



Trump And NATO's Ukrainian Proxy Are Playing With Nuclear Fire

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Greece for Reason2Resist on June 3, 2025. This past weekend, less than 48 hours before Ukrainian and Russian officials were scheduled to meet in Istanbul for another round of peace talks, Ukraine launched highly provocative attacks on Russian airfields deep inside Russian territory. The attacks severely damaged and possibly destroyed at least several Russian strategic heavy bombers. This much has been admitted by the Russian Ministry of Defence. Ukraine claims that it succeeded in destroying dozens of Russia's strategic bombers. Now, at around the same time, two bridges collapsed in western Russia near the Ukrainian border. As a result of one of these incidents, a passenger train bound for Moscow derailed, killing seven persons and injuring 66. Ukraine has not taken responsibility for the destruction of the bridges, which is unsurprising, considering that those attacks would likely constitute acts of terrorism, and thus far Russia's government has not formally accused Ukraine, to my knowledge, of having destroyed the bridges and caused the deadly train derailment. According to the Russian news agency TASS, the Moscow Interregional Transport Prosecutor's Office has launched an investigation. Only four days before the Ukrainian attack on Russia's strategic bombers, a key part of Russia's nuclear deterrence, Donald Trump publicly warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that he was, quote, "playing with fire" by not agreeing to a ceasefire. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a member of Russia's powerful National Security Council, responded to Trump's bellicose language by writing on X that, quote, "I only know of one really bad thing, World War III. I hope Trump understands this".

Now, despite these ominous developments, Russian officials proceeded with peace talks in Istanbul yesterday, and those talks lasted for more than an hour, but appeared to result in little, if any, progress toward a lasting peace or even a temporary ceasefire. Ukrainian negotiators said Russia had, again, rejected an unconditional ceasefire, a key demand by Kiev and its allies in Europe and the US. The Russian team, meanwhile, said it had proposed a two- or three-day truce in certain areas of the vast front line, but gave no further details.

However, the two sides did agree to exchange all sick and heavily wounded prisoners of war, as well as those aged under 25. Now here to discuss all of this madness with me is John Helmer. John is the longest continuously serving foreign correspondent in Russia and the only Western journalist to direct his own bureau independent of national and commercial ties. Born and educated in Australia, then at Harvard University, John has also been a professor of political science, sociology and journalism, and an advisor to governments, including those of Greece and Australia. He's also published several books on military and political topics, and his latest book is titled: *Long Live Novichok! The British Poison Which Fooled the World*. Always a pleasure to have you on, John. Thank you for joining me again.

John Helmer (JH): Thank you for having me, Dimitri, good to be back.

DL: So John, why don't we start with the Ukrainian attacks on Russian airfields? What do you know about those attacks at this particular stage? In particular, how were they carried out and what damage did they actually do?

JH: I can go through a little bit of the unravelling of the logistics for you to take some of the exaggeration out of the Ukrainian claims and the Western media boosting of those claims. However, I don't want us to be focused too much on the microcosm of this attack, because of the scope, the ambition, and the meaning of the attack changes all realities in a way that hasn't happened before. Speaking microscopically and forensically, what can we say? I do not believe the Ukrainian claim that this operation has been in planning for 15 months, which therefore lets the US off the hook by placing responsibility, as it were, in the Biden administration. This is an operation comparable to the bombing of the Crimean Bridge, which logistically it shares much in common with; a truck was loaded with explosives and detonated on the bridge. But the explosives were loaded originally in Odessa, shipped under a humanitarian cargo across the Black Sea to Bulgaria, converted into concealed palettes, are placed on trucks or a truck which was then moved across to Georgia and then into Armenia and then onto the bridge in which apparently unknowing drivers at the end were guided by Ukrainian Secret Service operators and the detonation triggered remotely. The operation involved foreign intelligence agencies at the time identified on the Russian side as the British.

This time round, the difference is that we have explosives, weaponized in the form of drones, composed and combined, at least some of them, in a plant, a factory, a warehouse in Chelyabinsk region, placed aboard truck trailers, which were then moved across Russia to be very close to nuclear arms air force bases in the north, in the Romansk region in the south, in Irkutsk in the east, in Amur region, as well as Ivanovo and Ryazan near Moscow. Five bases were hit. The tarmacs of those bases required by the inspection protocols of the US Russian START and other related disarmament or nuclear arms treaties, those planes had to be outside of protection, outside of concealment, outside of revetments, so they could be photographed from the air. The satellite pictures of one of those bases, the Olenya base, were shown in 2024 by an American blogger, and the invitation to attack them by a proxy not related to the United States was made pretty plain a year ago.

The claim that more than 40 aircraft have been destroyed at a penalty cost of some multiple of billions of dollars is almost certainly exaggerated. Based on the Ukrainian supplied videos, I think we're talking about somewhere between five and ten aircrafts damaged or destroyed. But the number is not so important. The logistic modus operandi is not so important. The fundamental thing to understand here is that a red line of gigantic meaning has been breached and that is to say here was a proxy enemy of Russia attacking the nuclear capable weapons of Russia required for mutual assured destruction in any nuclear war contest between Russia and the United States or between Russia, France and Russia and Britain, but since they're minor, this is the basis for more than a generation of nuclear assured deterrence, of nuclear weapon stability, of deterring nuclear war between the two are superpowers, the two nuclear-armed powers, Russia and the United States. By this means, the United State has been able to demonstrate, and those who believe the United States and its allies could make a surprise attack on Russia and win a nuclear war by attacking first and destroying Russia's capability to defend and retaliate. They have been encouraged by this.

The Russian side, it has been shown, was unable to effectively suppress the firing points. Effectively suppress the firing points was the phrase that President Putin used on May 22 in a meeting with government ministers to say: This is what we have decided to do in relation to Ukrainian drone and artillery and missile attacks on the westernmost regions of Russia, including Novorossiia regions of Donetsk, Khrushchev, Zaporizhzhia and Lugansk. He said at the time, we are aiming to effectively suppress the firing points and that was understood to refer to the special military operation, creating a buffer zone as part of a peace agreement and the ceasefire arrangements in negotiation with the US and the Ukrainians. Well, this shows, this event, the June Sunday attacks show that the firing points have now entered Russia and could go anywhere, depending on the ingenuity, the effective concealment and the coordination and simultaneity of the plan of attack in the future. And this is a nuclear arms threat to Russia. Therefore, what does it mean? What does it create? Well, in the first place, as...

DL: Before you go there, I want to ask you a question of the utmost importance. I think you've already foreshadowed your answer to this question, but I want to be very clear about this because it is critically important. In our prior discretion discussions about the Ukraine war, you and I, it's fair to say, have questioned whether Donald Trump is truly committed to a durable peace in Ukraine. And as I mentioned in my introduction, Trump directed highly bellicose language at Russia's government only four days before the Ukrainian attack, saying that Russia was playing with fire. This is not unlike, in my opinion, what happened with Nord Stream where Joe Biden declared standing beside the German chancellor at the time that the US would end Nord Stream if Russia invaded Ukraine, and sure enough, someone blew it up a few months later. Personally, John, I find it inconceivable that Ukraine carried out these attacks without Trump's knowledge and approval. And I also think, although I'm not a military expert, that it's highly unlikely that the US government did not help Zelensky to carry out the attack, his regime to carry out the attack. Do you agree with that assessment? And whether you and I are of that view, would it not likely be the Russian government's view,

which is the really important question, that the US government knew of and approved this attack?

JH: Well, I agree with your analysis, Dimitri, and what's remarkable for our audience to understand is how many of the expert podcasters currently working in this area are coming to the same view. Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, the former assistant and advisor to Secretary of State Colin Powell made this very clear and lucidly a few hours ago. The podcasters from the United States are all coming to the same view. Either Trump was knowing in advance and chooses to camouflage that, that's a point that I believe was the case during and after the attack on President Putin's helicopter, which occurred on May 20 when Putin visited the now-liberated Kursk region. We don't need to go into details. I've gone into details for the audience that wants to read the details. But Trump's behaviour, his remarks, when he said that something's happened to Putin, the way he speaks, either he knew in advance and knew because he made his remarks 12 hours after the helicopter attack, he either had known or should have been briefed and did or didn't remember so well, or he didn't care, and the latter is as damaging from a Russian point of view as if he knew and calculated because he was hostile. He warned in the remarks in the tweet that followed, that you quoted, May 27 – he made his first remarks about the helicopter event on May 25 – two days later, he's still attacking Putin and saying: "You're playing with fire". Well, the fire has been demonstrated to have been firepower of the Ukrainian side. Now there are many Russians including Oleg Tsaryov, the Ukrainian opposition leader now living in Crimea, who believed this was a CIA-assisted operation because the SBU, the security service of the Ukraine, has skited, boasted of its engagement directly in the airfield attack. The GUR, military intelligence organisation led by Budanov is almost certainly involved. Tsaryov has written and believes and not carelessly, was a GUR Budanov operation. The two agencies compete with one another, much as happens in any bureaucracy of competing intelligence agencies. Nothing special about that. But the SBU has claimed direct involvement and engagement, and they can't, based on the evidence we have, have a major secret like this for however many months, six to 15 or 18, from their CIA handlers. And how much of that intelligence goes up as a warning to headquarters at the CIA and from the CIA to the National Intelligence Committee headed by the purported reform leader, Tulsi Gabbard, and from her to Trump who gets one intelligence briefing a week and then one lunch with Vance which translates the big words in the briefing for him to simple ideas?! That's all that Trump gets.

But it's either true as you said that he was knowing and culpable in approving and calculating in approving, therefore culpable from the American point of view, or is it doesn't matter? Why? Because on the one hand, President Putin has finally come around and has said it more than once: The Americans can't be trusted to sign an agreement which they would implement and enforce. Well, what's to be said of the agreement for peace, the terms that were tabled in Istanbul on June 2, the day after. And the ceasefire arrangements accompanying that. For those who want to see the details of the Russian proposal, the memorandum, the term sheet, I've put that up on the Dancers with Bears website so you can read it a bit after listening to us. That set of terms for peace depend on the view that Trump can be trusted. But what you're saying as a fundamental level of distrust, whether based on a hunch, or a guess, or partial

evidence, or persuasive evidence about Trump as a person, no longer matters. They pulled off this operation and this operation is an operation that is strategically beneficial to those in the United States who believe, those in policy-making positions in the Pentagon, state, CIA, and NSC who believe that a war can be fought against Russia and won. And that Putin, the president of Russia, is vulnerable, indecisive, weak, and that must be exploited now. That's what they think. That's what they think they demonstrated through the Ukrainians on Sunday. Whether that proves a chain of cause and effect is possible, but it doesn't matter. The strategic consequence is the same.

DL: Now, I interrupted you. I think you were about to embark upon the all-important question of what Russia is likely to do now. So I'm most interested to hear your thoughts about that, acknowledging at the outset that it's extraordinarily difficult for anybody to say with a high level of confidence exactly what the Russians are going to do. But one would imagine because there has been this crossing of the red line, which is likely to have been done at least with the knowledge if not the approval and assistance of the US government, that we're going to see a response unlike any response we have seen thus far. I mean, I think that certainly is a possible outcome of this. And I think that that's probably going to be the case because the United States has gone so far in, if not enabling, at least allowing its proxy to do this. What is your view about this, John?

JH: Well, I've quoted both in print, and we'll say it again, Russian sources who say that if you accept the analysis of US knowing or being immaterial whether the US knew then, now what will happen, since that changes the realities in the negotiation in Istanbul, one question arises: Is there any point in continuing the negotiations? What's to be achieved? Except escalating demands for Russian concessions against terms that have been laid out by the Russian side, that's one issue. What's the point of continuing if this level of strategic imbalance has been achieved by the enemy? Second, what can Russia do to take the initiative away from the enemy, and by enemy I mean, the Empire. I mean the United States decision makers, their Ukrainian proxies and their allies. What can be done to take the escalation initiative away from them and deter them from this kind of operation? Again, what can be done to deter? To deter and therefore restore strategic balance, that means mutual assured destruction, mutually assured deterrence. Well, what's Russia got to make that level of deterrence? The one side has always been forecasted and the boys crying wolf for many years now since the special military operation began was suggested that Russia would use a tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield. Well it doesn't need to do that. It does not need to go to nuclear level on the battlefield. It's advancing slowly but surely westward. And the plan has been and the plan is laid out for the first time very clearly, the four regions will remain Russian – this has been laid out in the memorandum tabled yesterday in Istanbul – the four regions would be acknowledged internationally as part of Russia, plus Crimea, and a demilitarised zone – that's not the term used – would be created out of the rest, the rest of the Ukraine.

You can not imagine enforcing this, which is no surprise to you and me, we've been talking about it, no surprise, to our audience. You can't enforce it unless you recover the initiative, unless you deter the other side from believing they've got escalation dominance. The US

thinks that, Trump thinks that, Zelensky thinks that, Starmer thinks it, Macron thinks it, even a flibbity-jibbit like the president of Finland, Alexander Stubb thinks that. Okay, what can be done? Well, you then look at the portfolio, so to speak, of terrible surprise weapons that are available to the Russian side. And that's why I've called this the Oreshnik moment. Why? For the obvious reason, it's non-nuclear but could be. It's hypersonic, at a speed with multiple warheads that it cannot be defended by any known anti-aircraft system on the Ukrainian battlefield anywhere in Europe. It can be deployed against any nearby capital that's engaged in fighting Russia. If the Germans want to field Taurus, Berlin's a target. But the Oreshnik has already been demonstrated in Dnepropetrovsk.

So is the decision now, and Russia doesn't make decisions, Putin doesn't make quick decisions, it doesn't make emotional decisions, but the strategic logic, the operational necessity of the anticipation of what cannot be done, what can be done from the negotiations dictate a surprise retaliation. That's the Oreshnik moment. Will that weapon be used? Will it be tit for tat in the sense five airfields were struck, five aeroplanes hit, damaged, destroyed, or more? Do you hit that many targets? Do you make the arithmetic a symbolic message? Or do you demonstrate that you have an overwhelming capacity to destroy the other side's capacity to go on fighting in the confidence it can win?

The entire world Western press thinks that in the recent few day war between India and Pakistan, the Pakistanis won. This is completely false. But let me – and I've tried to explain why it's false on the website. We don't need to go into that, but I raise it as an example that the Americans know, because they tried to get a ceasefire that Pakistan employed after the Indians used their military force to remove the capacity of Pakistan to escalate to a higher level. How did they do that? They destroyed their air defences across the country. They destroyed their command control so that the Pakistan Air Force couldn't get up and couldn't target. They also hit the Sargodha air base where Pakistan stores its nuclear warheads and bombs. The Indian lesson is the lesson in recovering escalation dominance. Take your enemy's capacity to go up the ladder of escalation away. Make them afraid of and naked to your capacity. At one level to defeat them and your capacity to dictate the escalation ladder before you get nuclear. Now Russia has that capacity with the Oreshnik missile. The other other weapons in the inventory are less obvious, less dramatic, less message-carrying. What the Ukrainians with their helpers demonstrate – it was a demonstration. It's a demonstration effect. It didn't kill many people, I'm glad to say. Everybody's glad to say. Many more people were killed in the bombing of the bridges that derailed the trains. But the demonstration effect is the politics and military strategy of this. And so we're at the Oreshnik moment. That's what Russia can do if it does not...

DL: The other side would be emboldened, I would imagine, to escalate even further, assuming that Russia doesn't capitulate to their...

JH: That's the logic. If you don't – they will have the escalation confidence, and they'll use it; we would in their position. Why wouldn't we in their positions?

DL: One thing you didn't directly address in your comments just now was the question of whether the Oreshnik moment might be visited upon the territory or the military assets of a NATO country. Do you think we're at the stage now where Russia's leadership will seriously consider – and by the way, they could, you know, they don't necessarily have to attack the territory, the physical territory, they could take out, for example, naval vessels belonging to, let's speculate here, the Lilliputian military of the United Kingdom, which I think would be regarded by the Russian Federation as a rather attractive target if they were minded to go there. Do you think that we are at the stage where they would think seriously about going there?

JH: I don't think so. I don't mean this to be reassuring to the British, the French, the Italians, the Poles, or the Finns, or the Estonians, who've also interfered with Russian tankers moving down the Baltic. No, there's no need to do that. The need would arise as a pressing question, were Chancellor Merz, now described, uniformly across the Russian media and across the Russian leadership as a Nazi. Not even a neo-Nazi, a German one of the original type. He is the most fascist, Russia-hating, race-hating leader in Europe. And he's proposing a 50 billion rearmament programme for Germany as part of a 500 billion – I'm sorry, euro, that's the currency, programme for Europe and Germany aims to lead it and Germany's already redeploying its forces in Poland, in the Baltic states and so on. Were Merz's threat to supply the tariffs which comes with German technicians, German trainers, German officers, German master sergeants to the Ukraine, and were that weapon to be fired, Russia's made it very clear from Zakharova, Maria Zakharova, the foreign ministry spokesman, up to the president, that's an act of war by Germany. At that point, Berlin's a target.

But why use that opportunity early when you could, as the Russians have already demonstrated, hit the Germans where they're firing the weapon. That's already happened to the French. French military trainers, officers, advisors have been hit in regional centres where they've been based. The casualties may be somewhere around ten to 30, but the bodies, the casualties were hidden when the bodies were returned home. Similarly, there've been these deaths of US officers in Ukraine, which have been concealed. The numbers are small. It's been possible to camouflage why they died and so forth and so on. I don't believe it's either strategically necessary or politically useful to use a weapon against a NATO power unless NATO escalates. The problem now and what we're trying to urge people to understand is we are at a nuclear threshold. And the other side that the Ukrainians, Americans, Germans and so forth think they can win if they can escalate because they think Putin will not respond and retaliate at a level to deter them from escalating. Where does the deterrence ladder stop and what does it stop? This can be done on the Ukrainian battlefield and if it fails there then – if it fails in circumstances in which the Germans are engaged – then we have this question answered in a different way.

DL: Now you mentioned in the course of explaining what happened here that the New START Treaty requires that these nuclear strategic bombers be visible to the satellites of the other side. This seems to me to be a profound abuse of that requirement because you're actually something that is supposed to make both sides more secure is being used by one side

to make the other side more insecure. So it's at a bare minimum a profound demonstration of bad faith on the part of the Americans that they would allow this or even worse enable it to happen. And this thing is supposed to come to...

JH: And a silence since has happened. I mean, it's very well said, Dimitri, but they've been silent.

DL: Yes, they haven't condemned it. It's amazing.

DL: You would think that they would at least have the good sense to pretend that they are opposed to it, but they're not even doing that. So, I mean, there is extraordinary incompetence here. I just want to, if I just may, about this treaty.

JH: Well, it worked.

DL: Go ahead, go ahead. And I'll complete my question afterwards.

JH: No. Well, I was going to say, by omission and by commission, Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State and acting National Security Advisor, took a telephone call from Foreign Minister Lavrov late on the evening of Sunday after the events – a matter of if the attacks happened around 1:30 Moscow time and they were simultaneous across the country, around 22:00 Moscow time, so nearly ten hours later, Lavrov telephoned Rubio. Now Rubio's readout of that telephone call is a two-line, three-line sentence, the smallest readout I have ever seen when the State Department talks to the Russian Foreign Ministry. Saying we've had a call and almost nothing else. The readout from the Lavrov side said that Rubio gave his condolences for the train wrecks. Condolences for the train wrecks, but that implied by Lavrov saying it: Look at the guy, he's saying we're sorry this happened to you, but we're not sorry THAT happened to you and he's saying that by not saying it. That's the level of trust which is advertised quite discreetly by Lavrov on the Russian side as of Sunday night. But on Monday, President Trump had the smallest official log I've seen since he came into power on January 20. He did nothing listed on his official schedule for the day except eat lunch at one o'clock. And not a single tweet. That means by silence, they're endorsing what happened.

DL: So this brings me back to the START Treaty. It's set to expire in about eight months' time. Of course, the Bush administration demolished the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The first Trump administration took out the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. Nuclear disarmament is hanging by a thread. Do you think there's any prospect at this stage of START being salvaged, or are we going to see that last vestige of nuclear disarmament disappear in February of next year?

JH: I can't be hopeful. In all of these, let's call them, sequenced wars that the US is developing, whether Trump succeeds in making the Ukraine a sideshow, a minor war priority, and sequences to the bigger priority of fighting China, whether he succeeds in making a sort of partial settlement with Iran to tie off the possibility of an attack, an Israeli declaration of war against Iran, whether he succeeds in the sequencing of that war making, every indication is that the Trump administration is escalating war on all fronts. But having the Europeans

take more responsibility in the Ukraine sector, on the northern front, even as far as the Arctic front, but give or take whether the US takes control of Greenland. So if it sequences over to its priority war against China, we're talking about war-making. We're not talking about peacemaking. And we're talking about war making in a neighbourhood in the East where you have two nuclear powers. We have China as a major nuclear power and we have North Korea as a major ballistic missile threat.

So, it's very difficult to imagine that the Trump administration has an appetite for strategic arms deterrence. And speaking of it politically, not emotionally, not individually, not psychologically, not even cognitively, which is required if one's dealing with a president like this one, if one deals with it politically, what's the political gain for Trump in having a complicated strategic arms limitation agreement when he's announced the Golden Dome? What's the Golden Dome? The Golden Dome is a revised version of Reagan's Star Wars of essentially having an arms race in space, which Trump has presented as a boon for all the military industries of every blue constituency you can think of, so it makes money. Second, the amount of spending involved is huge and I recommend to the audience to listen to or read Theodore Posto's analysis of why it's impossibly expensive and impossibly unsuccessful. But leave that aside. Trump is committed, he's offering it as a political gold card to his voters, his voter base, and to the country, and that's a strategically destabilising multiplication of arms in space. If you're doing that for those political reasons, and he thinks it's good for his political future – the midterms for the Republican Party and the next campaign, whether he wants or tries to run again or will dictate who his successor will be, whatever – the political calculation seems to me to mitigate the appetite Trump would have for strategic arms limitation. He's not likely to go the Reagan path of the peacemaker at that. Especially if on the way to being the peacemaker of strategic nuclear arms he fails to make peace in Iran, he fails to make peace against the Houthis in the Red Sea, he fails to make peace against the genocide in Gaza, he fails to make peace in the Ukraine. Have I left a war out that he's gonna fail at? I don't think so.

DL: Two things have happened in West Asia, I think, which are compounding the perception in the non-Western world that the Trump administration is utterly untrustworthy, duplicitous, and agreement incapable. The first is that the Iranians have made it crystal clear that they are not going to abandon altogether nuclear enrichment. And Trump just came out with a statement that he will not tolerate any enrichment by Iran after a report emerged that they had dropped the demand, the US had dropped the demand that they abandoned enrichment altogether. And so, as I've said many times, and I was more convinced of this than ever when I returned from Iran recently and spoke to the head of the spokesperson of the Atomic Energy Organisation in Iran, who was adamant, under no circumstances will they abandon enrichment. They view that as their right and it's essential for national security. They see absolutely no reason why the Americans and the Israelis and others should have the ability to do it and not them. So he's issuing, or his administration, conflicting statements on that front, and he's taking a position now most recently, which is intolerable to Iran. And something else that happened in West Asia is that Witkoff persuaded somehow or, you know, representatives of the administration, Hamas, to release the last American Israeli detainee. And obviously

that was not done for nothing. Hamas must have expected some benefit in exchange for releasing that hostage. And not only has there been no material benefit, the situation has gotten worse. You know, just now something that's dubbed by the Palestinians the Witkoff Massacre, where they lured, you know, thousands of starving Palestinians and killed, I think dozens of them and wounded a couple of hundred of them. So, you and I have talked about this previously, John. I think that we're headed for war with Iran. I just don't see how we're going to avoid that. And when you see the Trump administration engaging in this kind of provocation with Russia, a nuclear-armed state, why would anybody doubt his willingness to go to war with Iran? I mean, I just don't see how we're going to avoid that. Has your view evolved in that regard?

JH: No, no, I defer to your reporting from Iran being first class, Dimitri, and I rely on your judgement about that. It would seem, and I can only second your interpretation of the facts, that Witkoff proved to Hamas that he's a liar, and that the United States, having gone through Witkoff to accept some level of enrichment, have now gone back to zero enrichment, accompanied by that planted story that I saw in the Financial Times a couple of days ago, claiming that there is objective international evidence that the Iranians have gotten enrichment up to somewhere between the 20 and 50% level. I mean, when I see plants in the Financial Times, a Japanese propaganda organ run out of London, I don't believe it. So I kind of don't read to the bottom to figure out its truth value. I stop when I realise it's a plant to support the zero enrichment line. Which is a non-starter, and if it's a non starter, then we head towards an Israeli attack backed by the United States on Iran and Iran retaliation, which puts us in a war, which my US colleagues, your US colleagues and friends believe, the Pentagon wouldn't be so stupid as to attempt because the risk to US bases aircraft, as well as the Israeli fortress of being lost, being defeated, being hurt, very great. But so I agree with you, that's my long-winded way of saying it. I agree with you that the US side can't be trusted to make peace. Everything it does suggests it aims to make war.

DL: Let's close out by talking about what happened yesterday, John. We're going to switch back to the Ukrainian theatre of conflict. Sorry for that tangent, but I just had to just touch on the subject of Iran because that seems to me to be heading in the wrong direction. In any case, in light of all of the things that you've said, all of these, I think, very compelling arguments you've made, what was the purpose of yesterday's exercise and what did it accomplish, if anything, in your view? I'm talking, of course, of Istanbul.

JH: Well, bear in mind the purpose changed on Sunday. In other words, the agenda had been set. It's my understanding corroborated in part by General Kellogg's moments on Fox News and CBS and ABC where he confirmed that the Ukrainian term paper, the Ukrainian proposal for peace was 22 points in length and had been delivered to the Russian side some days ago. We also know from my Russian sources and some of them have published that the Russian memorandum was delivered to the United States around May 28, around Thursday. So both sides already knew what the other side was intending to say. But the agenda between Thursday and Monday changed because of the attack on the Tupolevs in the five airfields. But it left everybody locked into going to Istanbul. That meant that what Istanbul II or the

second session of Istanbul amounted to was a public relations exercise of disclosing papers, not negotiating terms of each side demonstrating it's for peace and trying to, as the phrase they keep using, putting the ball in the other side's court. At the same time, it had clearly been agreed before Monday – now, bear in mind, the Monday meeting lasted for one hour and 14 minutes. I can say that because there's a Russian state medium, RIA Novosti, which gives you online, live, moment-by-moment summaries. The actual session, full open session, lasts one hour and 14 minutes, but before that there was a two and a half hour session between the Russian delegation leader Vladimir Medinsky and at least the Ukrainian leader, Defence Minister Rustam Umarov, and probably the presidential assistant andriy Yermak, who's more powerful than Umarov because he is sort of the alter go of Volodymyr Zelensky. So there was a two and a half hour negotiation in private, not disclosed before the open session. The real purpose was to demonstrate readiness to negotiate and blame the other side for not coming to the table and announce what had already been agreed, which was the return of 6,000 corpses from Russia, Ukrainian soldiers killed, more than a thousand prisoners of war exchange, including civilian hostages taken by the Ukrainians and returned – that had already been mediated in Qatar and had been agreed. The numbers had been agreed, the names had been agreed, plus the reiteration on the Ukrainian side, they wanted the so-called children to be returned. This number has dropped from the thousands, which even Kellogg has used as a number. So I believe 324 is the number stuck in my head.

So a pre-cooked agreement, very valuable, humanitarian in meaning, was announced. So what happened in addition to this was a bunch of European national security advisers showed up to hold the Ukrainian hand. Kellogg had announced that last week, and he implied he, Marco Rubio, would be there too and he implied national security advisors from Germany, the UK and France would be there. Actually what happened is interesting. It was downgraded, Kellogg didn't show up, Rubio didn't show up, I'm not clear that any American of significance showed up. Instead there were no national security advisers from those countries. Italy, believe it or not, Germany, France and the UK sent deputy advisors and they've posed for a picture I put on my website a little later. Pose for pictures, one of them was in jeans. So what that tells you is the allies, the West, the US downgraded its expectation of what would happen. You send deputies as clowns to clean up after the elephant. You're not the ringmaster orchestrating whether the elephants will run with the clowns. You're just with a broom and a bucket at the back of them. That's what happened. It was low level but made to appear higher level because of the importance of the documents tabled. And we've gone through already what we think the Russians have to do to make their document a credible one. And that lies in the future, in the days ahead of us now.

DL: And they'll be interesting to be sure. Thank you very much, John. It was a great pleasure speaking with you as always and I look forward to our next conversation.

JH: Thank you for having me, Dimitri.

DL: And we're signing off today from Greece on June 3rd, 2025.

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