

Episode 183: Mike Waller

Bill Walton ([00:00](#)):

So Mike, how things going at Center for Security Policy? Okay?

Mike Waller ([00:04](#)):

They're going pretty well. They've got a great Homeland Security project underway.

Bill Walton ([00:09](#)):

Oh good.

Mike Waller ([00:09](#)):

Kyle has put together. I think you've met Kyle.

Bill Walton ([00:12](#)):

I did. Yeah. I'm doing Frank's radio show every Monday morning. And I'm doing multinational finance and China and all that. It's great fun.

Mike Waller ([00:25](#)):

Oh, good, good. Yeah, he's always bringing in some great guests on the show. I'm never... I seldom listened to it because I've got so much going on and then I forget. I can't catch up.

Bill Walton ([00:37](#)):

Well, mine is particularly worthwhile. Well, that's the problem is we're all doing all this outgoing stuff and we're never paying attention to what anybody else is doing. And we should.

Mike Waller ([00:47](#)):

Yeah, We should.

Bill Walton ([00:48](#)):

We should. Okay, Kenny, we ready?

Kenny ([00:51](#)):

All Right. Bill Walton Show. April 14.

Announcer ([00:53](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people. Interesting things.

Bill Walton ([01:18](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Well, with event moving so rapidly with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I wanted to call an audible on this show to bring in somebody who is really an expert not only in the geopolitics of it than the geo-military aspect of it, but also the psychological

aspect of it. Mike Waller, returning guest. Jay Michael Waller, PHD. He's with the Center for Security Policy. And his doctoral dissertation was called Secret Empire: The KGB in Russia Today. And in that, and this was 40 years ago, he predicted the rise of Vladimir Putin and has been a real student of Vladimir Putin really ever since. And Mike now is also... He was an Annenberg Professor of International Communication at the Institute of World Politics, and instructor in SYOPS operation at the Kennedy Special Warfare Center School at Fort Bragg. So, Mike, thrilled you're here.

Mike Waller ([02:23](#)):

Nice to be back.

Bill Walton ([02:24](#)):

Although the circumstances are always sort of dire when we get together. Bring us... It's now April, mid-April 2022. Where do you think we are with Russia's incursion into the Ukraine? And are they winning, losing, stalemate? What's your assessment of what's happening?

Mike Waller ([02:43](#)):

I don't think anybody can honestly say where we are. It depends on the day. It depends on a whole lot of factors. When it depends on personalities and not groups of people where it's more predictable. You know, how's the president of the United States today? How coherent is he? How coherent is his chain of command? Where have our NATO allies flip flopped most recently, for better or for worse? What's Vladimir Putin's mindset? How is he communicating with his general staff? These are all unknowns every single day. So we can't... Nobody can say how things are going right now.

Bill Walton ([03:25](#)):

Well, I had Peter Pry on. You and I were on together with Peter Pry and we gamed out something. First we talked about the possibility of this provoking a World War III, which is still on the table. It's still a possibility. But there's a theory that Putin really would like a long war here, because it's really grinding the west down. If you look at what's happening with the sanctions imposed on Russia, at first it clobbered the ruble. Now the ruble's climb back up to where it was, and Russia's still getting lots of revenue from natural gas and oil sales. And of course they've been hurt. Their economy's going to be down 10-15% this year. But it seems like they're thinking that may be a manageable outcome if Putin can keep NATO and all these other countries engaged in Ukraine. Europe is getting clobbered economically the same way the United States is. And the head of the biggest chemical operation in the world based in Germany, I think it's BASF, said that if they ended up not getting Russian gas, the German economy would basically shut down.

Mike Waller ([04:37](#)):

Right. Right. So Germany has created this dependency, which we've been warning about for years since the Reagan time.

Bill Walton ([04:46](#)):

Well, Angela Merkel in particular was... Anyway, continue.

Mike Waller ([04:50](#)):

Well. Yeah, but even Reagan saw this when the Trans-Siberian pipeline was being built in the eighties. That made Europe dependent on Russian gas. And he had a covert operation, that Norm Bailey had a role in, which was the Germans wanted this pipeline in there and they needed, I think, General Electric turbines. And so the Reagan's National Security Council staff and Bill Casey at the CIA ran an operation to grudgingly allow GE, I think it was, to sell this technology for the pipeline. But it contained a piece of software or a small piece of hardware like a chip that would ultimately malfunction. And it finally did and it blew up the pipeline. So our early warning satellites looked at and saw it as a possible nuclear missile launch had we not known what we were...what was going to happen there. And that set back the Soviet program for years. So what we're seeing now under the past 20 odd years with Putin. And with Angela Merkel and her socialist predecessors bringing on this new set of pipelines is really an extension of that old one from the eighties.

Bill Walton ([05:58](#)):

So where does that leave us now? I mean, what is...

Mike Waller ([06:02](#)):

That leaves our main central European NATO ally completely dependent on Putin's good graces in order for its economy to continue.

Bill Walton ([06:12](#)):

Ouch. Not a good place to be.

Mike Waller ([06:15](#)):

No. And it's a weak ally and it's a double dealing ally, even on a good day.

Bill Walton ([06:20](#)):

What's your assessment of the new head of Germany? He gave a very strong stirring speech a week after all this happened.

Mike Waller ([06:29](#)):

Yeah, he did, but it's easy to give speeches. But he's still slow walking everything in terms of making good on whatever commitments he's making. He either makes the commitments and sticks with them, or don't make a fancy speech. So he's made great speeches, but I don't see where he's really put real policy or energy behind making those things happen.

Bill Walton ([06:52](#)):

So do you think we have a... I mean, we talked about this. You mentioned at the outset. We've got a leadership team here in the United States starting with Joe "ghost gun" Biden, which was a pathetic thing to watch in the Rose Garden. And then we've got our secretary of defense and our head of the joint chief of staff who agree the white rage and climate change are the biggest issues we face. And oh, by the way, now they've got to deal with this thing in Ukraine. Do we have a leadership team that we think can act assertively in this case?

Mike Waller ([07:36](#)):

No.

Bill Walton ([07:37](#)):

That was pretty leading question.

Mike Waller ([07:38](#)):

No. I mean, really when you think of it though.

Bill Walton ([07:40](#)):

No, I think they'll be great. Sorry.

Mike Waller ([07:45](#)):

Look, if you want to wreck the military and if you want to turn it into a politicized social revolutionary operation, then we have a great leadership team. None better. But that's not what our military's for. And so if you're Vladimir Putin or your Xi Jinping in China and you have your own ambitions. And what's holding you back is wondering how the United States might respond. And you see Joe Biden and then you see Kamala Harris and Nancy Pelosi, and then the defense secretary Austin and all the worse than politically correct. But just woke and crazy social engineering policies for the military where they would rather force our war fighters out of the military than stop their transgender plan. That's the strategy. So you're Vladimir Putin and you're thinking, this is the time for me to strike at Ukraine. I've been talking about this for years. The world has ignored me on it. This is time for me to move. And now we find ourselves in the situation that we're in.

Bill Walton ([08:52](#)):

And do you think Putin expected to take this long to work his way through Ukraine? Was this a surprise? I've heard that he hasn't brought in his best tanks. He hasn't brought in... He hasn't used cyber warfare very extensively. And there are a lot of tools in his arsenal that he has not used. I mean, is this... What's going on here?

Mike Waller ([09:14](#)):

Part of it think is we have conditioned ourselves to think the Russians are 10 feet tall. Still. Even with the Soviet collapse and everything we saw behind that. So having been in Moscow during the Soviet collapse, it was shocking to see just how decrepit and backward so much really everything was.

Bill Walton ([09:30](#)):

You were there in '91?

Mike Waller ([09:31](#)):

'91, '92, '93. Up through '94.

Bill Walton ([09:34](#)):

What were you doing there?

Mike Waller ([09:35](#)):

I was helping... I was working with the opposition to have Russia succeed from the USSR. Doing political training with them, working with Ukrainians, and Balts and others to take down the Soviet Union from

within. Give it a push. Because George Bush was trying to save the Soviet Union. But we were working since the Reagan times to help undermine them and had this crazy idea-

Bill Walton ([09:58](#)):

Were you with one of the agencies?

Mike Waller ([10:00](#)):

No, always civilian. No. The agency didn't do this stuff.

Bill Walton ([10:02](#)):

No. Okay. This was... No.

Mike Waller ([10:06](#)):

If you don't want to secede, then you collaborate with the CIA. If you want to really secede, you do it privately.

Bill Walton ([10:12](#)):

So you were there then and you saw this and you saw... So we think... You don't think we've overestimated the strength of their military conventional military capability?

Mike Waller ([10:20](#)):

Yeah. Oh, but even the nuclear. I became friends with President Yeltsin's national security advisor, General Alexander Lebed. And Lebed was a pretty hard-nose general, but he really wanted to change the country and really wanted to end any hostility with the United States. And he came and he said, I've been trying to raise this with the American government, but I can't get any answers. But I've been doing an inventory of our tactical nuclear warheads and we're missing about 110 of them. Do you know anybody who can help us find them?

Mike Waller ([10:56](#)):

So we had that kind of window of opportunity at the time, where if you were just straight with these guys and could speak like normal people to each other and not have the sense of pretentiousness or talk down to them, they come to you for this kind of help. And then you realize what they can even keep track of their nuclear warheads. What kind of system do they have? And then we had another... We had a Russian bomber pilot, General [inaudible 00:11:23] who actually hated the Russians. He was an ethnic Chechen. But he was based in Estonia, then Soviet occupied Estonia, and took the trouble to learn the Estonian language. And then he went back to become head of Chechnya. And then he came and said, Hey, I've got a... I can fly you a bomber with nuclear weapons on it if you can provide safe passage to the bomber. You guys can have it if you just help us out and be help us become independent from Russia. I mean, we would've access to that technology and everything else. I went to the Clinton National Security Council on this and they said, we're not going to touch that here. He would've flown the bomber to Italy or any other place and landed it if he could land it at a NATO airbase.

Bill Walton ([12:05](#)):

Did you find that 110 nukes?

Mike Waller ([12:07](#)):

I don't know. I handed it off to a Clinton NSC staffer who then had a movie made about it with Nicole Kidman and George Clooney. And that's all I ever heard of that.

Bill Walton ([12:20](#)):

So we've got call Nicole and George to find out what happened. I'm sure they'll know. But we had a whole state department that didn't really want to see the Soviet Union dissolve.

Mike Waller ([12:31](#)):

They were scared. And not just the state department, but the CIA said it could never collapse. Condoleezza Rice at the White House then, Bush 41. She was the Soviet affairs person. She was deathly afraid of having the Soviet Union collapse. She was... She wrote the Chicken Kiev speech for...that President Bush gave to convince Ukraine not to try to become independent. And we're over there trying to work to help the Ukrainians secede.

Bill Walton ([13:01](#)):

I wouldn't... I was off doing private equity back in those days. What was the Chicken Kiev speech? I've heard the sort of termed, but what did he say?

Mike Waller ([13:09](#)):

He said... He went to Kiev and he said, we've got to stop this to temper this sense of nationalism that will become destabilizing. And basically in his gentle way saying don't even think of seceding from the Soviet Union because it's just not going to work. So you have the American Republican leadership trying to save the Soviet communist party and save the USSR, very fearful of it and the whole political and diplomatic establishment behind it. And then Bill Clinton went on to continue that and make the problem even worse.

Bill Walton ([13:42](#)):

Has there been a jump shift in our national securities establishment since then, or is just the continuation of that mindset up to today?

Mike Waller ([13:51](#)):

It's pretty... It's like a club.

Bill Walton ([13:54](#)):

Okay.

Mike Waller ([13:54](#)):

So you're either welcome in the club or you're not welcome in the club.

Bill Walton ([13:57](#)):

And what are your credentials if you're in the club?

Mike Waller ([14:00](#)):

If you've gone to the right schools or hang out with those who've gone to the right schools. If you've gone along with certain policies and not been disruptive. If your ideas are within a conventional acceptable range and they're not too innovative, you can be part of the club. And if you're ready to compromise your principles, you're certainly welcome to be part of the club. That's kind of a mandatory price of admission.

Bill Walton ([14:28](#)):

And you're not being cynical. You're just being factual.

Mike Waller ([14:31](#)):

It's just personal experience.

Bill Walton ([14:32](#)):

Okay. You've been there. Well, this is the Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Mike Waller. And we're talking about... We're beginning to start talking about our national security establishment and what it takes to join that club. So we're coming up to today and we're in this mode where all the headlines are about Ukraine. And how much is it in our national interest to be...to care about what happens to Ukraine? I mean, I know we want to... We don't like humanitarian crises. We want to "do something", but do we really have a role there?

Mike Waller ([15:16](#)):

That itself is a big debate? I mean, what role should we have or should-

Bill Walton ([15:20](#)):

Because we've got a lot of conservative friends that say, look, we got to get tough. We got to defend Ukraine. We got to shut down Russia. And then we've got to... I guess I'm in the dove camp where there people that say, look, there's really not a whole lot we can really accomplish there. If we wanted to bring in all of our conventional forces, that could be a catastrophe that leads directly to nuclear war with Russia. Why would we want to do that? Seems to me like we ought to be getting on the phone, although I don't, as we've talked about, I'm not sure whether Joe "ghost gun" Biden is the right guy to get on the phone with Putin. But we ought to be communicating with him and trying to shut this thing down. So that's my two camp world of where people were thinking. What do you think?

Mike Waller ([16:05](#)):

It's that and it's a bit more. Putin has his own doctrine. He really wants to rebuild Russia's greatness the way he sees it. He's a nationalist. He doesn't want to restore the Soviet Union. But he does want to restore the old Soviet empire, which was actually bigger than the Soviet Union. And to do that, he has to do...he has to deny the existence of certain nationalities. Meaning not just sovereign countries, but certain ethnicities and nationalities. And the main one is Ukraine.

Mike Waller ([16:38](#)):

So Ukraine is actually the heart of the Russian existence because the Rus' nation, where we get the name Russia, was founded by the Vikings in Kiev. So this Russia comes from Kiev. But so he's sort of in this Ukrainian denial phase where this ethnicity must be wiped out. So you can't reason with a guy like that. You can't moderate someone like that. But you can influence his behavior. The point is, to what

extent is it in our own national interest as a country beyond being a do-gooder military power that just does good things, but actually ends up making things a lot worse sometimes. So is it in our vital national interests and then to what level? So yeah, as a humanitarian issue, sure. As an issue to support our allies, yes. As an issue to safeguard our own interests, probably not.

Bill Walton ([17:38](#)):

Was it a blunder to try to force Ukraine into NATO? It seemed to me like that was one of the tipping points for Putin.

Mike Waller ([17:49](#)):

He likes to say that. I don't really agree that was a tipping point because his own ideology was that the Ukraine must be destroyed regardless.

Bill Walton ([17:57](#)):

So that preceded any moves on NATO. So this was just in the DNA.

Mike Waller ([18:01](#)):

Yeah. Because that's a years old process that people sort of had accepted that likelihood and the Russians didn't really try too hard to prevent that from happening.

Bill Walton ([18:11](#)):

Well, you know Putin. You've spent 40 years thinking about Vladimir Putin, or at least if not-

Mike Waller ([18:17](#)):

A little over 25.

Bill Walton ([18:18](#)):

Over 25. But you predicted that the KGB was going to end up running Russia.

Mike Waller ([18:23](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([18:24](#)):

And they did.

Mike Waller ([18:25](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([18:25](#)):

And they do.

Mike Waller ([18:26](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([18:27](#)):

And obviously Putin is straight out of the KGB. What can you tell us about him as a man?

Mike Waller ([18:33](#)):

Well, first the whole policy when you had the Soviet Union breaking apart, they didn't have laws. They only had power. And that power was either guns and informants and agents and cash. So then you had the development of a gangster state. And this is what I in my 1994 dissertation.

Bill Walton ([18:53](#)):

This is in the nineties after the dissolution. Okay.

Mike Waller ([18:54](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So I finished it in '93. But this was that Russia is going to become a gangster state alliance between organized criminal cartels and oligarchs and the old KGB and the Russian state will be in control. Will be controlled by these elements. Largely because of US policy. So part of the do gooder policy we had then where it was certainly in our interest to shape the Soviet, the post-Soviet space during and after the collapse. But when you shape it so that you leave these elements in charge and you look the other way while it's happening, and you deny ounce and marginalized both Russians and Westerners who are warning about this, then you're creating the problem that we have today. So that was all foreseeable. We had really good opportunities to get it right. And this is not speaking in hindsight, but it was from the foresight at the time.

Mike Waller ([19:48](#)):

And it was the conventional wisdom where you had the Bush types feared upsetting the status quo. And they were comfortable with the communist status quo and maintaining that communist status quo, even in a post communist situation. Where the Clinton people looked at it as more of a business opportunity, make a lot of cash very quickly with very little accountability. Rather than looking at what's really in our strategic interest. So there was never an attempt by the US to leverage our massive aid to Russia, to stabilize its economy, to help it rebuild. Never to leverage any of that on ripping out the roots of the old KGB. Decommunizing in the way we had denazification in Germany, which was extremely successful. And making sure that the old Soviet traditions were uprooted and exposed and discredited forever. So none of those were ever on the table in terms of US policy.

Mike Waller ([20:45](#)):

So the Bush people opposed it. The McCain Republicans opposed it. Nearly all the Democrats opposed it. Some of them were very wise about approaching it to Senator Bill Bradley, then of New Jersey, was one of them. But the grand old sage on the Senate foreign relations committee, Senator Joe Biden, opposed all of these measures.

Bill Walton ([21:08](#)):

Senator Joe Biden.

Mike Waller ([21:10](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([21:10](#)):

The grand old sage.

Mike Waller ([21:12](#)):

Well that, yes. That's why Obama picked him as his running mate was because Obama had no foreign policy and national security experience. And Joe Biden was considered the wise man of the Senate on all of these things.

Bill Walton ([21:24](#)):

Well, didn't somebody really smart... Was that Sam Nunn said that Joe Biden's been wrong on every foreign relations decision in the last 50 years?

Mike Waller ([21:35](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. A lot of his colleagues have said similar things.

Bill Walton ([21:38](#)):

But my obsession recently has been China and everything that's happened. All the American companies went into China. And at the time it was we were going to go in, do business with China. They'll get richer. They'll become more democratic. They'll be just like us. And we're all going to live happily ever after. That didn't happen there. But there was also a gold rush of American companies into Russia. What happened with that? Did... You said there were people going in to make money? I mean, how much of that tilted Russia in the direction it is going now?

Mike Waller ([22:13](#)):

Well, it didn't work the same way as it did in China. And I think it worked badly for us in China, given the situation that we have now. But at least you had companies going in and dealing with a system that had a system, had its own rules, had its own cronyism, had its own way to make you rich and co-opt you, and then make you act as a Chinese agent in the US. And we had all these views from the big engineering and aerospace companies to hardware and software companies to manufacturers and everything else. And they would all end up acting as agents of influence for the Chinese regime. In Russia it was a lot different where the businesses were subsidized often by the American taxpayer, either directly in terms of contracts or other guarantees, or indirectly by international monetary fund loans and world bank projects. A few of which were very successful. Well, we did succeed in that was the IMF money, which was literally put on pallets on 747s to fly from New York to Moscow to be delivered to the Russian Central Bank. And freshly wrapped federal reserve packages of cash.

Bill Walton ([23:27](#)):

Did we use the same pallets that we used to send cash to Iran?

Mike Waller ([23:31](#)):

The recyclable pallets. The same idea.

Bill Walton ([23:33](#)):

Oh, right. Yeah.

Mike Waller ([23:34](#)):

Yeah. Same idea. And so they're all shrink wrapped on these pallets and sent to Russia. Now you had the shipyard workers at [inaudible 00:23:43] going on strike. They're laying the keel of this next generation strategic ballistic missile submarine called the Borai Class submarine. They're going on strike because they're not getting paid. This is a Soviet project. It was set up to be a superior design to our Ohio Class submarines that fire the strategic ballistic missiles.

Mike Waller ([24:05](#)):

And so the work on this submarine would shut down and then the money would come through with the IMF. And one of the first things visible that would happen was the strike would stop at the submarine shipyard. And this happened two or three times to the point where the Russian finance minister, Boris Fyodorov warned us. And he told me, but he also warned the public. He said, this IMF money is not enough to do us any good, but it's plenty to make really bad things happen. So that submarine, that Yury Dolgorukiy is the name of the sub, is the first of several of these Borai Class ballistic missile subs that now have an array of nuclear weapons aimed at us, which is what gives Putin his power. If he didn't have modern nukes he wouldn't have nothing.

Bill Walton ([24:54](#)):

Well, he certainly has modern nukes.

Mike Waller ([24:56](#)):

Yeah. And we paid for them.

Bill Walton ([24:58](#)):

What about their first strike doctrine?

Mike Waller ([25:01](#)):

They revived it and they formalized it. First strike, meaning that they would use first use of nuclear weapons in a conflict. And not necessarily strategic nuclear weapons aimed at us, but tactical weapons or what would be called battlefield nuclear weapons. They would... Gorbachev had renounced first use of nuclear weapons. Putin revived first use of nuclear weapons. Now whether or not you could believe Gorbachev at the time. I think he did have in his doctrine. Whether or not that happened, we don't know. But the fact that Putin took the trouble to come out and say it and that the Russian military has been drilling on this, you know that they're serious.

Bill Walton ([25:43](#)):

Is Putin in an underground bunker now?

Mike Waller ([25:47](#)):

We've heard various reports. There have been drills to move the whole Russian elite to Yamatau Mountain in the Urals and to Novosibirsk in Siberia. There have been actual aircraft drills.

Bill Walton ([26:00](#)):

Drills or actual movement?

Mike Waller ([26:02](#)):

Actual drills with the aircraft and everything, meaning it's been live drills. Now whether they move the people, we don't know. But there have been a lot of reports that Putin is in a bunker either outside Moscow or out in the Ural mountains. Whether he goes back and forth, we don't know.

Bill Walton ([26:19](#)):

I mean, I'm still sort of probing. I want to learn more about Vladimir Putin. You've been following this guy. What is he? Some people say he was this stable guy, chess player. We could predict him. And then the last two years something's changed and he's now become unstable and unpredictable. And he's cut off from the rest of his leadership. I probably made that too much of dichotomy, but where do you think he is now? Is he off in, just in isolation and doing this on his own? Or does he have the full support of the Soviet military apparatus?

Mike Waller ([26:59](#)):

First, we don't know. We don't know precisely the fact that right now as we're talking, he's sacked a large number of generals. He's had arrested over 150 of his own senior secret police people. There's a report that his defense minister has suffered yet another severe heart attack during the sacking of these 20 top generals. So he certainly doesn't have the support or at least he doesn't have the confidence in his military and intelligence leadership. Nor should he really, when he really thought he could take Ukraine in several days. He only gave his troops... Or his forces only had three days worth of food, insufficient fuel. And there was an idea that they would take Kiev as a symbolic or as a real actual strategic victory very early on. So they completely underestimated their own capabilities or they overestimated their own capabilities.

Mike Waller ([28:00](#)):

They underestimated Ukraine's capabilities. I think they thought President Zelinsky was just a buffoon being a comedian and he would flee. And this is where you had, I think, a similar understanding between the Biden team and Putin that Zelinsky would flee. And then there would be a parallel government or a public government set up. And then Russia would just be able to rule Ukraine and then it would be basically over. So the fact that he was not well informed on any of these things, and it seems to be a case of people being afraid to tell him the truth. This was visible right at the initial invasion time when he dressed down and humiliated his foreign intelligence chief in front of everybody. And you had the head of the Russian spy agency is stammering and stuttering and visibly afraid, standing 40 feet away from Putin, just visibly afraid of telling him a real answer. That's not a good sign of confidence.

Bill Walton ([28:58](#)):

No, that's not a good sign. So you've done all lot of work on our national intelligence agencies. And you were saying... You say to me, well, we just don't know this. We just don't know that. Does our side really... Are we doing spycraft in any useful way to know how to predict what they're doing and be effective?

Mike Waller ([29:22](#)):

We only know what's public. And we like to think, well, really there's such great stuff it's just so classified that we'll never find out. And that might be the case. Let's say part of it is the case. But there is so much leaking going on. Some of it's strategically done with a purpose that does make sense to shape a narrative or to try to deter Russia or whatever else. But you also have leaking going on for self-

promotion of people with inside the CIA and the political system in the executive branch. And that's really, really dangerous. But none of the leaks have shown that we have any sense of strategy or that we really know what Putin's mindset is.

Bill Walton ([30:04](#)):

What about Mark Milley talking to the Chinese and providing inside intelligence to them?

Mike Waller ([30:13](#)):

Yeah. Well it's normal for the chairman of the joint chief of staff or for some other very senior four star to talk to their counterparts in China or Russia or elsewhere. Because often when a political figure makes a statement that is against what the general understanding is, it's necessary from a professional military level to call the counterpart and say, Hey, everything on this side. There are no changes in our policy. You don't need to get paranoid for what we're doing. And it's been productive in the past, especially with the Soviets in the past. So it's avoided some nuclear accidents.

Bill Walton ([30:58](#)):

So what about the fact that I've heard that we're trying to reach out to the Russian military leadership and they're not responding. They're not returning our calls. Is that true?

Mike Waller ([31:13](#)):

That appears to be true. Every source that's mentioned this type of communication has said that the Russian... Putin did not respond to Biden's calls and the Russian general staff, which is their equivalent of our joint chiefs of staff. So we're talking about not just one general, but several who we would traditionally correspond with at a peer level were not responding to our calls. And this is really dangerous.

Bill Walton ([31:39](#)):

And if you're right about Putin's whip pan, or reign of terror with his military leaders, then anybody that's steps out of line to do that is putting their life in jeopardy.

Mike Waller ([31:51](#)):

Yeah, because Putin has shown he will kill people.

Bill Walton ([31:55](#)):

Poison.

Mike Waller ([31:56](#)):

Poison is his favorite weapon. If you look at... There are some great collections of images of foreign leaders who won't shake hands with him. And in one place, there was a chef who Putin extended his hand to shake hands with him and who wouldn't want to shake hands with the president of Russia, like him or not, in a social event. The chef wouldn't even shake hands with him. Kim Jong-un wouldn't shake hands with him. So people are afraid that he's going to poison them with something on his hand.

Bill Walton ([32:24](#)):

So this is not concern about COVID. This is something more lethal.

Mike Waller ([32:28](#)):

Right? Yeah. Because some people say, well, Putin's not meeting with people up close because he's afraid of COVID and he's a germophobia or whatever. But no. His pictures where he was sitting 40 feet away from his own defense minister who suffered those two surprise heart attacks during the military purge, 40 feet away at the same table. Putin's afraid of his own people. We call it the von Stauffenberg seating arrangement. Like the-

Bill Walton ([32:54](#)):

Von Stauffenberg is who?

Mike Waller ([32:56](#)):

He was the German officer who placed the bomb at the conference table-

Bill Walton ([33:00](#)):

Hitler.

Mike Waller ([33:00](#)):

...with Hitler. Yeah. So we call it... And if you look at that long table where Putin sat, it's a good... It's like the size of a shipping container. At Putin side of it there's a blast barrier on the floor right below the surface of the table. Like if somebody plants a bomb, they're not going to get him. So he's really, really paranoid. But it's not a germ thing because where he met with certain local power brokers within Russia who had no power in Moscow, he met with them up close, closer than you and I are here at the table. So it's not like he was afraid of COVID or anything.

Bill Walton ([33:35](#)):

This is a very bizarre world. I'm laughing, but it just... I'm really worried that we're, with all this instability in Putin's camp and with the instability in our own camp, we're going to blunder our way into... Putin, if he is that isolated, that he might say, well, look, let's use the tactical nuke. And then somebody, one of the children in our defense establishment or state departments going to say, well, we got to nuke them back. I mean, do you see any probability or possibility there?

Mike Waller ([34:10](#)):

Anything's possible. And this is the danger where predictability can be good in military rivalries when the stakes are as high as they are. Nuclear stakes.

Bill Walton ([34:26](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Waller ([34:27](#)):

And this is what gets back to Ukraine. Personally, I'm not as dovish as you are on Ukraine. I believe strongly in a people's right to self defense, and having been involved with resistance movements in the past that are awful messy, tragic affairs. It's still people's right to defend against an invader or against a communist regime. And so I really support the Ukrainians there up to a point. Meaning I think we have a moral obligation as a people to help other countries in this way, but not when it places our own country in danger. And this is what team Biden is pushing us into is pressing that danger point. There's been

surrogate warfare between the US and Moscow since World War II. And we haven't fought each other about it. There's been an understanding. But there's a range of operations where it's not considered a direct attack. But when we keep pushing with our daughtered leadership-

Bill Walton ([35:34](#)):

Well, it seems to me like we're getting really close to a proxy war when we send them what we got 3 trillion or 3 billion... How much money have we sent to them? 800.

Mike Waller ([35:43](#)):

It's hard to say what they announce versus what they say and do, but a lot. Yeah. And then to be blabbing publicly about what we're doing is extremely dangerous. There's something called deniability. And it's not necessarily that we'll fool the Russians. We might hear and there. But you don't just go around crowing about what you're doing because it's showing your hand.

Bill Walton ([36:08](#)):

Well, Mike, I want to shift gears a bit. You've also got a point of view. I guess a lot of people are leaving our national security establishment. People are not... The talent that we need is leaving the agencies.

Mike Waller ([36:21](#)):

Yeah. And this has been going on for a while. You had in the CIA, you had a lot of really good operations people checking out at age 50 or after they'd put in their 20 years of service. Some of them went back to become contractors, so they could double dip. But some just said, you know what? I want nothing to do with this anymore. They've been leaving the FBI. I mean, the good ones have been leaving the FBI. Not the bad ones. And they've been leaving the military and the military's been leaving them. One of my colleagues is a Marine reservist. He was just pushed out because he was refusing to order his men to take the jab for COVID. So he was pushed out of the service. And that was to be his whole life's vocation.

Bill Walton ([37:07](#)):

Okay. I want to end with a note of optimism. Help me out.

Mike Waller ([37:10](#)):

Okay. Well, we've been through a lot of this before, and we've had darker times than we have before. And somehow we muddle our way through.

Bill Walton ([37:21](#)):

I'll take that.

Speaker 6 ([37:22](#)):

That's as good as we get.

Mike Waller ([37:24](#)):

That's about it.

Bill Walton ([37:25](#)):

We're demand... Inquiring minds want to know. Everybody in this room. Come on, Mike. Okay. Well, if we're counting on that, goodness gracious. Anyway, this has been the Bill Walton Show with Mike Waller. And as always, we're trying to dig into what's true and what's right and what's next. And I don't think we got that far in this show, but we're going to make progress. Anyway, Mike Waller. Jay Michael Waller, PhD, thanks for joining. And we'll back soon and hope you enjoyed this. And we'll keep you apprised as we learn things about what's going to happen next. So, thanks.

Mike Waller ([38:07](#)):

That was fun.

Bill Walton ([38:08](#)):

So you provoke Kenny.

Mike Waller ([38:11](#)):

It's not often that I actually...

Bill Walton ([38:11](#)):

I'm glad you did that. So Mike, how much can't you say because you know so much?

Mike Waller ([38:16](#)):

I'll say pretty much whatever, unless it's a-

Bill Walton ([38:20](#)):

How worried are you about Mark Milley?

Mike Waller ([38:23](#)):

Very.

Bill Walton ([38:25](#)):

Amplify?

Mike Waller ([38:26](#)):

Well, it's not just his foolishness about white rage and pushing transgenderism and all this other weird stuff on our military. It's much more than that because of the way military promotions work. So the people rising to the top are Milley-ites. Your three stars are going to recommend the two stars who should get promoted. And the two stars are going to recommend the brigader who should be promoted and so on and so forth. And so the military, it's really a brown nosing force now where I used to not trust anybody with a well... First, I used to trust anybody with stars on his shoulder. Then learned no don't trust them with stars on their shoulders. And now I'm like, I don't think I trust colonels now either, just because you see how people are being treated out. And so if somebody makes it to Lieutenant Colonel, the best guys, unless they're real in the special ops community, probably aren't going to make it even to full Colonel.

Bill Walton ([39:24](#)):

Seems like every really interesting foreign policy or national security analysts that you see on TV. They're all Lieutenant colonels. And they got retired before got to be Colonel. So the kind of people that seem to be trenchant and understand our interest and what to do about it, they seem to be getting drummed out.

Mike Waller ([39:45](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([39:47](#)):

I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Want more? Click the subscribe button or head over to thebillwaltonshow.com to choose from over a hundred episodes. You can also learn more about our guest on our interesting people page and send us your comments. We read everyone and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and subscribe there in return. We'll keep you informed about what's true. What's right. And what's next. Thanks for joining.