



Ukraine Attacks Iran – The Geopolitics Behind It

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you for Reason2Resist from Montreal, Canada on July 28, 2026. Very happy to be joined again by our good friend John Helmer, Russia analyst extraordinaire who seems to be in good spirits and good health today despite all of the madness in the world. Thank you for joining us again today, John.

John Helmer (JH): Thank you for having me. Good to be back.

DL: So John, the US government and the Western corporate press have raised concerns about Russia allegedly helping Iran to target US military bases and CIA personnel in West Asia. Recently, just a few days ago, I believe it was an American reporter, asked the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, about this, and this is what happened.

Journalist: Is Russia helping Iran target US troops, sir?

Sergey Lavrov: Nice hairstyle.

DL: Nice hairstyle indeed and so in an article you published on your website on Sunday, John, and I put the headline up here on the screen, this was on July 26, you guessed that – because of course the limited information available – when Marco Rubio met – this is the US Secretary of State with the Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov on July 23rd for what was reportedly a little more than 30 minutes, your best guess is that Rubio warned Lavrov about Russia aiding Iran to strike CIA facilities and US troops in West Asia. Do you in fact think that Russia is providing that kind of assistance to Iran, John? And if so, what, if anything, do you think that the US can do about it?

JH: Let's go back to a big piece of context here, Dimitri, which isn't being discussed, even in Moscow, and that is the Iran-Russia pact, signed between President Pezeshkian and President Putin in January 2025. Now, what that pact requires, and I'll emphasise it requires, is that

Russia will share intelligence information with Iran. It's Article 4 of the pact. Let me, if I'm looking down, forgive me folks for casting my eyes away from you or from Dimitri while I read the words, listen to the words. This is the Iran-Russia pact. It says, Article 4: "One, in order to enhance national security and confront common threats, the intelligence and security agencies of the contracting parties shall exchange information and experience and increase the level of their cooperation. Two, the intelligence security agencies or the contracting party shall cooperate within the framework of separate agreements"; that's Article 4. That makes what the Americans and the Western propaganda media are complaining about a strategic necessity under that pact. Article Five says, "the contracting parties shall consult and cooperate, encountering common military and security threats of a bilateral and regional nature." In other words, Russia and Iran have agreed that they will share intelligence information. That's a requirement of the pact. By the way, Article 3.3 of the pact, and I'm looking down to make sure, there are 47 articles in the pact, you can read the whole pact and a discussion of it on Dances with Bears and just go to the box for January and put in Pistachio Pact; *Is the Russian-Iranian Strategic Agreement the Nut or the Shell?* is the title of the piece. But you can read the piece, you can read the pact, you can compare it to Russia's pact with North Korea, which is somewhat tighter, but Article 3.3 of that pact says that basically in the event that either contracting party is subject to aggression, the other contracting party shall not provide any military or other assistance to the aggressor which would contribute to the continued aggression. Now that provision, I need to put in important parenthesis, prevents Russia from allowing Turkey to transfer S-400s to the UAE or to Saudi Arabia or to Qatar, that would be a violation of the pact. But to go back to the positive part of the fact, Russia is obliged to under that agreement provide intelligence information to Iran when it's under attack and they're under a common attack; the two countries are under a common US, European, NATO, Israeli attack on different fronts.

So that's a context which oddly enough is not being discussed in Moscow. It was not discussed by Lavrov at the Rubio meeting. It's not put in the way in which the Foreign Ministry of the Kremlin discussed these matters in media platforms like Vzglyad. I'll come to what Vzglyad has just said on your point in a minute. What happened at the Rubio-Lavrov meeting was that Rubio called for the meeting. It was his invitation. It happened at his hotel on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in Manila. It then was set up by the State Department in such a way that press were invited for a ten second photo op. You can measure the seconds by watching the clip. But the reporters were told no questions to be asked, because none will be answered. But the State Department said that Rubio would give a press conference later, and he did. What happened was that two American reporters were heard loudly on the tape asking Rubio: Mr. Rubio, are you going to ask Lavrov, are the Russians helping Iran kill Americans? That was repeated twice before the reporters were ushered out. Then after the meeting, only 30 minutes, Rubio confirmed in his press conference, it lasted only 30-minutes, you heard on the tape you just ran Dimitri, the US reporter calling out again to Lavrov, and you heard Lavrov giving the amusing answer, nice hairstyle. What was happening, as Lavrov perfectly well knew, that Rubio had planted, was that the subject of their conversation, their 30 minutes called by Rubio, was announced in the questions. And then consider, and this was the basis of the guesswork, because it hasn't been

confirmed by either side. What can be discussed in 30 minutes? Well the Russian foreign ministry downplayed that by saying an in-depth discussion occurred in which and then lots of topics are discussed. That's baloney. They are covering up the fact that there was a relatively fierce, let's say, exchange. The fierce exchange is each side warning the other; Rubio, and he confirms it in his subsequent press conference, and you can find the text of that in that Dancers with Bears piece you mentioned Dimitri, Rubio is saying you're killing our people and we're not going to tolerate it. We can see that you're providing the satellite intelligence, the live feed to assist the targeting of drones that are killing our people. Stop it. That probably took five, seven minutes of talk. I don't know whether they used English, pardon me, as their common language. However, when you look at the line up on the Rubio side, you see something very odd. On his right, there is US Ambassador to India, Sergio Gora is his current name, but his real name is Sergio Gorokhovsky. Sergio Gorokhovsky arrived in the US as a child with Jewish parents leaving the Soviet Union. He was born in Tashkent, a Soviet citizen. Why was he there? The answer is he speaks Russian. He was the private interpreter for Rubio at that meeting. He was outranked and therefore should not have been sitting right next to Rubio by, I believe the lady's name is Allison Hooker. Miss Hooker is the number four ranking State Department official under Secretary of Political Affairs. She should have been sitting right next to Rubio, but she doesn't speak Russian. She's an Asia specialist, a Korea specialist. She's there for obvious ASEAN reasons. But she was downgraded at the meeting by a special interpreter, Gore or Gorokhovsky. That encourages me to think that the meeting was done in English on Rubio's side and Russian on Lavrov's side. And after Rubio delivers his five minutes plus translation time, Lavrov gets to say, and he clearly says it because the communique says it: You, the United States, are providing satellite intelligence, drone intelligence, fixed-wing intelligence that are guiding Ukrainian drones to attack and kill our people. Not simply on the front, not simply soldiers, but civilians, civilians, kids going to school, people working in warehouses. You are killing our people, stop it!

Did either side imply that if they don't stop assisting, let's call it the proxy, to kill each other's people, each side will then escalate? That's the crucial question. We'll talk a bit more about it. You ask me about it, we'll come to that in a minute. What then has happened since I wrote that piece, is that it would appear that Lavrov has walked back the ferocity of the exchange of warnings. In other words, both sides are going to a brink, which the US side has set up in propaganda terms as Russia's fault in assisting Iran killing Americans. Partly, you have to look at this in US political terms, election terms. Casualties are rising in the US and they're becoming harder and harder for the US to hide. We've just seen over the last I think 48 hours President Trump showed up at – I've got to better get this right. There were the four casualties killed in action, American soldiers who were killed in Jordan, their bodies were returned with ceremony in the United States, and Trump picked up the family of one of those killed, and participated in some funeral, or let's say body reception ceremonies to honour the fallen. The US side is preparing public opinion for increasing casualties. The four are only four. Trump keeps tweeting that his casualty levels from making war are far lower than past wars of Biden's in Afghanistan, certainly lower than the Korean war casualties, or 58-59,000 US...

DL: Sorry, if I may, John, I just want to update our audience on the last tally that we saw was when the Pentagon website was updated a couple of days ago, the total number of people they say have been killed, I think they're only talking about military personnel, is 18 US soldiers and over 600 have been wounded. And this is apparently since the beginning of this war of aggression on February 28th. I have not seen a single, maybe it's not surprising, but I haven't seen a single admission by the US government that any CIA officials have been killed throughout the course of this war. Have you?

JH: No, I haven't.

DL: Right. Sorry, go ahead.

JH: No, no, what we can't see is partly detected by spotters around Andrews Air Force Base. They are watching the arrival of medevac aircraft carrying wounded from the Middle East, which would include CIA agents, because they're the ones who've been allegedly attacked in secret locations, for which Russia is also blamed in locating for the Iranian attacks. The spotters I've seen, there's one spotter who's calling himself the Intel Frog on his Twitter stream, he's watching the arrival of these US Air Force C-17A Globemasters, which have been carrying wounded into Andrews Air Force Base and then ambulance buses, which pick up wounded who are ambulatory and other ambulances, which carry individuals on stretchers or in various forms of mechanical or medical support, he's counted the ambulances from one aircraft or two aircraft and he's counting the way they move towards the hospitals in the Navy or Army hospitals in the Washington area. On that basis, I've counted since July 20, according to Intel Frog – take it or leave it, folks – 154 casualties, okay? So the numbers are significantly higher. The numbers are being hidden. The numbers have to have a political alibi. Why? Because we're in election season in the US and there's one combination that always kills incumbent presidents and incumbent congressmen, and that's the combination, inflation and killed in action. Body bags plus rising oil prices damage incumbents at election time. So what the US is coming up with in propaganda terms prior to the meeting in Manila, hardly a thriller in Manila, but there it was, an alibi; the Russians are to blame. That's what happened, that's what happened as of the weekend. But Foreign Minister Lavrov has to some extent walked back the sharpness of the exchange. And in articles which have begun appearing in the Russian press, there's been, let's say, a tempering or a modification. I'm flipping pages to get to today's text, which appears in the Kremlin on a media platform, looking for it and suddenly can't find it, an article which appears is Vzglyad today that quotes Lavrov downplaying that Russia is providing weapons to Iran or Iran providing weapons to Russia for the war against the Ukraine. This is part of the, let's say, modification of interpretation of what happened in the Caspian Sea attack. So if you don't mind I'll drone on a bit longer.

DL: Well, I want to park the Caspian Sea; I was gonna ask you separately about that. I just want a clarification about one thing because I have not seen this article which you interpret as a walk-back. It sounds like the focus in that article is the provision of weaponry. Does it address the provision of intelligence?

JH: Correct.

DL: It doesn't address the provision of intelligence you're saying?

JH: Good lawyering, Dimitri. Exactly so. It does not address the fundamental point that Russia and Iran are cooperating on intelligence level and not trading each other's weapons. However, we do believe that the Iranian side provided drones in the early part of the special military operations since 2022. The Shahed drone was then modified by the Russians and we've been told that the modified Shahed has been returned by Russia to Iran and used in modifications which the Western press have been claiming. You can see in some drone wreckage that's been available to American forensic examination after the attacks, either on the CIA stations like in Riyadh or in the US base attacks in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and elsewhere. So, yes, what's being said today in Vzglyad, so let's say they're trying to answer your question, Dimitri, and trying to cope with what happened, let's fall out of the Manila meeting with Rubio, they're trying downplay the pressure on President Putin to retaliate eye for eye – and I use eye for eye because that's the phrase Foreign Minister Araghchi used in his tweeting following his telephone call with Foreign Minister Lavrov after the Caspian Sea attack occurred. Now, when that happened, I mean the Araghchi-Lavrov conversation, Araghchi is very much clearer afterwards in saying that there must be retaliation. However, the Iranian ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, was even clearer. He told the Russian press, quote, "Russia as a friendly country is expected to give a serious response to these criminal attacks". In other words, Jalali is saying, and reinforced by his Foreign Minister, that Russia must retaliate against this attack. And that's what Iran's waiting for.

DL: You're talking about the Caspian Sea attack?

JH: The Caspian Sea attack, yes.

DL: Okay, can we just move to that subject because I want to provide some context to those members of our audience who may not be completely up to speed on what has happened. And before we do that though, John, if we can park the Caspian Sea for one second, I just have one more question for you about this; given the gigantic quantity of weaponry that the United States has provided to Ukraine, not to mention all of the intelligence, why would the Russians feel shy about letting the American government believe that they provided some weaponry to Iran? Why would they feel the need to walk that back?

JH: It's a good question. Better somebody in an official position speaking for the Kremlin would answer that. I suppose my answer would be that President Putin wants to believe still that the US and Russia are not at war with one another, though he's made statements, he's been forced to make statements saying otherwise. Second, he wants not to acknowledge now what Foreign Minister Lavrov and virtually every other significant official outside the Kremlin but inside the Security Council is saying, that the US is committed to permanent war to damage Russia. Trump signed that statement with the G7 in France in June. He re-signed the statement, equivalent statement, in the NATO summit in Ankara and he's just reconfirmed, says Zelensky a couple of hours back in their meeting in the White House at

9:30 this morning, that he's committing to assist Ukraine. Now it's fundamentally difficult for President Putin, who's also in an election race, who has engaged Kirill Dmitriev to negotiate particularly terms of settlement, US settlement with Russia, to assure Russia long-term security in Europe. That's to be negotiated with Kushner and Witkoff. Dmitriev keeps playing the line. The answer to your question can be found in Dmitriev's endless tweets in which he protects Trump. Okay, so in protecting Trump for negotiations – and believe me, what has just come out of the Zelensky meeting is apparently an undertaking that Trump is about to send Witkoff, Stephen Witkoff and Jared Kushner to Kiev. If that happens in the next few days, there's rather considerable pressure on President Putin to accept Kushner and Witkoff in Moscow, except that those two are anathema to most Russian officials who see their role in exactly the way they played their negotiating role with Iran. They're camouflage, they're deception operations, they are...

DL: Big shyster, so what's my word of preference, but hey whatever floats your boat...

JH: So should President Putin receive them or not?! The only basis on which you can receive men who are killing your people which is what Rubio and Lavrov have just exchanged views about is if you pretend that's not happening, and what's then the value of their coming to the Kremlin after Zelensky has told Trump, look what I just did to assist you in blocking the Caspian Sea route by which Russia's helps break the blockade around the Hormuz. Zelensky is doing that but not because he's trying to bid for more US help than the US officials briefing him have already agreed to, he's doing that because he and Trump think alike. Trump has accepted permanent war against Russia and sees it on two fronts. He's just met Zelensky, he followed it up with Netanyahu, the attack on the Caspian Sea vessel highlights the problem. President Putin is still reluctant to solve – you raised it in lots of ways, we'll go on talking about it, it covers the entire span of Russian domestic economic needs and requirements and injuries from this escalation of drone war.

DL: Okay, so we'll come back to this man's challenge that President Putin is reluctant to resolve or confront it seems. Let's now get into the Caspian Sea before we talk about that, please so just again to bring our audience members who haven't been following the Caspian Sea story carefully. The Iranian government just accused Ukraine a couple of days ago of targeting an Iranian commercial ship on the Caspian Sea killing one sailor and wounding another. Rather than deny the accusation, Zelensky, the dictator of Ukraine, has lustily embraced it. It appears. He claims that Ukrainian forces struck the vessel because it was being used to transport military cargo involving Iran in the Caspian Sea. So, on X, Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi has openly threatened Ukraine with retaliation. Here was his post on Sunday: "Zelenskyy has attacked an Iranian commercial vessel, killing a sailor, a blatant UN charter violation done at Israel's behest to drag Europe into its war. In calls with the EU High Representative Kalas and FM Lavrov, made clear that what the freeloader in Kyiv did" – indeed, he is a freeloader – "cannot go unanswered."

I have several questions for you about this attack, John, and first is a prelude to my first question. The nearest Ukrainian border is more than 700 kilometres from the Caspian Sea. So I've just put up a map here. The Caspian Sea is in the centre of this image and you can see in

the upper left-hand corner, there's Ukraine. And of course the Eastern Ukrainian border is not under Ukraine's control. So the front line is actually, I think about 900 kilometres from the Caspian Sea is, you know, further to the west of the Ukrainian border with Russia and in order, if you were firing directly from Ukraine into the Caspian Sea, you'd have to fire across Russian territory. And there's a good chance your drones would be shot down, not necessarily, but there's a good chance they would be shot down by the time they get to the Caspian Sea. Okay, now the other possibility is you fire them from Ukrainian territory, I guess, into the Black Sea, and then they either cross Georgia and Azerbaijan to avoid Russian airspace, or maybe they go through Turkey and then Armenia, then Azerbaijan, but that's problematic as well. Now there's yet a third possibility, it seems to me, John, and I just throw this out there, I'm not saying this is what happened, is that the drone was fired from the territory of Azerbaijan, and the Ukraine is, quote unquote, "taking credit for it" because Trump and the Azerbaijanis don't want, or at least Azerbaijan doesn't want to get dragged into a war with Iran. At the end of the day, I haven't seen any hard evidence that the drone was actually fired by Ukraine from Ukrainian territory, even though Zelensky is clearly embracing the allegation that Ukraine is behind this attack. So I guess my first question to you is, how do we know, do we in fact know, that Ukrainian forces launched this drone from Ukrainian territory? And do you think it's at least possible that Ukraine has, quote unquote, "taking credit" for the attack to conceal the involvement of some other third country in the attack, for example, Azerbaijan?

JH: I think these are very good questions to me. I have to say, I don't know and nor has the latest Vzglyad discussion of the event raised any of these important points you make. What I can say is that because the map is up on the screen for everyone to look at, the location of the attack, the location of the vessel, the Ana, was five kilometres off Astrakhan port, where it was anchored during a storm. It was not underway. This has been indicated by Iranian Ambassador Jalali in public in Russian and corroborated to some extent by Foreign Minister Lavrov's message of condolence for what happened in his call with Araghchi. So, it's at the top of the Caspian Sea, where the vessel was. It's not the first time, not the first Ukrainian attack drone attack on Caspian Sea Russian targets. So a Caspian Sea drone attack by Ukrainians, that has happened before, last year for example. I'm not aware, but others that are watching us may be aware that those drone routes were tracked. There's no doubt that the Ukrainian drone capacity, range capacity, is now in excess of 1,500 kilometres, up to 2,000 kilometres, because Ukrainian drones appear to have hit the Omsk refinery, hit at more than 1500km from a launch point. So, while it's possible that Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia were used for airspace transit, much as the Ukrainians used Estonian airspace for transit, I don't know the answer. And so far, I would think the implication I see in Russian press coverage is that the Ukrainians fired from Ukrainian territory. What remains to be added to Araghchi's tweet, there is a clarification. I don't quite understand why he says that the attack is an attempt to drag Europe into the Iran war. Europe is in the Iran War. For example, I refer to David Miller's article which appears in UK Column News, a British site out of London in the last 24 hours showing that the bombing of Iran in the last week has come from US-launched aircraft from Air Force bases in the UK. And Miller has pointed out that the storages for US weaponry, missiles, warheads, the storages which may include US nuclear weapons is a RAF

Welford, Royal Air Force Base Welford in Berkshire, the airfield from which the US bombers bomb Iran with these weapons...

DL: Sorry also John sorry, but didn't NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte also say that Italy allowed hundreds of US war planes to take off from its territory during the war on Iran as well? So we don't need also confirmation that Italy is involved and isn't it almost a certainty that the krotiri military base on Cyprus is being used to facilitate this war as well?! I mean, we also know the Greeks have been bragging about sending a Patriot air defence system to Saudi Arabia and they claim they took down two ballistic missiles from Yemen over the weekend. This is what they've been bragging about, which I think is, by the way, BS. But in any event, all of Europe, you're totally correct, all of Europe is clearly, I mean not all, but most of Europe seems to be participating one way or another in this war on Iran.

JH: Exactly so. In addition, so far as I can tell from looking at the press, so this is uncorroborated, the Ukrainians have provided anti-drone defence units either in Saudi Arabia or the UAE or in Qatar; I'm not sure which. And those units and their locations have been made available to the Iranian side and the Iranian side has targeted them. And those units, or the Ukrainian units, have allegedly been ordered out of those Arab territories. I don't understand why Araghchi should make the claim that this is new. Europe is fully engaged, covertly yes, but just ran through a list of countries deeply involved, not only in so-called air defence, the Arabs shaped them, but in assaults, and the bombing assault that Miller exposed over the last 48 hours was authorised by the new Prime Minister of the UK, Burnham, who is as committed to both wars, the war against Russia, and the war against Iran as his predecessor, Keir Starmer. Now, the Russian side wants to insist, through Dmitriev, that political change, like removing Stamer, will encourage the British government to come to better, more peaceful, more secure terms with the Russian side. They say the same; Dmitriev says the same thing. This wishful thinking is part of Kremlin approach to applying to Germany where they believe the AFD will rise to power and end the militarization of Germany. And it applies to France where they think Rassemblement National, Le Pen and Bardella will come to terms with Russia if only they can take the presidency away from Macron. And we can see the same things asserted about Meloni's government in Italy and in Greece and so on and so on. It's an illusion that President Putin wishes to maintain steel. And that's under obvious domestic attack as the domestic consequences of what the Ukrainian drone attacks have been doing. You mentioned Wildberries attacked, the Amazon equivalent in Russia. This hits Russian consumers, it hits Russian small businesses, it hits civilian voters and this is a commitment that Trump's making to continue because as Zelensky recently said and I'm looking down at what Zelensky said because this happens to be correct, quotes, in the FT version of Zelensky: "President Trump wants to be where there's success. That's tied to many things, not only to his personality, but to the approaching elections, to his status, his belief in how this war can be ended." That happens to be an accurate description of the way Trump thinks and the way he broadcasts and so that's from one circus showman to another that's correct. And so there's the question then you raise, is how can Iran negotiate with that? How can President Putin negotiate with it? Arguably you can't.

DL: Correct. So before we come back to Wildberries, I wanted to ask you that as well, I just have a couple other questions about this Caspian Sea thing. So first of all, on the assumption that it was in fact, Ukraine, I think it probably was, but I don't really accept that unless somebody shows us objective evidence and I've seen absolutely no evidence to back up the claim that this was a drone launch from Ukrainian territory and it was somehow made its way all the way to the Caspian without being shot down, it is possible, I'm not denying it's possible, but there are reasons to be sceptical, on the assumption, however, that it was Ukrainian forces firing from Ukrainian territory, do you believe that Zelensky's regime would and could carry out such an attack without the support of the United States?

JH: No.

DL: Okay. So let's just leave it at that because I agree with you. I think it's very likely, I think the most likely scenario of explanation here is that Zelensky was ordered to do this. Not simply that he was allowed to do it, but that Trump told him to do it. Now, whether or not – go ahead.

JH: Trump does not have to do the telling. There are senior US offices and CIA agents in Kiev or around Zelensky that suggest this is how we should do it. We will provide the targeting, we'll provide the routes, we will provide the evasion intelligence that enables the drone to manoeuvre across its route so as to hit the target. We'll also provide the target. You're doing this right now to reinforce the propaganda line we've been running for several days now, but going back let's say a month over the issue of whether Russia is assisting Iran in its war with the United States. Whether or not that vessel carried military supplies, the US policy, Trump policy, is to choke Iran to death, right? That's what the blockade of the Hormuz is doing. Now when the Caspian Sea as a sea route provides a way for Iran to break the blockade with Russian assistance as Russia is obliged by its pact with Iran to do on military cooperation and civilian cooperation, then it stands to reason exactly as you said, Dimitri, the US collaborated in that attack.

DL: And this is an important point you make. It doesn't necessarily have to be Trump himself. It could well have been one of a number of US officials who are working closely with the Zelensky regime. But in any case, let's assume it was Ukraine; they got the order, they got the okay. So I just want to show you and our audience, I'm sure you're aware of this, John, but just to dramatise it, Iran has the capacity to strike Ukraine. And as we've seen, the most formidable air defences that the United States and Israel can bring to bear can't stop Iran's ballistic missiles. And a lot of its drones are getting through. And we also know because the Ukrainian regime is constantly whining about how low they are on air defence interceptors – not that the Patriots are effective at bringing down ballistic missiles, they really aren't. But nonetheless, it's clear that Ukraine is vulnerable, according to Zelensky's own public statements. Iran can hit them. And the United States could have attacked that vessel without Ukrainian assistance in the Caspian Sea. They're probably better able to do that than Ukraine is at this stage and then we get this weird that is background this weird post by the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, I believe this was today, Andrii Sybiha: "I called Iran's Foreign Minister for a frank conversation. Diplomacy is about direct conversation even when it's

difficult. I stressed that our goal is to avoid unnecessary escalation. I reiterated that all of Ukraine's actions are aimed solely at defending our country from Russian aggression and never intended to target civilian vessels or people. This is also true with regard to Iran's statements about their nationals who died in a civilian vessel that was targeted in a recent incident. Our goal is to counter Russian aggression" – he's already said this – "which is the root cause of all incidents. I emphasise the necessity to refrain from any escalatory steps", blah, blah. So this sounds like a rather conciliatory statement from the Ukrainian equivalent of Abbas Araghchi, who made that threat. What do you think is going on here, John? You think there's some sticker shock, they don't know what they got themselves into and all of a sudden the Ukrainian regime is having second thoughts about this? What do you make of this statement?

JH: I'm not sure how to interpret this. On the one hand, as we've already said, it's a mistake on the Iranian side or on the Western press side to characterise Iran's official statements, and I've quoted Ambassador Jalali's statement that Iran is threatening retaliation, direct retaliation against Ukraine. It's not. It's said a serious response, and that should come from Russia, ok? You're quite right, the Iranian capacity to break through air defences and strike Ukraine is equal to, but not better than, Russia's capacity. And Russia's doing that every day. The issue here, and I think Sybiha is trying to, let's say, address it, is both sides, Ukraine as the US empire proxy, US empire means NATO, Europe, the UK, Ukraine as US Empire proxy, Iran is being characterised by Rubio speaking to Lavrov as a Russian proxy – that's not true in the way that Ukraine is a proxy, but they're trying to characterise this. The proxies are speaking at one another and trying to say we are not at war with one another when it's obvious they are; and when the President of one of the proxy states, Zelensky, says as much. So Foreign Ministers get to say, speaking for proxies pretending not to be proxies, that they are not at war with one another, they have sincere condolences and they're basically advising each other not to get tangled in this second front, when they are, all right, so what do we give a gold star stamp to Sybiha for diplo speak that makes the opposite seemed to be true, or what about a lollipop as he goes home? Well, in Ukraine no official goes home with lollipops, they go home with gold.

DL: Lots of it. So let's then finish our discussion by talking about these attacks, the most recent attacks on Russian targets, and you mentioned this company Wildberries. This is a report from Canada's state media outlet, the CBC, published on July 24th, so I guess that would be a Friday of last week, if I'm not mistaken, and you see here a warehouse of the so-called Amazon of Russia Wildberries engulfed in flames and smoke, and this one is in St. Petersburg, this particular facility, and it looks like they've done quite a bit of damage here.

JH: I don't believe it's in St. Petersburg, it's near Moscow, but I could be mistaken here. My understanding is that Wildberries warehouses have been attacked in and around Moscow, in and around Kazan, but not as far north as St. Petersburg. I don't believe that Wildberries has, I don't know where their warehousing is to service the northwestern region, but I don't believe it's been attacked, but I may have missed something.

DL: Well, the CBC could very well have made a mistake, but the caption of the photo you might not be able to read it there, John, it's a bit small, but it says: Smoke arises from a Wildberries facility in St. Petersburg, Russia. So it doesn't even say near, it says in St. Petersburg.

JH: But I believe that to be a mistake. I believe that's in the Moscow region.

DL: Okay, in any case, why the hell do you think that Ukraine is expending its munitions on the Amazon of Russia?

JH: In order to demonstrate that it can expand beyond the losses it's taking along the combat front. That it can expand its targets at key parts of the Russian economy that are highly sensitive now to turn into votes when Russia goes to the national parliamentary elections September 18 to 20th. What they're doing is playing the playbook of the Rand Corporation, CSIS, all the US think tanks, Brookings, Rand, and others, have all been issuing plans, some of which are aped and copied by European think tanks, aimed at disabling the Russian economy in such a way as to unsettle Russian voters in the belief that President Putin is first doing a good job, second in the belief that the Russian army can secure the Russian hinterland, the Russian voter, the Russian at home, the Russian on the internet, both young and old. The aim is to attack them in such a way as to say the war is coming home to you now, what do you think of President Putin's performance? That has in turn turned into a number of clear vote markers. President Putin's level of public support for his performance is off its highly stable highs than the 80% level and is dropping. It's dropping also for self-inflicted economic reasons we've talked about before; high interest rate policy inflicted on Russia by the central bank government, Elvira Nabiullina, and the Finance Minister, Anton Siluanov, has in fact brought Russia into recession. The best President Putin can do about that, is to jawbone and say that the GDP is not in recession, not in minus month to month in the first five months of the year, but rather in the fraction of somewhere between 0.2% and 0.3%. This is manipulating the data. Most Russians feel their real income is retreating. There are a range of ways in which Russian voters are expressing this, hitting them in the gas tank, hitting them in the pocket, and hitting the middle class, especially the young who work like in the West, buy their goods and services through the internet and therefore use Wildberries as we Westerners, we outside Russia, use Amazon, this is a way of communicating that the US, Ukraine, the Europeans can win the war by bringing attrition to the Russian hinterland. It's a political manipulation of military means. It's very understandable. It's been a US strategic objective against the Soviet Union, now Russia, for a very long time; that part is not new. Drone methodology is the new part and there's every indication that Trump thinks it's a good idea and he said so. And that's part of what will come out of the readouts of the Zelensky-Trump meeting this morning. So what question you raise is an important one, Dimitri; what's President Putin's reaction? Well, the answer, the most recent answer through Dmitry Peskov is we haven't decided yet how we will respond to compensate and repair the damage to consumers and small traders from the Wildberries attacks. Let me tell you about the scale of this and think of it in terms of boats that spread out over a nation voting for parliamentary representatives. 88,000 small businesses and

entrepreneurial outfits have been affected. Their goods have been damaged or destroyed or lost in the Wildberries attacks. Okay, 88,000. Let's suppose that each of those 88,000 have ten clients, ten times 88, we are nearly at a million people affected directly.

DL: And then you can throw in their employees, John, and their shareholders. You could be talking about millions of people.

JH: Correct. And if I'm not mistaken, and forgive me if I've underestimated, at least five Russian workers at the warehouses were killed. So people are losing their lives, their livelihoods from this attack, from the US point of view, from the CIA point of view, from those veterans of the CIA who made war on the Soviet Union from the beginning of their career until it became opportunistic to go another way. This is terrific news. This is exactly what the CIA always sought to do, but didn't dare to do during the Soviet Union; during Soviet days, inland attacks on Russia from outside. So when President Putin's spokesman, Mr. Peskov says, we haven't yet come to a decision on what's to be done, any normal Russian person says, why the hell not? What are we paying you for? Why does it take nearly a week before you've come to a decision? The owner, oligarch sized owner Mrs. Kim, who controls Wildberries, has said that the company will compensate the businesses and the consumers and repair the damage as quickly as possible. Why hasn't the Kremlin decided what's to be done if Kim says we will compensate? Answer: Look at what the political and economic implications, the social class implications here are. If Wildberries get bailed out, then every other oligarch who owns an oil refinery, or a truck system, or a grain storage, or a port terminal, every other oligarch, and they know how to talk for compensation, is asking the Kremlin, compensate me, compensate us. At the very same moment, Rosneft, the leading state company, oil producer and oil exporter, is being accused all over the country of manipulating the attacks on oil refineries which have shorted the supply of gasoline or gas or benzene, essence depending on where you buy your petrol and what you call it, they're being accused of manipulating the shortages, the spot shortages caused by the refinery strikes. And that's now under investigation by the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service, the FAS. And all of that's an incendiary political mixture in which Russian voters say, President Putin's too close to the oligarchs. He's going to protect them, but not us.

DL: At the end of the day, that may have a lot to do with the mystifying behaviour of the Russian government. I want to go back to something, a conversation, where you and I have been talking about the failure of Russia to deter these increasingly aggressive assaults on its economy and its people and its territory. And I asked you at one point in a recent conversation, because you have been an advisor to governments, what would you advise these non-Western governments that are being targeted by the collective West, how to react. And the one word I remember standing out for me in your recommendation was, be unpredictable. You were very clear about that. You have to be unpredictable. And I was thinking the other day, I saw these interesting articles just popped out of nowhere that North Korea's economy is booming and North Korea, which is of these four countries that are being targeted in Eurasia, by Washington, China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, the one that has suffered the least, it seems to me, in recent years is North Korea. As I said, the reports in the

New York Times, the Wall Street Journal recently, are that its economy is booming. And of the four leaders of these countries, the one who is, I think, probably deemed to be the least stable and most unpredictable is the North Korean leader. He's cultivated this image of being the wild man. So I don't know if that's what it takes, John, but I really, I cannot believe, I'm getting reports, I can't get into the details that the situation, for example, in Crimea is very, very bad, extremely dire, and it's not just Crimea that's suffering. And I can't believe that the Russian government has put up with this for so long. It's mystifying. I mean, other than..

JH: Hang on a minute. We agreed that the damage is significant. I wouldn't say dire in Crimea, but our sources and we have friends, mutual friends in Crimea report all sorts of troubles and certainly gasoline shortage, electricity blackouts, internet failures. All of this adds to a relatively new, it's not old, new public loss of confidence that the President's conduct of the war provides them with security. Okay, it is not, increasingly not. So the pressure then is on President Putin to reply; how to reply when he has to balance the oligarch base on which his rule has depended from 1999 and earlier, carefully the way he rose from St. Petersburg to Moscow, the oligarch base wants completely different outcomes from the public base, the popular base. When you have a conflict like that, and you've got an election time, what do you also have? You have plans for election rigging, you have plans for election fraud. You also have, so far, a reluctance of President Putin to go out on the hustings. Okay, you don't see the President going out, you see the victims as it were, the widows, the wounded soldiers, you see them coming into the Kremlin. President Putin is facing a very serious set of decisions where he has to balance against his underlying, let's call it, class interest and his pressing public opinion and public vote interest.

Balancing is what good politicians do, but in a war in which your enemy, your adversary, is deliberately changing the balance for you, how do you then explain your lack of retaliation? Answer, on the one hand, the military staff is doing its level best now to seal off the Black Sea for Ukraine. The attacks on Chernomorsk, the series of attacks going on against Odessa are intending to seal off the sea routes, the same time the Ukrainians are sealing off the Black Sea for the Russian side. Russia has lost the capacity to deliver roughly 30% of its coal shipments to Turkey are no longer moving, 30% loss of coal shipments across the Black Sea have been affected by Ukrainian attacks on Russian ships. But where's the counter-escalation against the supply of drones, drone components, men to run them, on the land border routes? We've said this before, I'll have to say it again, the escalation on the Russian side around the sea routes into Ukraine may succeed in cutting Ukraine off from the Black Sea. But to the extent that the land borders from Poland and Romania into Ukraine continue to refuel the drone war. And the drone war continues to escalate, cutting Russia off from the Black Sea, damaging Russia and the Baltic Sea, damaging Russia on the Caspian Sea, which is where we began today. If you don't cut the Ukrainian firing platform off totally, if you can't cut off their electricity supply, their communications from the NATO hub in Rzeszów in Poland, etc. you can't and won't do that, but in President Putin's case, it won't. We've had a Resnick demonstration effect in the Lvov region recently, but not a real cut off of that border. Why then escalate half when you leave the other half open? I'm afraid I have to leave with a puzzle, because I can't answer that. I can't answer it. It doesn't make logical sense. It doesn't

make common sense. It doesn't make strategic or military sense, but it does make political sense. You can explain it. When you balance contradictions, nonsense falls out.

DL: Yeah, well, I'm gonna end, we've run out of time on just by reiterating John my prediction I made a couple of months ago, I probably can't think of a prediction I want to be more wrong than this one, but I just don't see any other way this playing out given the realities we confront and that is by the end of the year the Russian Federation will be obliged to strike and cut the NATO country in order to send a powerful message of deterrence. So we've had enough of you supplying the weapons and intelligence that is being used to destabilise our country. I really don't see any way for this to be avoided given the lunatics lined up on the other side of the table from Russia and Iran and China and so forth. In any case, I guess time will tell whether it's going to come to that, but any last thoughts, John?

JH: Well, it's not appropriate; I want to let you your prediction stand Dimitri, because it's the subject for an ongoing discussion and I look forward to that between you and me and you and others and our colleagues, however the important question to ask about the escalation of nuclear retaliations is whether that would in fact deter the European remilitarization?

DL: Just to be clear, I wasn't talking necessarily about nuclear strikes, I was talking about, my prediction is conventional strikes. And the question you ask is absolutely the critical question. And I don't know what the answer to that is. But I do think it'll be more effective than the current strategy. But it's entirely possible that this will lead to an escalation. What I say in response to that, John, is we're heading up the escalation ladder anyways, and we're heading up there real fast. So I don't see how we're going to avoid escalation by adopting this very, very restrained, almost mystifying approach that the Russian government has adopted to these mountains of weaponry being delivered to Ukraine constantly. All of the intelligence, all of the economic aid, Ukraine is basically on life support. It's entirely a ward of the West. It's so clear now that there's a NATO-wide war being perpetrated against Russia using Ukrainians as cannon fodder. It's almost cliché, it's so obvious at this stage. So what is Russia going to do? The current course of action is not deterring the West. It's clearly not to deter in the West. So I don't see what the alternative is, unfortunately.

JH: That's the next time, Dimitri, isn't it?

DL: It is, we'll get into that in some more detail. Hopefully by the time John and I convene for our next conversation about all of this, all of the insanity will have been resolved. But I've got probably not much hope. In any case, John, thank you very much for joining us today. Just a reminder to all our friends out there, if you found this video to be informative, please like and share it. Please become a subscriber if you aren't already one and check out John's excellent website, Dances with Bears. John, any last words you want to tell us about your recent, you've written many books over the years, which are a fascinating read, your most recent book, you want to talk about that briefly before we sign off?

JH: No, I think we'll save that for next time. We're heading into August, so it's time for me to close down the office in Moscow. We'll continue to podcast, but write lessons and try to write

a new book. The only sign-off part is don't go visit the Odyssey movie, folks. The Odyssey movie is an attempt to depict, in Hollywood terms, why blood lust works, and that's why bloodlust is pursued by a king going home, who then kills all of the oligarchs who were contesting for his political power while he was away for the previous ten years. This is the sort of, how to say, filmic propaganda, the Hollywood version of what Trump believes works, what Trump leaves is moral. What he thinks will keep MAGA together, and the Republican Party relatively successful coming out of the midterms. So my parting invitation, I've just written a bit about the Odyssey movie, I haven't seen it, the seats are all sold out at the cinemas that I can choose, oddly enough seats entirely sold out until mid-September in London, but they're going free and easily in Manhattan, go to an IMAX in Manhattan you can watch it, but I strongly advise you don't, because this is the Trump doctrine turned into Homeric morality. The bloodlust exercised by a king who's a winner is a winner and what we do to defend our countries, Canada, the United States, Russia and Iran and others, what we do to defend against a bloodlusted king, that's for next time. But don't go to Odyssey, boycott it as a small protest.

DL: Hear, hear. And since you opened up that can of worms I'm gonna have to add a couple of comments on all this. First of all, this is very personal to me this whole Odyssey crap because I am Greek and the subject of ancient Greek history is of considerable importance to me, and I just saw this article in the Guardian where this translator, this British-American translator, her name is Emily Wilson, she did a translation of the Odyssey, she was going off on the director of this movie. Nolan is his name again? And saying how much this departs from the real Odyssey and so forth. And I just found it so unseemly that a British American and an American were sniping about what the Odyssey means and the Guardian didn't think to actually ask somebody who's Greek what the Odyssey means. But that's not my biggest beef. My biggest beef, John, is that there is a beautiful nature preserve in Messinia, and it's just like a 45-minute drive from my house, I go there all the time with my wife when I'm in Greece, and the production set of that movie literally took over that nature preserve for three months last year and nobody was allowed to go anywhere near it. And they had inundated the place – this is a very, very sensitive natural environment – they had inundated a place with trucks and helicopters and there's all kinds of pollution and hundreds of staff for the movie production set and so forth, and we, the Greeks who live in that area were deprived of access to this pristine nature preserve so that Hollywood could make some bullshit movie that is designed at the end of the day to promote whatever passes for American values nowadays, I don't know. Anyways, I had to get that off my chest, John, and always great talking to you, and I look forward to our next conversation.

JH: Thank you, Dimitri.

END

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