

Is Germany Sending Ukrainian Men Back to the Front?

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Glenn Greenwald: All right, probably the last question, let's see. Hludolf Kaffenberger, as some of you may know – or maybe few of you know, but I'm going to say it anyway – when I was in college, one of my majors was German. I think it was my minor, but my major was philosophy. I just got enamored of German philosophers as people want to do when they're 18 and 19. And I wanted to read it in its original language. So I studied German and really got infatuated with German. I was very fluent. I used to travel all the time to Austria. I spent a lot of time in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and I spoke German fluently.

And then when I moved to Brazil and learned Portuguese, somehow it just overwrote that part of my brain. I wasn't just conversing in German, I was fluent in it, I had studied it for a long time. It was so frustrating that I had learned German, so much energy, so much time, and then I would just forget words. I remember I did a book tour once, I went to Germany and in interviews when the interviewer was asking me questions in German, I could still understand it, I just couldn't answer in German. But then it got to the point where my brain just every time it would look for a German word, it would only find the Portuguese word. I just became super frustrated. Even though you don't need German, like if you go to Germany or Switzerland or Austria, especially in cities, the minute they hear that you even have an accent, they just switch to this extremely annoyingly perfect English. But it just bothered me so much.

So anyway, I've been re-studying German over the last couple of years, and I love the name, Hludolf Kaffenberger, a great name. I know that was a big side divergence from the topic at hand, but I guess you'll have to indulge me. I'm done with it. All right. "German Chancellor Merz recently announced that he is supporting Ukrainian refugee repatriation efforts, just as Zelensky's government is stepping up its campaign to hunt down draft dodgers. At the height of the 2015 European migrant crisis, there was a strong pushback from liberal individuals and institutions against efforts to repatriate refugees and migrants. Why aren't there analogous efforts to fight back against plans to send Ukrainians back to a conflict zone where they are at risk of being forcefully conscripted into the army?".

It's a really interesting question because, and I think this is something that I didn't quite understand for a little while at the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, like the full-on 2022

war. Obviously there was a huge contingent. Kind of the Hillary Clinton, Mike McFaul, Victoria Nuland, Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, kind of bipartisan foreign policy perspective, that Russia was somehow the greatest threat to the United States, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, no longer communist, no longer the Soviet union, no longer with big imperial plans beyond its region, really more for regional power. And yet our foreign policy community was obsessed with Russia.

Hillary Clinton, when she was secretary of state, was funding Russian opposition groups. It's one of the reasons why Putin hated her when she ran in 2016. She was using the National Endowment for Democracy and other public funds to fund and organize dissenting groups in Russia, to organize them, to sponsor protests like we did in Ukraine and so many other places and then cried about foreign interference in our sacred 2016 election. To me, that was just kind of a by-product of what has always been this kind of anti-Russian mentality embedded in American foreign policy institutions going back to the Cold War before the fall of the Soviet Union, just never really left the American psyche to look at Moscow, the Kremlin, Russians as kind of the adversary, the enemy, something bad.

And during Russiagate, I would see this all the time, Democrats who were obsessed with Russiagate. They would talk about the KGB or they'd be like, "the Republicans, Trump is in bed with communist Russia" or "Soviets communism". And you'd be, like, what decade are you living in? A lot of that was just stupidity on the part of these, like house Democrats, you know, like the Adam Schiff's and the like, Eric Swalwell's who were super fanatical on Russiagate, but it's still reflected this very genuine animosity toward Russia and the whole effort to kind of try and provoke Russia with Ukraine, talk openly about putting Ukraine in NATO or elevating the military presence of the United States and NATO in Ukraine right on the Russian border, even though there are memos at the highest levels of the US government going back many years saying that not just for Putin and his faction, but basically every faction of Russia, including the liberal opposition, putting Ukraine in NATO is considered an existential threat that will provoke a war. We just kept doing things like that.

And then once it finally happened, The way the US foreign policy establishment felt like that war was its war, I think I was even surprised by just how invested – I don't think I wasn't realizing quite how antagonistic the US foreign policy community wanted to be towards Russia. Even though they often have wanted rapprochements and better relations – did have better relations under the Obama administration, worked with Obama on the Iran deal, bombing Syria. But Hillary Clinton, when she wrote her book, *Hard Choices*, where she criticized part of what Obama did, she really focused on his refusal to confront Russia in Syria, in Ukraine. She's obsessed with Russia. And a lot of other people in the bipartisan class are. John McCain, Lindsey Graham, that group, used to always attack Obama for being soft on Russia. It was like, why? Why are you so obsessed with Russia?

Even Obama during Russiagate, when he was asked why he wasn't doing more to punish Russia, he was like, "Let's take it easy. Russia is a regional power. They have an economy smaller than Italy. They're not some big threat to the United States". And eventually through

pressure, he started endorsing Russiagate and became hysterical about it, unleashed his FBI and CIA to kind of push it and feed it and spy for it. But he never – I always used to talk about this interview that he did with Jeffrey Goldberg, the aforementioned Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic, kind of on his way out, it was called, like, "The Obama World View". It was all about Obama's foreign policy.

And Jeffrey Goldberg, the way he reveres Obama, like Hillary Clinton, in the one place where he was angry at Obama, was for not confronting Russia enough, specifically over Syria, but also Ukraine. And he was saying like, hey, the Russians annexed Crimea – didn't mention that they did that in response to the US sponsored coup in Kiev in 2014 – but he said, "the Russians annexed Crimea, they are waging civil war through proxies and in Eastern Ukraine, you didn't do anything about it, why didn't you do more to confront Russia?" And Obama basically said like, it's idiotic to go to war with Russia over Ukraine because Ukraine always has been and always will be of vital interest to Russia, but it is not and never will be of vital interest to the United States. We're not going to confront Russia, the largest nuclear power on the planet over Ukraine. He was saying it was moronic and yet, just like a year later, when Russiagate happened, the Democratic Party became single-mindedly fixated on Russia. And a lot of the Republican Party did, too.

And that kind of did surprise me, but what really surprised me, and I really had to go back and think about this, is the European obsession with Russia. Now, in part, I understand it a little bit more just because of the geographic proximity that Russia has to Western Europe, whereas a big ocean separates Russia and the United States. And so Russia being on that continent, having obviously in the Cold War, taken parts of Eastern Europe, that became part of the Warsaw Pact under the control of the Soviet Union. Even though the Russians were very important allies to the UK and to the US and to allied powers in World War II, immediately there were a lot of people after World War Two who thought that the Soviet Union was actually a bigger threat than the Nazis. And in fact, the US, and the Europeans took some of those Nazis who were war criminals and probably should have been tried at Nuremberg, but if they were scientists or physicists, the United States wanted to work with those Nazis to keep pace and even stay ahead of the Soviet Union. A lot of our advances in space were through former Soviet astronauts and physicists who made big strides in the American space program. So there has always been this kind of almost sense that actually the Soviets and the Russians are worse than the Nazis. And there were a lot of people at the start of World War II who didn't want to get involved. World War II because they saw the Nazis as better allies than the Russians. Lots of history there.

But anyway, I understand why kind of old Europe, like the Cold War warriors of Europe, which many of them are still around, you know, the Cold war didn't end until 1990, 1991, maybe 1989, you can understand why so many of the people who lived through that era and were embedded with the idea that the big threat to European independence and sovereignty, the reason why NATO was created was to protect themselves against Russia. It's this embedded animosity in the European mind to hate Russia, especially for Germany. Germany and Russia have obvious antagonisms, but the UK is probably the craziest. They're preparing

for war with Russia. And the fanaticism around Russia, they started immediately adopting their own Russiagate narratives, they blame Russia for Brexit, they invalidate elections, claiming that the Russians were in favor of a candidate who then wins, it happened in Romania, Marine Le Pen, who's now banned of being funded by the Kremlin. It's a Russiagate that never ended, but on steroids.

And it is kind of ironic that this whole immigration anger went in reverse when it came to the Ukrainians at the time that Europe was giving rise to right-wing populace, largely based on anger and resentment toward immigrants. They took a ton of Ukrainian immigrants in. Part of that is clearly racial. Ukrainian refugees are white. They look like they fit better into European culture than African or Middle Eastern Muslims do. But the real reason is because Europe sees the war with Russia and the need to defend Ukraine as their top priority. They'll sacrifice anything for it. And so you have all these Ukrainians in Europe that did accept them as immigrants. And now there's this kind of strangeness to it that Ukrainians are running out of people to fight. They have been for quite some time. It's like a lost generation of men. Now really two generations of men lost. And the United States and Europe have been angry that Zelensky didn't do more, but he couldn't because he was constrained politically. He never lowered the draft age to 18. They needed men in college. They needed men in the dating pool. They're just running out of men.

And I don't know what the exact number is, but a non-trivial number of Ukrainian men escaped to Eastern Europe and to Western Europe, where they were welcomed as immigrants in the name of pro-Ukraine fervor. And now you have, also in servitude to Ukraine, Merz and a couple other European leaders starting to make noises about repatriating them, kicking them out of the country. They welcomed them as immigrants, they kind of built a life, and now it's like, "we need you to go back to the front line and serve, just be on the meat grinder of people getting shot down by drones and bullets on the Ukrainian front line because we're running out of people to do it and it's getting desperate.

And it's again this obsession, this single-minded obsession with Russia that Western Europeans have, even though all these claims about how Russia was going to first take Ukraine and then go to Poland and then suddenly take Paris and then go to London – this has been all proven to be such a fraud, even if you believed it at the beginning, because it is true Russia hasn't really been able to take Ukraine. Yes, Ukraine has the support of the United States and Western Europe, flooded with weapons, flooded with money, but still, Russia – if they were really the kind of threat that a lot of people in the United States and Europe want to make it out to be – shouldn't be basically in a kind of standstill in Ukraine. And part of that is seasonal. As we get into summer and it gets less cold, the Russians typically make advances, but it's been very slow, it's been a bloodbath over now in its fifth year.

So any people who really believe this insanity about how Russia was going to take Ukraine and then Poland and then Hungary and then move further – this is now a joke. And yet the Europeans continue to build their society based on this "possible" or even "likely", maybe even "inevitable", war with Russia. And this kind of anti-immigrant sentiment that has now

appeared isn't really what's driving the attempt to drive Ukrainians out of the country. They're perfectly happy with Ukrainians. It's barely an issue. What they're trying to do is make sure that more people can go be cannon fodder on the front lines in Ukraine because they're running out of people. That's what this is all behind it. And that is all part of this obsession that I admit I don't fully understand. Again, I understand I can make a case for it, and understand it historically, culturally. But rationally, to be in Germany or France or Spain or Italy or the UK and think that your number one problem or even close to number one is Russia, and we have to spend hundreds of billions of dollars building up the military in anticipation of a war with Russia, that is madness. That is a kind of deranged mentality that, again, I can try and understand, but I can't really understand. But I know it's there and I think that's what's driving all that.

All right, these were great questions, really, really thoughtful, provocative questions. I say that every week and in large part because it's true but this week's were particularly thought provoking. I really appreciate those of you who submit questions, not just the ones we get to but also the ones we don't. And I always say this, we do go back sometimes to prior weeks when there were questions we wanted to get to but I couldn't and try to get to them in the next week. So keep submitting your questions, your comments, your critiques, your observations, whatever. It doesn't have to be just a question. And we'll continue to engage in this dialogue on – remember, I know this hurts still, let's just hold hands together – on our Thursday night, live Q&A session with our Substack subscribers. If you have any questions, obviously anybody can watch. I really appreciate your participation, your support for our Substack page. Those of you who aren't subscribed, you can go and subscribe at greenwald.substack.com. Great to see you as always, and we will see you again next Thursday. Have a great evening and a great weekend.

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