



## Ukraine's Counteroffensive, Zelenskyy's Peace Plan & the Failed Grain Agreement

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Thank you for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza. Before I start this interview, I would like to share with you an important development. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Glenn Greenwald recently released a video in which he documents in great detail with ample evidence how the US government and social media corporations are censoring or suppressing voices that are providing an alternative view to the war in Ukraine. The link to this video can be found in the description below. Therefore, we urge all of our subscribers and people watching this video also to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. Even if you don't want to leave YouTube, please just join these channels as a precaution. The links to these channels can be found in a description below. Today I'll be talking to Dimitri Lascaris about the latest developments in the war in Ukraine. Dimitris Lascaris is an independent journalist and lawyer who specializes in human rights, class actions and international law. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada finishing second. Dimitri, welcome back to the show.

**Dimitri Lascaris (DL):** Thank you for having me back again.

**ZR:** I would like to start this interview with the Black Sea Grain Initiative or the Grain Deal, an agreement between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations that allows Ukraine, one of the world's largest grain exporters, to use the Black Sea for its grain shipments. That agreement expired on July 17, 2023, According to the Tagesschau, Germany's leading primetime news program, Russia is responsible for the collapse of this agreement and the suffering and hunger of millions of Africans that may result due to it. In this July 20th segment, the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, was quoted as saying: "This is an attack on the poorest people in the world". Before we get to the African Russian Summit

which took place in Saint Petersburg on July 27th and 28th, what do you think about Russia leaving the grain deal, especially given the disastrous consequences it could have on the most vulnerable people in the Global South due to rising food prices?

**DL:** Well, I understand that the Russian government's position, and there seems to be a good deal of evidence to support it, is that the deal was not simply designed to facilitate Ukrainian exports of key agricultural products, but also to facilitate Russian exports of key agricultural products. And sanctions that had been preventing Russia from exporting grain and fertilizer, sanctions imposed by the West, continue to effectively impede the export of these products from Russia, even after Russia agreed to allow the export of Ukrainian grain. And so Russia finally got fed up and said, You're not keeping your end of the bargain, and therefore we're not going to continue with this deal. There was also some concern that the – I myself have not seen, I would say, credible and compelling evidence to back this up – but there was a secondary and unsubstantiated concern that to some degree these grain shipments were being used as a cover for arms shipments. But I think really the principal reason was the fact that this was supposed to be reciprocal and it turned out to be a one sided deal for Ukraine. And a couple of things that one must bear in mind: first of all, the lion's share of these Ukrainian grain exports were not going to poor countries in Africa. By far, I understand the largest share was going to Spain, where it was being used to basically feed pigs for the upkeep of Spain's industry in Jamon. A very important industry for that particular country. And, you know, other European countries as well were absorbing a very significant part of the Ukrainian grain exports. So to a large degree, the West is exaggerating to what extent the Global South was dependent upon these exports. And the other thing I'll say is that Russia is offering to provide free significant quantities of grain to the countries in Africa that would be worst affected by this. So at the end of the day, Zain, I think if these sanctions weren't in place to begin with and they were never approved by the United Nations, the West has, you know, an extraordinary habit of imposing unilateral non UN approved sanctions on countries that they deem undesirable, this wouldn't be a problem. But the problem started with the imposition of sanctions that have effectively impeded the exportation of Russian agricultural products.

**ZR:** I want to stick to the Tagesschau and their reporting as it's one of the most watched programs in Germany when it comes to daily news. They commented on the African Russian Summit in the 27 July segment by stating that the summit was a way for Putin to shore up political support in the United Nations, where the African Union has 50 votes. Since Russia, according to the Tagesschau, has, quote, "hardly any supporters". Further, more in the segment, they stated that almost all African states attended, but only 21 leaders and heads of states attended, which is way below the last summit in 2019. Putin, on the other hand, which you just mentioned, announced to maintain grain supplies to Africa and even promised to provide free grain to six African countries. Is Russia's position in Africa faltering and is this as the Tagesschau put it, a way to shore up political support. How would you evaluate the summit?

**DL:** Well, as I understand it, only seven countries of Africa were unrepresented. You indicated the number of African countries that sent heads of states, a significant number of other African countries sent delegations and were represented at the summit, even though their heads of state did not attend. So the vast majority of African countries were in fact represented at the summit. And furthermore, it's important to understand that this is despite the fact that the West is applying very considerable pressure on these African countries not to go. And the West has had typically, you know, significant economic levers to use to apply that pressure. So I think it's remarkable that as many countries were represented at that summit, either by heads of state or lower level delegations despite this extraordinary pressure. And the other thing, you know, I just did a speaking tour on the Ukraine war in Canada, Zain. And part of my presentation was to discuss this whole concept of isolation of Russia in the context of the actual statistics. Now, it's true. If you look at the voting at the United Nations General Assembly in terms of condemnation of what Russia did, there is widespread rhetorical support, shall we say, for condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But if you actually look at a map of the countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia outside of the West, almost no country has imposed sanctions on Russia. And in fact, a close trading partner, almost the entirety of Latin America has not imposed sanctions on Russia, almost the entirety of Africa. The vast majority of Asia has not imposed sanctions on Russia. And even in North America, Mexico has refused to impose sanctions on Russia. Mexico just refused to attend a summit. That Saudi Arabia peace summit that Saudi Arabia is organizing on the grounds that Russia wasn't invited. And this is, as I say, a close trading partner and ally of the United States and Canada. And the same goes for weapons transfers. The vast majority of countries in this world have not sent weapons to Ukraine, despite very considerable pressure being applied, particularly on Latin American countries, to do that. So if you look at what countries are doing in terms of concrete action to take one side or the other, the vast majority of countries have taken a position of neutrality and continue to have a robust economic or not robust but significant economic and political relations with Russia. That's the reality. And that's been the case throughout the period of the invasion.

**ZR:** I would like to switch to the developments taking place on the battlefield in Ukraine. On July 28th, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy posted a video showing a group of soldiers holding a Ukrainian flag saying they had seized back control of the village of Staromaiorske in the Donetsk region. The Ukrainian president congratulated his troops on reclaiming the village, and Western commentators call it a significant breakthrough in its ongoing counter-offensive. How would you assess this victory? Are the Ukrainians now finally beginning to break through the Russian lines?

**DL:** No, not at all. And this is a much do about nothing. This village apparently had – had, I stress – somewhere in the range of 200 homes, was a quite small community. It has been razed to the ground by artillery. It is very difficult as a result of that for either side to actually hold it for any significant period of time, because the villages are within range of the artillery of both the Russian and Ukrainian forces and there really is nowhere to hide. And in fact,

CNN, a very pro NATO, pro Ukraine media outlet in the United States, just wrote an article titled that very phrase: Nowhere to hide. And they interviewed Ukrainian soldiers who are at the front line of this battle. And they discussed the fact that this village has been entirely annihilated, almost entirely annihilated. It's extraordinarily difficult for anybody to hold. Effectively it's now in the Grey-zone. So this is by no means any kind of a durable or game changer type of event. But really, the most important thing of all, Zain, is that nowhere along the front line has Ukraine actually broken through the first line of defense. Even the first line of defense, Russia has a layered defense, two, three layers, sometimes more, built up over many months in preparation for this offensive. And after two months, approximately, of extraordinarily intense combat and very heavy losses and I'm going strictly on the basis of Western media reports, we don't have to pay any attention to what the Russians are saying. Western media reports have acknowledged that in the past two months, Ukraine has taken extraordinary losses and they haven't even broken through the first line of defense. By any rational measure, this is a debacle. It's extraordinarily sad and just tragic to watch Ukrainian soldiers being thrust into this well-prepared and robust Russian defense when they don't have sufficient air cover. They have really no air cover at all. Their artillery is not adequate to meet the level of artillery strikes from the Russian side. They haven't had anywhere near the level of training that the Russian forces have had. And they're on the offense, which means they're going to, just by the nature of combat, take significantly higher casualties. So they're doing this, they're setting themselves up for higher casualty rates in the ratio of approximately three to one historically with inadequate training and inadequate equipment. And The Wall Street Journal put out an article recently. Again, this is not anything other than a pro NATO, pro-Ukrainian media organization in the West, saying that the Western military officials actually knew. They knew in advance that the Ukrainians did not have the means to conduct a successful counteroffensive, but they urged them to do it nonetheless because they're fearful that support for this proxy war is going to dry up in the West and particularly the United States. So this was in effect, as they call it in American football: Hail Mary. That's what it was. And they sent tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers to the slaughter in order to try to achieve something, some desperate last moment before the Western public turns against this heinous war.

**ZR:** On July 21st, the Tagesschau, I mention them once again, did a very interesting segment on the use of cluster munitions that the US recently provided to Ukraine and which Ukraine has been using now in the war. It seemed like a complete justification. In this segment, the reporter firstly stated that Russians have also been using cluster munitions since the start of the war, even on civilians. Secondly, he stated that since Ukraine did not have sufficient conventional ammunition, cluster munitions would help fill that gap. Thirdly, he reasoned that the defense minister of Ukraine provided a plan that committed to not using cluster munitions in the Russian territory and only on the battlefield where a proper accounting would be used, where these cluster bombs were dropped so that in the future it would be accurately assist in the demining process. What do you make out of these reasons? Does it

justify the use of cluster munitions by Ukraine? And will this weapon be decisive in breaking the Russian defense lines?

**DL:** First of all, I don't know that it has been established that Russia did use cluster munitions, particularly in civilian areas prior to the provision of cluster munitions to Ukraine. My understanding, in fact, is that the Pentagon was asked this question last year by the press whether or not Russia was using cluster munitions. And the Pentagon's response was essentially that we don't know. So it's certainly possible that Russia did, but Russia has not undertaken not to use these cluster munitions. It isn't a party to the treaty that bans them, first of all. And secondly, even if it's true that Russia used cluster munitions, that does not justify the West providing cluster munitions to Ukraine. You know, we don't have to engage in the behavior that we have condemned in the Russians. And in fact, at some point, I believe it was the prior spokesperson, not the current one, for the Biden administration, you know, referred to this as a war crime. So we're going to engage in what the Biden administration characterizes as war crimes because the Russians have done so. I thought that we in the West were supposed to set a higher standard and that we were supposed to be the champions and defenders of international law and human rights. So whatever the Russians may have done in this regard, and if they've been using cluster munitions in civilian areas, of course they should be bitterly condemned and people should be held accountable for this in accordance with due process of law. But in no way, shape or form should we consider ourselves free of any moral or legal obligation to refrain from the use of cluster munitions or providing them to Ukraine.

**ZR:** According to a July 31st report by Al Jazeera, Saudi Arabia, spurring what you also mentioned early in the interview to host a summit to discuss Ukraine President Zelenskyy's plan for peace. The ten point peace formula, as it is called, includes the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression and security guarantees for Ukraine. Russia has not been invited, whereas high level officials from the US, European Union, UK and other countries are expected to attend. How do you view Zelenskyy's plan? Can it create a basis for peace and help end the war? If not, what would a realistic plan look like?

**DL:** So this should not be called a peace deal. A peace deal, as I understand that term, and as I think most people understand that term is two parties bringing an end to a war before there is a decisive defeat of one side or the other and engaging in mutual compromise. And sometimes one side will be forced by circumstances to make more painful compromises than the other. But the key term, the key element of any true peace deal is compromise. A compromise that results in the cessation of hostilities before one country is completely destroyed and defeated?. What Zelenskyy is doing is basically his so-called peace deal is a demand for Russian capitulation. Russia gets nothing out of that so-called peace deal. That's not a peace deal. Now, maybe you take the position that this is the right thing for the Zelenskyy government to do, that it's entitled to demand every one of these things. But let's not pretend that this is going to bring about a cessation of hostilities before one side or the

other is defeated. Russia has absolutely no incentive to accept those terms because it amounts to a complete and utter defeat. And here's the reality, Zain. It's absolutely clear that there ain't going to be no deal, no compromise involving Russia, where Russia gives up not only the four oblasts that it has annexed under its own laws following the invasion, but Crimea as well, which for 200 years was part of Russia and is of strategic significance to Russia. That's simply not going to happen. And we should stop pretending that that's going to happen; that one day Vladimir Putin is going to wake up and say, you know what, I was wrong all along and I'm going to withdraw all of our soldiers, including those from Crimea and you can have all the land back. And, you know, and we're going to let you enter NATO, even though we regard that as an existential threat. And we're going to not deal with the problem of neo-Nazism in your country and we're not going to have any deal in place that requires you to honor the Minsk Accords, which you floated for eight years. This is delusional, Zain. It's absolutely delusional. And we should stop pretending that this is going to lead to anything other than a continuance of this war ultimately leading to one defeat. And that defeat is almost certainly going to be Ukraine. This is the height of irresponsibility. If Mr. Zelenskyy is truly interested in bringing an end to the suffering of his people, he has to sit down at the table without preconditions and be prepared to make at least a few compromises. And at the very top of that list should be finally, Ukraine's agreement not to enter NATO. At a bare minimum, and he's not even offering to do that. So I think that this is just delusional behavior that will ultimately cause only more suffering to the Ukrainian people who have already suffered so much.

**ZR:** Dimitri Lascaris, independent journalist and lawyer, thank you so much for your time today.

**DL:** Thank you, Zain, always a pleasure.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. Please, I urge all of our viewers before leaving to join us on our alternative channels on Telegram, Rumble and our podcast called Podbean. The link to these platforms can be found in the description below. And if you're watching our content regularly, make sure to donate just 1 to €5 a month. If all of our 141,000 subscribers donate on a regular basis, via Patreon, PayPal or bank account 1 to €5 a month, we will be able to sustain our operations for the next five years and provide you with daily nonprofit news and analysis. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

**END**