



Biden's withdrawal, US deployment of Tomahawks in Germany & the war in Ukraine

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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. Today I'll be talking to Peter Kuznick about US domestic politics and the situation in Gaza and Israel, as well as the war in Ukraine. Peter Kuznick is professor of history and the director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at American University. He's also an author, and he's written a book together with film director and Hollywood producer Oliver Stone called *The Untold History of the United States*. Welcome back Peter.

Peter Kuznick (PK): Hi Zain, it is always good to be with you.

ZR: Let's start this interview with a recap of some recent developments in US domestic politics. On July 13th, former president of the United States and presumptive Republican Party nominee for the 2024 presidential election, Donald Trump, survived an assassination attempt during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania. The attack was widely condemned across the political spectrum, both in the US and in Europe. In the US, the director of the US Secret Service, Kimberly Cheatle, resigned after it became clear that there were massive security theories, the likes of which had not been seen for decades. In addition, President Joe Biden dropped out of the presidential race this week and pledged support for Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party nominee. This came after immense pressure built up within the Democratic Party base for Joe Biden to withdraw from the presidential race following his debate against Donald Trump in June, where he was unable to formulate complete sentences and appeared mentally impaired. Despite Biden declaring that only God Almighty could drive him out of the race, his debacles continued. For example, at the 75th NATO summit in Washington, he mistakenly introduced Ukrainian President Zelensky as Russian President Vladimir Putin, and even mixed up Vice President Kamala Harris with Donald Trump in a

solo news conference. Could you first comment on Trump's assassination attempt and thereafter talk about Kamala Harris, her political profile and her stance on Ukraine and Gaza?

PK: Yeah. American politics have been really crazier than ever these last few weeks. I guess we can say it begins with that disastrous June 27th debate in which Biden seemed to be mentally incapable. He really could not finish his sentences, could not present his positions. That created a crisis in American politics. I was asked by a Russian interviewer the following day, I think, five interviews the next day, and one Russian interviewer said, what he asked: "Was yesterday's debate a disaster for both Biden and the Democratic Party?" And I said: "Yes and no". It was a disaster for Biden, but it could be the salvation for the Democratic Party, because now there's going to be enormous pressure to remove Biden from the top of the ticket. And it took weeks before that happened. Biden encircled himself in a smaller and smaller, tighter cocoon in which the decisions representing the future fate of this planet really rest in the hands of an 81 year old, mentally challenged narcissist warmonger. His wife, a community college English teacher, and his son, a felon, former drug addict, those three people were deciding what Biden was going to do. And for weeks, he resisted all the pressure that was mounting to drop out of the race. 18% of the American people in one poll thought he was capable of being president. You know, so this was really a truly pathetic moment in that regard. We were all finally relieved when he stepped down. Although he wasted three weeks dithering on whether he should do so. And then before that happened, you've got the assassination attempt on Donald Trump. It was a fiasco in terms of the Secret Service protection. They saw this guy. They knew he was there and they did effectively nothing to stop him. Trump gets up there, he gets hit in the ear. And there's a famous saying in America, when Nathan Hale was executed during the Revolutionary War, and he said, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country", before the Brits executed him, well, Donald Trump said, "I regret that I have but one ear to give for my country", and he made it like he was a strong man again. The contrast between Trump getting up and raising his fist and shouting: "fight, fight, fight!" And with Biden and not being able to walk up the steps to his airplane or walk across the stage, the contrast was so stark that Biden had to drop out. The discourse in the United States around Trump, the Republicans, especially the evangelical Christian base, said that the fact that Trump turned his head at the last minute, which he never did, was a sign that God was protecting Trump, that God saved him. Well, as I've said to some of my interviewers, there are just as many people in the United States who think that Trump was saved by Satan and not by God. You know, so what you choose your religious metaphor for, for what's happening in American politics. In any case the fact that Trump lead over Biden, despite the fact that there was nobody home mentally, that Biden was a warmonger, that Biden was inept and couldn't campaign, the fact that Trump and Biden were still within the margin of error shows that there's a real ceiling on Trump's support. Most Americans fear Donald Trump. Americans have a short memory. And I've quoted Chou En-lai before, and he said: "The charming [delightful] thing about Americans is that they have absolutely no historical memory". It's not really that charming. It's quite dangerous. So a lot of Americans have forgotten how much they hated Donald Trump and the Trump presidency of just four years ago. Trump the insurrectionist, Trump the felon. And so Trump's base of support remains solid. However, he can't get past about 45/47%, even against Joe Biden. I was not

thrilled with the fact that Kamala Harris was being anointed. When she ran in 2019 and 2020, she ran a very, very weak campaign. She started off, and was fairly well received and was coming in third, but she was so inept as a campaigner that she was forced to drop out before the first primary – for a lot of reasons we can get into. So I was hoping that the Democrats would be smart enough to go a different direction. Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan, would be strong and progressive, an independent. If the Democrats were concerned that passing over a black woman who is also of South Asian descent would hurt them with the Black base of the party, I was hoping they would choose Maryland Governor Wes Moore to run as a vice presidential candidate, and that would be a very strong ticket. Two smart, articulate progressives would be able to really take it to the Republicans and break with Biden's policies. Kamala Harris is in a difficult position. She's not the worst of candidates. There are a lot of things about her that are very likable and even possibly successful as a candidate. She's learned a lot. She's not the same person who ran in 2020 and couldn't figure out what her program was and what her message was. She's a lot better now, especially in the last year or two since Roe v Wade was overturned by the worst Supreme Court in American history. The most backward, reactionary, right wing extremist Supreme Court in American history overturned Roe v Wade and since then Kamala Harris has come out as a champion for women's health rights, for abortion rights. Biden is this Catholic, who personally was opposed to abortion. That was not a strong voice, even though that was the strongest message the Democrats had to appeal to women, suburban women and most men who also oppose that are supportive of women's health rights and women making their own decisions about their bodies. Kamala Harris will be able to take that case to Trump and to Vance. The other thing that's happened is that Trump chose this clown from Ohio, J.D. Vance, to be his vice presidential running mate. Vance is on record as having said that Trump is potentially an American Hitler. Germans know what that means. Even Americans know what that means. Vance condemned Trump. He eviscerated Trump. He identified Trump for what he was. And now he's there kissing Trump's ring and kissing Trump's butt. And that's a big target. So what Vance represented was a doubling down on Trump's MAGA base. Trump could have chosen other candidates who would have broadened his appeal. What he does with Vance is he chooses somebody who not only seems to be a sycophant, but who also seems to be an opportunistic hypocrite who will say anything in order to ingratiate himself with Donald Trump and the MAGA base. So I don't think that's going to play well.

So you got Kamala Harris, who's so much smarter than Trump, more articulate. Now it is the Republicans, who are the ones who are vulnerable on the age issue. Because it wasn't only Biden who couldn't get a sentence out and was constantly making mistakes. Trump does the same thing. Trump is also mentally challenged, physically challenged, chronologically challenged, health challenged. And so Kamala Harris will be much stronger, more energetic, more vigorous, more focused. I hope she chooses somebody that makes a good choice for vice president. Although in the United States, vice presidential candidates almost never matter at all. The thing about Harris is that it's difficult – if Biden stays on as president, and there's a lot of pressure on him to step down and that might probably be great for Harris if she became president before the election. But Biden is too stubborn, I think, to do so and too proud to do so. So she's going to have to distance herself on several issues without seeming to

attack President Biden. That's not easy to do. Humphrey couldn't do it very effectively when he was running in 1968 after Lyndon Johnson stepped aside. Vice presidents really have little influence over the policies. But she's been blamed for the fiasco at the border. She's been blamed for gaslighting the American people and saying that Biden was still competent and he should continue running. So those are the two main attack lines against Kamala Harris. The real attack line against her from the Republicans is that she's Black. A Black Indian woman, and there's still a big portion of Americans who don't trust Blacks, don't trust women. Even though Obama did get elected in 2008 and 2012, there's still that undercurrent in American society, that racist, misogynist element. And that's going to be a factor, no matter who she chooses as vice president. The wisdom is she's got to choose a white male Christian. One of the candidates who would give her support in Pennsylvania is governor Josh Shapiro. But he's Jewish. And so the people who don't like her for being Black and Indian or a woman, are also anti-Semitic in large part. So she probably will steer clear of that. Gretchen Whitmer would be a great vice presidential candidate, but to put another woman on the ticket also probably isn't going to happen. So she'll choose one of the governors likely, or Pete Buttigieg. And then you put a gay man on the ticket that also has these liabilities in the United States. So what we need to see is her breaking from Biden on the Israel-Gaza issue and her pushing for diplomacy when it comes to Ukraine and her backing off the new Cold War approach toward China. You know, Biden has been actually a good domestic policy president in the United States. He hasn't been as progressive as a Franklin Roosevelt or even a Lyndon Johnson. But he has been pretty good on domestic policy. It's his foreign policy that's been a disaster, as you and I have discussed before. But there are some signs of hope that I'd like to talk to you about.

ZR: Let us move to the war in Ukraine and the bigger geopolitical move surrounding it. Let me start by recapping the major developments for our viewers. In spring of this year, the United States approved a \$61 billion military aid package for Ukraine that also included, for the first time, the 300 kilometer range Army Tactical missile systems. The Russian military then began its summer offensive in eastern Ukraine, making notable territorial gains. In response, the West gave Ukraine permission to deploy western made missiles to strike targets within Russian territory, while France announced that it would start sending military trainers to Ukraine. In June there were some calls for peace. For example, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed a peace plan without preconditions that included a ceasefire in which the current territories would be frozen as they are, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a peace in Switzerland to which Russia was not invited. Even Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, joined the initiative, and since his country took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union, in a move that was widely condemned in Europe, he went on a self-appointed peace mission in which he visited Ukraine, Russia, China and even Donald Trump in the US to find a resolution to the war. All of these peace calls have thus far fallen on deaf ears, as the war rages on. NATO in the last summit decided to send more F-16s as well as air defense Patriot systems to Ukraine, in addition, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the US will deploy long range Tomahawk missiles in Germany by 2026. The Tomahawk cruise missile is not only hard to detect on radar, but it also has a range of 2500km. Moscow, on the other hand, is around 1600km away from Berlin, and this

deployment would give NATO the capability to strike Moscow in 2026. A few days ago, the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock defended the deployment by stating that Russia has been continuously violating international arms agreements by expanding its nuclear capacity. She went on further to state and let me quote here, quote: "We must protect ourselves and our Baltic partners against this; including through increased deterrence and additional stand off weapons. Anything else would not only be irresponsible, but also naive in the face of an ice cold Kremlin", unquote. Can you provide your assessment on these long range missiles, and whether the deployment in Germany, as the foreign minister stated, will protect Europe and provide deterrence against the ice cold Kremlin?

PK: Well, let me backup, Zain, and first talk a little about Ukraine. Because what you're saying is absolutely correct. Terrifyingly dangerous. Stupidly shortsighted. I wrote an article in the Quincy Institute publication Responsible Statecraft with Ivana Hughes, a Columbia professor who is the head of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, in which we're warning about how all these measures are taking us closer and closer to World War three, to nuclear war. This idea that Ukraine can attack inside of Russia with American and other European advanced weapons, at the same time Macron is calling for actually sending combat troops to Ukraine and the trainers they're sending and the intelligence they're providing and the targeting, I mean, it's just getting more and more dangerous by the day. However, there are some glimmers of hope, finally. Number one, Germany has said it's going to cut in half its aid to Ukraine this year. That's actually a positive sign. Number two, we've got Orban's visits that you mentioned to Kiev, to Moscow, to Beijing, to Washington. Now Orban is a discredited figure in many circles, but at least he's talking about peace. Number three, we've got China and Brazil putting forth a ten point peace plan. Xi Jinping and Lula are pressing internationally for peace. Number four, we've got the number two official in the Vatican, Parolin, visiting Kiev right now, and pushing peace, talking about peace with Zelensky. Number five, we've got Kuleba, from Ukraine right now in Beijing. And Zelensky has been saying, number six, that he is now open to negotiations. We had that phony meeting in Switzerland, some kind of peace summit that neither China or Russia attended and after which, Zelensky said, Well, we need another one, a Global South country should host it and we should invite Russia to that one. That's a slight step. But the bigger step now is that Ukraine is signaling that it's open to begin negotiations. Why is that happening? Maybe partly because there's a real chance that Donald Trump becomes president in the United States. I hope not for the sake of the United States, and I hope not for the sake of the world, but the one issue in which he sometimes makes sense is about Ukraine and NATO. And so, maybe realizing that, realizing that the funds are likely to dry up, realizing that the war is going poorly, realizing that a month from now, six months, a year from now, Ukraine is going to be in worse position at the bargaining table than it is now, realizing that the deaths are just out of control among Ukrainians and Russians, and that Ukraine is at such a disadvantage militarily, in terms of armaments, in terms of weapons, in terms of population, economically, we're finally finally seeing some glimmers of hope. Of course, Baerbock is going to be there till the end and calling on Zelensky to keep on fighting, and Germany is going to provide the missiles and other weapons that Ukraine wants. But increasingly the world is going in a different direction. Even the latest poll that just came out yesterday among Ukrainians

showed that 32% of Ukrainians say that they're in favor of Ukraine giving up land for peace. That's a threefold increase over a year ago. It was more than threefold, actually. Another survey, I said, is that 44% of Ukrainians support peace talks at this point. Well, if even the Ukrainians realize that this is a futile effort – maybe it was a heroic effort. You know, when I talk about Zelensky, I don't talk about him being a wise leader, but I do talk about him being a brave leader. You know, just think back. Let's do a counterfactual. Back in March of 2022, we had the Istanbul negotiations going on and coming forth with a peace plan that would have kept, you know, we also had the Minsk agreements for years that would have kept the Donbass in Ukraine, giving it more independence. Ukraine out of NATO. But Ukraine is not going to be in NATO. Ukraine could be in the EU. That could make sense. But Ukraine should not be in NATO and NATO should stop expanding to Russia's border. Even the people in Georgia are realizing that now. So you put all of this together, and how much better off with the world we would have been if Boris Johnson and Biden had not pushed Ukraine to continue fighting rather than settle, a month after the war began. There would be hundreds of thousands of people still alive, Ukraine's economy would not be destroyed, food shortages, hunger, so many more Russians alive. You know, it was not a good thing for Putin to invade, I condemned it from the beginning. But in the West and the United States, Germany, they like to say it's an unprovoked war. Unprovoked? It was one of the most provoked wars in history. But in the nuclear age, the enemy is war. The Japanese Academy Award winning film from 1991, *Black Rain*, has one of the atomic bomb victims, five years later, getting word that the US might use nuclear weapons in Korea and commenting: "An unjust peace is better than a just war". You know, that's the reality that we face in Ukraine. And the sooner this ends, the better for the Ukrainians, the Americans, the Germans, the Russians and everybody else. So we've got peace plans on the table. Kamala Harris has to figure out a way to indicate that diplomacy is no longer going to be a dirty word, a four letter word in the United States, and to encourage Zelensky to sit down with Putin and figure out, hammer out a peace settlement that the world can live with. Putin says he wants all of those four territories that he said are now part of Russia, Zaporizhzhya, Kherson, and the Donbas, Luhansk and Donetsk, he doesn't control all of it, maybe they'll settle and redraw the lines for the territory that Russia now controls, as well as Crimea. I guess that's probably the best deal that Putin is willing to give Ukraine. But let's settle this now.

So to the question of missiles. Big report came out from NATO headlined in today's Reuters, the big headline: *NATO finds gaping holes in Europe's defenses*. One of the casualties of this Russian invasion has been the strengthening of NATO and the re-militarizing of the planet. Yesterday was the warmest day the world has ever seen. It broke the record for the hottest day. When was that record set? The day before. One of the biggest contributors to global warming are the militaries and the military exercises and the war. And rather than having any planetary commitment, serious commitment to dealing with global warming and climate change and greenhouse gases that are causing this increase in temperatures, all we are doing is figuring out ways to spend more money, to waste more money on the military. Look what's happening to Russia. Why did the Soviet Union collapse? In large part because Russia, the Soviet Union, is spending more than a quarter of its GDP on its military. In some accounts, even more than that. And the big pressure in Europe now is to bolster its militaries. These

new missiles go into Germany, well, people very close to Chancellor Scholz are saying this is madness; that this militarization that Baerbock is applauding and that the US militaries are offering, a lot of the top German leaders are having second thoughts. Germany is facing a recession. Why? Because of its cutting off of cheap oil and gas from Russia. You could say that India, while that NATO summit was going on in Washington, where was Modi? Not in Washington. Modi was in Moscow. Modi was meeting with Putin. I mean, Germany has resisted to some degree the new Cold War with China. It has fallen in line and been a big backer of the new Cold War with Russia. But we need a very different approach right now. And there are people in Germany who seem to at least have some sense of that. But this positioning, these missiles there, missiles that can threaten Russia even more than exists now. It was a terrible, terrible mistake to end the INF treaty. But this militarizing of the planet that we see going on in the Pacific, in Europe, while much of the Global South are resisting it, the Western world clearly is not – and Russia is not. So Russia is falling in that same trap and it is making Russia more and more dependent on China. And we see now, Putin's recent visit to Pyongyang. A Russian-North Korean security pact, is that really the direction we want? Or the US strengthening its ties to South Korea? The Yoon government in South Korea is very, very unpopular. However, the South Koreans feel threatened by North Korea. Different surveys say that 60 to 70% of South Koreans want South Korea to have its own nuclear weapons. This is the way the world is going now. All the nuclear powers are not only modernizing their arsenals, almost all of them are increasing, augmenting their arsenals. The Brits are talking about a 40% increase in Trident and their nuclear capability, the nuclear weapons. The Chinese have increased their nuclear arsenal from 200 weapons to 500 now, and they're going to triple that, according to the Pentagon, at least over the next decade. We're going the wrong direction lowering the threshold for nuclear use. The Russians rethinking their nuclear doctrines, the Americans doing so... When Trump was president, this nuclear Posture Review made the use of nuclear weapons a much higher priority than they've been before under Obama. And Biden, who promised to lower it again, has not done so. So the world is a mess. And the new missiles to Germany are symptomatic of the insane direction that we're taking as a planetary "civilization". I use the word civilization in quotes.

ZR: You have been voicing a lot of hope that Kamala Harris should make a break with President Biden in terms of the policy towards Gaza and as well as Ukraine and the hawkishness that the US has shown, in terms of Taiwan and China. Kamala Harris has not really had an anti-imperialist past or anti-war activism and she's not been really vocal about diplomacy, do you really think that she would shift position on these issues?

PK: Well, it's a tough question. You talk about her not having a great track record. Let's take it back further. Let's take it back to her parents. You know, her parents met when they were PhD students at Berkeley in the early to mid 60s. Her father got a PhD in Economics and was a renowned professor at Stanford. He was a Marxist economist or a quasi Marxist economist. He was anti-colonialist. He was a Black man from Jamaica. Her mother, also got a PhD. She's from India. She's an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist. She was a leading breast cancer researcher. When Kamala was a baby, they not only took her to civil rights demonstrations, they took her to anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in her stroller. So she grew up with parents

who instilled certain values, not only the idea that she could accomplish anything she wanted in life, despite being a Black girl and woman, but they brought her up with the right values. So she's been very calculating, pragmatic, maybe opportunistic in some of the same ways Obama was. But is there something else going on there beneath the surface? The Republicans are running against her for being too liberal. If she has any brains and any backbone and any convictions, she will double down on that. Not like the liberal warmongers in the United States now, but like real liberals, like anti-war liberals, like her parents. And so maybe that's there. Maybe it's in her DNA. Maybe it's in her genes, maybe in her bones, and maybe it's in her brain at our heart. We have to see, because it's clear that most Americans don't want a new Cold War with Russia, don't want a new Cold War with China, don't want to see the fighting in Ukraine continue, don't want to see us go to war over Taiwan. Most Americans hate what the Israelis are doing. Now she's going to be meeting with Netanyahu. Netanyahu is addressing Congress tonight. That's a disgrace. As a Jewish American, to me it's appalling what Israel is doing, but not only as a Jewish man, as a citizen of the world, what Israel is doing. While what Hamas did, in attacking Israel the way it did, should be universally condemned for the outrage it was, killing innocent women and children, concert goers, people who were mostly pro-peace with Palestine were slaughtered. But the Israeli response has been unconscionable and heinous and a disgrace. To see Israel, a country born in anti-fascism, behaving like fascist, and its treatment of Palestinians is disgraceful, also, much more disgraceful. So the fact that Netanyahu is here, it was great to see 400 members of Jews For Peace, I think the group is called, protesting yesterday at the Capitol; 250 getting arrested. I think back to the days of the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement, when Jews played a very prominent role in both the civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War movements and hopefully can re-capture that tradition, which is much more in line with Jewish values then supporting what Israel is doing now, which is just a moral outrage.

ZR: Peter Kuznick, professor of history and director of Nuclear Studies Institute at American University, thank you so much for your time today.

PK: Thank you, Zain. Take care.

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