it's really surprising that most of our media are not that interested in finding out who is responsible. And even more so, our government is not really interested. You know, when you believe in the Ukraine story, you should try to get hold of some of the responsables, their names. And there was an arrest warrant for one of the supposed perpetrators. But the Polish government didn't do anything, although they were obliged to do so to arrest that person. He escaped to Ukraine and the German government apparently is doing hardly anything. So it's extraordinary. So if our allies bomb our infrastructures, our government is not doing its duty, which is to protect German citizens and German infrastructures. And of course, all of this has huge geopolitical implications, because

if it really turns out that Ukraine was responsible, then how can we go on arming the country that has bombed our infrastructure in Germany? If the US was responsible, how can we claim that NATO is the beacon of Western values and so on? So, of course, because all of this is very critical, our government and our mainstream media do not want to talk really about it.

ZR: Yes, one of the most notable things is that the German government has not even sought any extradition from the people that it claims have conducted the attacks. Nor has the media, as you've claimed, done any more research or findings. It seems to me that the media was more interested in proving that it was not the US, but some other person. Have you been able to contact the German government or have other journalists tried to contact the German government and at least try to pressure them to seek justice for whatever, whoever it was?

FS: Well, you know, Zain, many journalists, including myself, have asked the German government to provide more details and the prosecutor general as well. But there's hardly any response. They always say that it's not in the interest of the state to give that information, which is a way of saying that other secret services are implied. So basically, the reason they give for not telling anything is implicating that "friendly" secret services and other governments are implied in the whole case.

ZR: Let us switch to the situation in Syria, where more than a week has passed since Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, also known as HTS, successfully overthrew the government of Bashar al-Assad and focus on international developments around this. Although HTS is still on the European Union's terror list, a reassessment of policy towards Syria is currently taking place. For example, the EU has sent German diplomat Michael Ohnmacht to Damascus to begin talks with the caretaking government formed by the HTS group, stating that it is too early for sanctions to be lifted until HTS takes concrete steps to distance itself from al-Qaeda and ensure the protection of minorities. The EU foreign ministers also agreed that Iran and Russia should have no place in Syria's future, which also include any military bases or activities. What is your assessment of European policy since the fall of Assad? And do you think they're really concerned about al-Qaeda and the protection of minorities, or is something else driving their reassessment?

FS: Well, again, this is another amazing story. Do you remember the War on Terror? Do you remember 9/11? Do you remember who was supposed to be behind 9/11? al-Qaeda. And the West, especially the Americans, but European countries as well, waged a 20-year war against al-Qaeda, devastating, one country after another to go after al-Qaeda. And now we have al-Jolani in charge in Syria, who has conquered Syria in an amazing way, by the way. And now he seems to be our friend. And the fact that he was in charge of the al-Nusra front, which is an offspring of al-Qaeda, is almost forgotten. And people say, well, he's a moderate rebel. Well, he disbanded from al-Qaeda some years ago, and so on and so forth. But isn't this amazing? I mean, the Western hypocrisy is so blatant here, because either we think that al-Qaeda is really the worst thing that ever happened to humanity since the ancient Mesopotamians, or we think that they are our allies. And so the fact is that all the Western talk about territorial integrity, for example, sovereignty, is just not valid in the case of Syria. There is a terrorist in charge and we are negotiating with him, but with nobody else,

apparently. And the second interesting thing here is that many other foreign governments were involved in this downfall of Assad. The Turkish government mainly. We don't know if the US was involved. It wouldn't surprise me if it turns out that the US was involved because they have been sponsoring jihadist terrorists for decades, for more than 40 years since Afghanistan, the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. So on the one hand, they were fighting them, on the other hand, they were nourishing them if it served their interest. So the fact here is that foreign forces, at least Turkey, and also of course Israel, we can talk about that later, Israel has bombed Syria, really 800 bombings since the fall of Assad, and nobody is really complaining that foreign governments are conquering the territory of another state. Now, I don't want to defend Assad by any means. It was a terrible regime and the Syrian people should be lucky to have a better government. But given the fact that a NATO member, Turkey, was so deeply involved in supporting al-Jolani, it's really concerning and we don't know what will come out of that. Al-Jolani claims that there will be a democratic process, but I think we should watch that very carefully.

ZR: What's also very noteworthy is that neither the US nor Israel conducted any airstrikes while HTS was conducting its offensive. And so far, since Israel has taken much of the Golan Heights, HTS has not come out and condemned any of that quite strongly. But returning back to the developments in Syria, there's not only international intervention taking place at the diplomatic and economic level, but also military intervention on the ground as you've mentioned. Turkey is active through its Islamic militia and is putting pressure on the Syrian Democratic Forces, SDF, led by the Kurds in northern and northeastern Syria. The US supports these forces and is also stationed in this region. Although Germany's main primetime news program, the Tagesschau, mentions US presence, it does so mainly in terms of protecting the SDF and other minorities. The Tagesschau fails to mention that the US military is present there without a UN mandate and that the eastern part of the region has important oil and gas reserves and infrastructure that the US previously did not want Assad to take over. In addition, Israeli forces are carrying out what they call one of the largest military offensive operations in their history, and as you've mentioned, have bombed somewhere 480 targets, including airports, air defense installations, fighter jets, naval ships and other strategic infrastructure. According to some estimates, they have destroyed 80% of Syria's military capacity. Furthermore, Israel continues to encroach on the Golan Heights, which it has occupied since 1967, despite the fact that the United Nations considers it to be Syrian territory and has called Israel to withdraw and respects Syria's territorial integrity. According to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel plans to invest more than eleven million in the Golan Heights and double the population there. When asked about Israel's actions in the Golan Heights, Christian Wagner, spokesperson for the German Foreign Ministry, recently made the following response. And let me quote him here, quote: "The settlement of the civilian population is contrary to the law of occupation, which is based on the Geneva Convention. We call on Israel to refrain from this project", unquote. How do you assess Israel's actions thus far in Syria? And secondly, does the German government's position go far enough to address the concerns that the UN has?

FS: The German government has supported Israel for decades. And since October 7, since

the Gaza war started, the German government supported Israel with huge arms sales financially and also diplomatically. And now Amnesty International has put out a report that says that what happens in Gaza is indeed a genocide. What the International Court of Justice is, of course, considering and has called a plausible genocide. So the position of Germany concerning Israel is quite clear. It's: We don't care for the genocide convention. We don't care if Israel is committing genocide there. We don't care for the Geneva Conventions even. And it's very obvious that Israel has been conducting war crimes in Gaza and Lebanon and now in Syria on a daily basis. So I think the position of the German government is deeply concerning. It's also concerning when you consider German history. I mean, what is the lesson from the Holocaust? Is it that you support other people for committing any war crimes? Or is it rather what I suppose it should be to protect international law, to protect human rights, no matter who is concerned, if they are Muslims or Jews or Christians or whoever? So I think it's really very concerning, the approach of the German government. Now, when it comes to Israel's actions in Syria, of course, it's completely lawless. I mean, they are bombing a sovereign country. Even if the government changes, that doesn't mean that the country has stopped being sovereign. Well, the West is talking all the time about sovereignty, territorial integrity when it comes to Ukraine and Russia, and rightfully so. I mean, international law is very clear here. But when Israel is bombing the hell out of Syria and is destroying the military, it's sort of okay. So they are entitled to do that. This is really baffling. And concerning the Golan Heights, the occupation of the Golan Heights has been illegal from the outset. Trump has recognized the illegal occupation of the Golan Heights and now they are moving even further into the Golan Heights, which is all completely illegal. I mean, almost everything that Israel is doing now in the region is not only illegal, but so deeply dangerous because it sets a really precarious region on fire. And we don't know where that ends. And the whole idea that all this will lead to a stable Middle East, formed in the image of what Israel and the US wants to have in the Middle East is deeply erroneous because there are so many people in the Middle East who don't like that kind of order that they try to impose.

ZR: Let us switch our attention to the latest developments surrounding the war in Ukraine. On December 7th, US President-elect Donald Trump met with Ukrainian President Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, where Trump called for an immediate ceasefire, while Zelensky, on the other hand, underscored the need for security guarantees. It is expected that once Trump comes into power, he will push for negotiations that will include territorial concessions. Just when we think the situation is calming down, today the media is reporting that Russia General Igor Kirillov, head of Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces, was killed with a hidden bomb in a scooter. Al Jazeera is reporting that a source in Ukraine's secret service, SBU, says the agency claims responsibility for the assassination. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, has come out strongly and stated that Ukrainian leadership will face imminent consequences for the killing of Kirillov. Can you first comment on the assassination and what impact it might have on the war and negotiations, and then talk about whether a ceasefire that Trump has mentioned is even realistic at the states, especially given the high price both countries have already paid in terms of political capital, money and lives?

FS: Yes, you know, the assassination has to do with the cart blanche that the US has given to Ukraine to escalate the situation. The Biden administration was very clear, they allowed Ukraine to use long-range missiles to hit deeply into Russian territory, and so the Ukrainian government feels entitled to do whatever they want. They are playing with fire because Russia has changed its nuclear doctrine recently, stating that they can even use nuclear weapons in response to conventional strikes. This is deeply concerning. I mean, don't these people have children? Don't they want to survive themselves? I mean, if this turns into a nuclear war, I mean, we are all dead. You cannot really constrict or confine a nuclear war. There's a lot of research on it. So I think that's utterly crazy to escalate in this situation. When it comes to the facts on the ground, Ukraine is clearly losing the war. Russians are converging on Pokrovsk, which is a major infrastructural hub, and they might even seize Pokrovsk in the coming days or weeks. Ukraine is lacking people, and the morale is very, very grim because people feel that they are losing. And that's why we hear all this talk that Zelensky is ready for negotiations, although a year ago or so he excluded negotiations. It's even forbidden by law to negotiate with the Russians. I mean, people concerned with the matter also in Western governments know that Ukraine is losing the war. And so now the question is whether Trump will keep his promises to make peace. Of course, that doesn't only depend on him, but also on the Russians and the Ukrainians. But I think the Russians don't need a quick peace because they are gaining territory, they are winning. So it's basically Ukraine that needs a rapid ceasefire if it doesn't want to break down in this winter. So, I think still there is sort of a chance that there will be talks when Trump comes to power, I mean, we don't know if he will keep his promises. He's promising a lot. And, you know, in the US, he has promised to make America great again, which will not work. He has to deliver on something because his economic program will certainly not work because he's just cutting taxes for the rich, raising tariffs, which raises prices and inflation and so on. So he will get in a lot of trouble, I think, at home, so he sort of needs some kind of success abroad. We will see how this plays out. I think when it comes to the European governments, we should push our European governments on the negotiating table because otherwise this could lead to other disasters, first of all, for the Ukrainians and for the rest of the world as well.

ZR: In response to the Russian invasion of 2022, Germany set up a military fund of 100 billion euros to counter what it calls an existential security threat that Russia poses to Europe and Germany. According to Euro News, military spending increased in 22 of the 27 member states of the European Union. And overall, the EU's military spending is expected to reach 326 billion euros, or about 1.9 % of the EU's GDP. However, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte recently made it clear that even a 2% target is not enough to maintain long-term deterrence against Russia. The mainstream parties here in Germany have all ruled out diplomatic solutions when it comes to Ukraine during their election campaign and have stated that they will support Ukraine for as long as it takes. The only difference is that while the Christian Democrats and the Greens have both stated that they will ensure that Ukraine receives a Taurus cruise missile, the Social Democrats have ruled that out. The Christian Democrats are the strongest political force in Germany currently and are expected to be in government after the next election that is expected to take place in February of 2025. Friedrich Merz, who is the Chancellor candidate of the Christian Democrats, recently visited

Ukraine in which he stated that he will form a European contact group with Ukraine in response to Trump coming to power, which will also ensure that Ukraine continues to receive support for as long as it takes. In your view, do you think Germany's loner approach and solidarity for Ukraine, coupled with EU's militarization, will be enough to keep Ukraine afloat against a war with Russia, even while support in the US is dwindling?

FS: Now, first of all, we have to face the fact that in Germany, the spectrum of these parties is like it reminds me of the DDR. You know, there were the so-called bloc parties in the DDR who basically all say more or less the same thing. And we have the same thing when it comes to the new arms race. They are all frantically boosting the military, although the fact is that world spending on the military is now at an all time high, 2.4 trillion dollars each year and 1.3 trillion dollars is NATO alone. And Russia is just a maximum 10th of that. So the whole idea that Russia would attack NATO is just mind boggling. It's just nonsense. There's no indication that they would like to do so. And they have certainly no achievable goals in doing so. And the idea that if NATO doubles its military spending in the next ten years, that we are any safer is complete nonsense. So all these parties who are in favor of not only raising spending to 2% of GDP, now most parties in Germany are in favor of 3% of GDP. So all this is utter nonsense. It doesn't make us any safer. The only thing that makes us safer is a new peace architecture that we need to build on a European and a Eurasian and on a world level. And this is completely feasible. But unfortunately, we don't have any diplomats left in Germany and in most of Europe. So this leads nowhere. And the question whether Europe can keep Ukraine afloat, I think they don't. If they wanted to pay for all that the US paid in the last two years, they would have to destroy the European welfare state. They are already doing this. I mean, in Germany, there are huge cuts coming. There is a new wave of austerity coming. That was also the reason why the sitting government has broken down because they couldn't find a way to pay for more aid to Ukraine without new debt. And so the question that we are facing here is whether we will destroy our social systems to put all the money in the military, to keep a lost war going to the detriment of the Ukrainians and the rest of the world. So I think, I mean, it's just madness.

ZR: Let's return to Israel, especially its assault on Gaza, where the death toll has now surpassed 45,000 civilians. In November, Human Rights Watch published a report holding Israel responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. And as you mentioned, recently Amnesty International came out with a report which documents how Israel is violating the genocide convention with specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza. And let me quote their General Secretary Agnès Callamard here. Quote: "Month after month, Israel has treated Palestinians in Gaza as a subhuman group unworthy of human rights and dignity, demonstrating its intent to physically destroy them", unquote. We've already talked about the ICC and the double standards of the West, and I would like to take away this conversation from the legality and geopolitics and focus more on the humanitarian aspect. I mean, what does it mean to treat somebody subhuman and have a death toll of 45,000 people? Can you provide our viewers a more insight on the situation in Gaza and how the people there have been suffering as of late?

FS: Yes, first of all, 45,000 is probably largely underestimated because there are many people under the rubble. I mean, these 45,000 are only the people who have been counted, where you have a body. But all the people under the rubble are unaccounted for. And there are so many people starving right now. And winter is coming and people are starving in the thousands in Gaza. So it's a crime of really unimaginable dimensions. There's a recent study that says that 50% of children in Gaza would like to die because of the situation. They are so traumatized and they don't want to live anymore. They lost their fathers, their mothers, their family members. They saw how they died. They see their whole world shattered. They see the world around them just watching without doing anything. I mean, this is so deeply traumatizing. So not only the people who died, but also the people who survived are so damaged, their inner selves are destroyed by this ruthless campaign. And the West is so deeply complicit in this. I mean, this has been going on for more than a year now. What has the West done to stop any of that? If the US would say, we don't give you any arms anymore, this would stop in a very short period of time. So this is the first televised genocide that we are seeing every day. I mean, our media are not reporting that much. They don't show the suffering that much. But you can see it if you watch Al Jazeera or other news, or TikTok or whatever. And everyone who wants to know can know. And our governments are not only tacit, they still support the state of Israel in this assault. And this is really breathtaking for me. It's heartbreaking to see that. It's heartbreaking to see the powerlessness of all the people, millions of people protesting around the world to stop this utter crime. But our governments are just sitting there and doing nothing. And I think history will remember this. History will remember the names of those who were supportive of the genocide, including our whole government, the German government, the French government, the British government and the American government.

ZR: To my last question, and I wanted to specifically ask you this, as you yourself are an independent journalist and were also part of developing an independent media outlet called Kontext TV. Why, in your view, is it essential for people to support media outlets such as ours that do not accept money from corporations, governments and believe in the principle of independence?

FS: You know, about 60% of the German printed press are in the hands of a couple of billionaires. And we have the same situation and even worse in Britain, in France, in the United States. So the fact if the corporate class burns the media is, well, they can put out their narrative. And so it's usually important to have really independent media. Everyone claims to be independent, but most of them aren't really independent. And I think in systemic crises like these, we need more than ever independent information.

ZR: Fabian Scheidler, independent journalist and author, thank you so much for your time today.

FS: Thanks for having me.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. If you watched this video until the very end, please take a few more moments and find out how you can support us in our crowdfunding campaign. You will find all of the information in the description of this video. This is the

opportunity for all of our viewers to support one of the most important pillars of our democracy, namely an independent and free press. I thank you for your support and your generosity and for tuning in. I'm your host, Zain Raza. See you next time.

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