

Bill Walton:

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. In every war, there are conflicting reports, propaganda, mistaken assessments of adversary's strengths or weaknesses, competing agendas, of course, war profiteering, blunders, leaders trying desperately to hold on to power against rival factions. The Russian Ukraine War seems to top the charts in all these things, plus a lot of others I didn't mention. [00:00:30] I try to follow events somewhat closely, but in this case it seems impossible for the ordinary observer to figure out what's going on, but what does seem clear is that looming on the horizon is the very real possibility of a nuclear war, as more and more countries are drawn in. Just this week the German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock seemed to state bluntly that western allies are indeed [00:01:00] fighting a war against Russia.

To learn what we should be thinking about Russia, Ukraine, and where it's heading, I've asked my increasingly frequent guest, Dr. Stephen Bryen, a senior fellow at Center for Security Policy in the Yorktown Institute to explain. Stephen has over 50 years national security experience with a long resume that includes serving as senior staff director of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and several stints in [00:01:30] the Pentagon where he was known as the Yoda of the Arms Trade. We're also joined by David P. Goldman, thrilled. Spengler columnist and deputy editor for the Asia Times and PJ Media, is President of Macrostrategy, and Washington Fellow at the Claremont Institute. David has vast subject matter expertise in international affairs and security matters.

Stephen and David, let's [00:02:00] start with this. Stephen, you wrote a piece this week titled All Is Not Well for Ukraine, and you set off a firestorm of comments and replies and debate. Why don't you go ahead and explain. We'll get started there, and then David, if you'll join in, if you two can talk with each other on this topic. I'm sure you're going to think of questions that wouldn't occur to me.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, I think where I started was that most of the reporting [00:02:30] about Ukraine that we're hearing in the west is not very balanced and it doesn't really tell you what's going on. It mostly reflects propaganda from the Ukrainian side. What we're really seeing on the ground is something rather different that the Russians have organized themselves better. They're not geniuses about this, but they're very stubborn and they're backed up by lots of equipment and lots of troops, and they're beginning to gain ground [00:03:00] in the Eastern Donbas and in the southeastern Donbas more recently in the [inaudible 00:03:05] area.

It's looking more and more that the Ukrainians are taking very heavy casualties, extremely heavy, hundreds a day casualties, which they can't sustain. What I was trying to say is, hey, look out here. Just pumping more stuff into Ukraine is not going to change that much the outcome that it's going south and it may be going south faster [00:03:30] than we think. We should be realistic and understand what's going on and take appropriate action, which in my personal belief is diplomatic. That was the thrust. I don't know, David, if I've summarized it correctly, but that's what I was trying to say.

David Goldman: It was a terrific piece, Stephen. One of the best read contributions to Asia Times for the year. [00:04:00] You made the point I think very eloquently that a few dozen tanks are not going to really make any difference in the strategic balance. In fact, we know that the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz's Chief of Staff, Wolfgang Schmidt, had a shouting match with Lord Austin, America's Defense Secretary, at the Ramstein meeting of NATO ministers a week ago, in which he accused the United States of [00:04:30] one to make an issue of the tank provision as the thinned end of the wedge to provide long-range weapons, which would allow the Ukrainians to hit deep inside Russian territory, and in fact, get us into a war with Russia.

Shortly after that, Anna Baerbock, the German Foreign Minister, as Bill mentioned, stated, we are at war with Russia. The Russian foreign ministry, some of the German ambassador demanded an explanation. The Germans said, well, [00:05:00] she was misquoted and we're not really a participant in the war, but that kind of thing definitely gets the undivided attention of the Russians. I think the question I would ask you, Steve, is assuming that you are correct that western military policy in the current configuration is not leading to a successful outcome from the western side, [00:05:30] will NATO countries be desperate enough to give the Ukraine the means to widen the conflict by striking deep inside Russia, and what would be the consequences?

Stephen Bryen: Well, I think they won't provide that kind of weaponry. I think there's real resistance even in Germany, which has a rather flaky government, in my opinion, compared to the others. They're all not very good, but I think the French ran away from [00:06:00] it today very clearly. We're not at war with Russia. We don't have any war with Russia. We don't want any part of that. I think now maybe reality is starting to set in a little bit in Europe that the next target is not going to be in Ukraine. It's going to be in Europe. That's what I think they're starting to understand. I think that's been the threat all along, that this could spread, that this [00:06:30] war could expand. I don't like Putin very much, but he's at least restrained the Russian side too, focused just on Ukraine and has not broadened the battle, so to speak, but I'm sure he is tempted. I'm sure he is.

Bill Walton: What do these tanks mean for the escalation? Everything I know I read on the internet, which of course is absolutely true, but their images now of [00:07:00] these tanks coming in, they're too few, too late, too obsolete. We're sort of setting up what some people call the Kasserine Pass in Ukraine as these tanks are blown up.

Stephen Bryen: Well, they'll be blown up because Russians have anti-tank weapons that are capable of blowing them up, and they've already blown up more than 10 of the German tanks, the Leopards in Syria and in Iraq. We know they're very vulnerable to those kinds [00:07:30] of weapons. There's no secret sauce here. None of these tanks, including the Abrams, which will be sent in three or four months because they have to be built, none of these tanks have active defenses. They don't have the equivalent of the trophy system that the Israelis have

developed. Basically they're sitting ducks for capable anti-tank weapons, and the Russians have the Kornet anti-tank weapon, tandem warheads. They have all these devices [00:08:00] that are tank killers, and the Russians know about getting tanks killed because a very large number of theirs have been destroyed in this war, even with reactive armor and other things, but not with active defense systems.

I don't think they're game changers. There aren't enough of them anyway to talk about. I think this is politics. That's all it is. In fact, what David was saying about Germany, I know for a fact that the Germans told [00:08:30] the American side, we're not sending any tanks unless you send the Abrams, which is why we ended up putting the Abrams in. Then the Pentagon apparently said, no, you're not taking them out of our stocks. We can't afford to give them. Then they have to build them. How do you build tanks in the United States today? You don't because there aren't any tanks in the United States today to build. You take older tanks and you fix them up, refurbish them we call it. It's a big deal. [00:09:00] Then you send them. That takes months. The American Tanks won't be there until May maybe.

Bill Walton: Have either of you talked with anybody in the administration about what on earth they're thinking? This seems to be death by incrementalism. One little bad decision after another.

David Goldman: Bill, I don't understand your question.

Bill Walton: [00:09:30] Fair enough.

Stephen Bryen: They're just digging a hole. It's a deeper and deeper.

David Goldman: Steve, how does this play out? One way it could play out is that there's a stalemate and a North Korea, South Korea kind of DMZ line and an armistice where everyone sits behind it and glowers at each other but doesn't do much while the diplomats push cookies and [00:10:00] push the thing out for years. Another possibility is there's a serious escalation. How do you see the end game?

Stephen Bryen: There's another possibility and that is that Ukrainian government collapses and they put in a pro-Russian government of some sort and make a deal. There are different options. There are different possibilities. I don't call them options here. A lot of that depends on the military situation. There's been a line of contact since before 2014 [00:10:30] between the Donetsk Republics, the Luhansk and Donetsk and the pro-Russian side. The Russians were fueling that with arms and supporting their friends there.

David Goldman: Now, you said before that you were quite sure that the west would not give Ukraine weapons to strike deep inside Russia and widen the conflict. I'm less convinced [00:11:00] because I have the sense that people like Tony Blinken, for

example, and Victoria Nuland, such ideological fanatics, that they will take serious risks in order to void a humiliating outcome for NATO.

Stephen Bryen: What do we have to send? Maybe the longer range HIMARS.

David Goldman: Long range HIMARS, [inaudible 00:11:26], and so forth.

Stephen Bryen: [inaudible 00:11:27] they're not sending. At least so far, [00:11:30] the Pentagon has said no.

David Goldman: Yeah. The Pentagon certainly is displaying a high degree of realism and caution, but I'm not sure that that's the only voice in the administration. Certainly the uniform military understands what the stakes are and are trying to be responsible, but I'm worried that others in the administration are not.

Stephen Bryen: General Milley this week has made some interesting comments that require tension. [00:12:00] First of all, he said the casualties on both sides are very high. This is something that Ukrainians keep trying to hide, but saying that, it's not a symmetrical conflict. It's an asymmetrical conflict. The Russian side is much heavier, much bigger, more troops, more capabilities. In a war of attrition, Ukraine loses. That's what it means. Secondly, he said there was no chance that the Ukrainians could defeat the Russians. That was out of the question for this year. That means all of 2023, [00:12:30] which means it's out of the question period. We can't push them out of where they are. That's what General Milley was saying. He said, the only logical approach here is a negotiation. Now, I don't know if he's convinced Lloyd Austin of any of this, but at some point, Austin has to pay attention to his joint chiefs and he has to understand the military situation and he has to go in front of the president and say, Mr. President, [00:13:00] we're losing this one and we better figure another solution because this is not...

Bill Walton: Well, I want to go back to that question that David said he couldn't hear, which is Victoria and Tony Blinken, and have they articulated any end game here, what our strategic objectives are and what a victory would look like to them?

Stephen Bryen: I haven't seen one. Maybe David has, but I haven't seen any.

David Goldman: One of the most incomprehensible [00:13:30] things I've ever read was that David Ignatius interview with Tony Blinken of the Washington Post yesterday or day before. Some people interpret it as Blinken proposing a negotiated solution. I actually couldn't understand a word that was said, but let me tell you what scares me about this and scares many people I know in Europe.

Let's say Ukraine has long range rockets, they destroy the Kerch bridge, [00:14:00] which connects Russia to Ukraine. It's a key strategic asset. Russian doctrine has always viewed non-strategic nuclear weapons, say one kiloton nuclear bombs, as accomplishing operational and tactical goals in the context of

conventional war. Here I'm quoting from a new Rand Corporation report on avoiding a long war. [00:14:30] The Rand analysts warn that there are circumstances in which Russia might use some of its very small nuclear weapons in response, for example, to attacks at its territory or perception that it's losing. I could, for example, see the Russians in response to destruction of [inaudible 00:14:50] like the Kerch Bridge telling the Ukrainians there's a certain coal fired power plant, evacuate it, because tomorrow we're going to eradicate it and drop [00:15:00] a kiloton nuclear weapon on it with about, I don't know, 200 times the ordinance of a Russian caliber cruise missile. That kind of escalation does not strike me as at all impossible and seriously worries me. Maybe I'm being a Nervous Nelly, Steve.

Stephen Bryen: Well, look, the Russians are watching what we do with nuclear weapons too. We have shipped in a new generation of nuclear gravity bombs to Europe just this past week. [00:15:30] Why? Why did we do that? Are we anticipating the conflict you are talking about or are we promoting it? I think it was ill-advised. There was no need to do it. The Russians have warned in the past about the air defense systems that we've put in Romania and Poland being dual capable. They could also launch nuclear weapons using Tomahawk [00:16:00] cruise missiles with the M-41 launchers. They've been aware of this for some time. This is where it gets to be very crazy and very dangerous. I don't frankly believe in tactical nuclear weapons. What is a tactical nuclear weapon? These bombs are bigger than Hiroshima.

David Goldman: Yes. Well, the late Helmut Schmidt famously said the definition of a tactical nuclear weapon [00:16:30] is one that lands in Germany.

Stephen Bryen: Yeah. Well, they'll take out a city.

David Goldman: The notoriously unreliable British press, in this case the Daily Telegraph, is saying that Ukraine expects to get missiles that can strike 190 miles behind Russian lines very quickly after the tanks come.

Stephen Bryen: Expect to get them from where?

David Goldman: Well, [00:17:00] from the United States, obviously. Who else has them?

Stephen Bryen: I think the Russians will then pull out all the stops. I think the game is coming to an end point because I don't think it's going to stay slow rolling, like we've seen it up to now for much longer. The Russians are preparing an offensive. Everybody knows it. It's going to be a big offensive, and I think they're intending to push the Ukrainians way back and hopefully, I think from [00:17:30] the Russian point of view, they would like to be able to force a conclusion to this conflict if they can. The US has been the one holdout. The Europeans want to sort it out. I think even the Germans... I don't understand the Germans at the moment, but to the degree, they're rational. They want to sort it out. The

French want to sort it out. The British not so much. The other European countries absolutely want to sort it out.

I listened to the Croatian president, Zoran [00:18:00] Milanović today, and I don't know if you heard him, but he thinks this whole thing's crazy. Absolutely crazy. He said, what are the Germans doing? Do they want to repeat what they tried 70 years ago? He can't believe it. I think that this mood is growing, but the wild card, the holdout, the problem is the United States. The United States has consistently [00:18:30] refused to conduct any negotiations on solving the Ukraine mess over time. They refused to participate with the Normandy Group in the agreements that led to the two Minsk agreements in 2014 and again in 2015. They have constantly said there's not going to be any negotiations with Putin, and we're not going to talk to the Russians about this. In December 2021, when the Russians asked the United States and NATO for [00:19:00] diplomatic process to deal with Ukraine and to deal with the European security, they were unilaterally rejected by the United States and by NATO. The Russians have come to the conclusion that they have a serious problem that they can only solve militarily.

Bill Walton: Is Putin... We talked about the potential for Zelenskyy to be overthrown and [inaudible 00:19:28]. What about Putin? [00:19:30] We hear that he's sick, he's got enemies, he has all these threats that he's facing. As I mentioned at the outset, none of us knows what's true, what's not true. How do you assess Putin's position?

Stephen Bryen: He keeps showing up for meetings and he looks okay.

David Goldman: Yeah. I think we have done everything possible to secure his position by convincing the Russian [00:20:00] elite that if Putin goes down, they will all go down with him. There will be massive asset seizures, there will be war crimes, tribunals. There will be no survivors. By making this a war effectively for regime change and threatening the Russians with not just asset seizures, but also war crimes, tribunals, this has caused everyone to rally around Putin. If we wanted to ensure his [00:20:30] absolute leadership there, we couldn't have done it better.

Stephen Bryen: I think that's right. If you look at the Russian television, which I watch a little bit of, I hear more aggressive talk, a lot of that. Crazy aggressive talk about destroying Ukraine, destroying NATO, all this stuff, but you don't hear any criticism at all of [00:21:00] the government. Only though we need more forces, we need to fight better, that kind of thing. I don't see any sign of him being in serious trouble. That doesn't mean something might not happen to him. Good.

Bill Walton: Well, there are all these hopeful comments here that well, he is run out of soldiers, 500,000 Russian men have left the country and that he can't continue fighting along, grinding it out war like Stalin did because he won't have the soldiers. I guess there's the Wagner Group that [00:21:30] seems to be staffing its military from the penitentiaries in Russia. How much of this is true?

Stephen Bryen: Well, that's true. There's no doubt what the Wagner Group. The Russians get a [inaudible 00:21:45]. They empty their prisons and these guys don't come back home.

Bill Walton: Cannon fire. Yeah. As dirty does it.

Stephen Bryen: From their point of view, it's not a bad deal, but I don't see any sign that the Russians lack man power. They only did over [00:22:00] partial mobilization of about [inaudible 00:22:06]... Much larger mobilizations if they want to.

Bill Walton: They're talking certainly with me much about what they ought to do, but it seems like public opinion still is fairly dug in on the narrative that plucky Ukraine is fighting the terrible Russians and that there's only one way to think about this, and it's defeating the Russians in war. As crazy as that sounds, I think a lot [00:22:30] of people do.

Stephen Bryen: Ukrainians have fought very well and very hard, and they've been, I think, from a command and control point of view, superior to the Russians overall, but remember that the troops they started with aren't the troops they have now. For the most part, the first line, the first army, someone speaking now, the third Ukrainian army, because the first ones go on, the second ones go on, and now we're on the third one. How much can they do? [00:23:00] It's asking an awful lot. For what? The territories, they're never going to have peaceful relations in those territories, even if they took them back, unless they drive the Russian-speaking people out of Ukraine altogether, because they're in Russian-speaking areas.

David Goldman: That raises the question, what were American strategic objectives in this to begin with? Certainly there [00:23:30] is an element of the administration, personified by Victoria Nuland, that believes with religious fervor that Russia is destined to be a liberal democracy and that our goal in one way or another should be regime change. I don't think everyone at the administration thinks that, but if we didn't want that, we certainly could have agreed to the Minsk two formula. This is something you wrote about, Stephen, in Asia Times, where right autonomous Russian-speaking [00:24:00] zones within a sovereign Ukraine would have satisfied Russian requirements. If we had done that, Putin would've had no basis for an invasion. We sandbag that; we prevented that from happening. As you pointed out, [inaudible 00:24:17] and London were against that, where Paris and Berlin were amenable. What did we think we were doing stumbling into this thing?

Stephen Bryen: Well, I think what we thought we were [00:24:30] doing is putting NATO in Ukraine, and that's what the Russians thought that we were doing as well. Russia lost it's buffer in Eastern Europe from the Baltics down to Romania. They lost their entire buffer, which was their award for winning a big part of World War II. They lost it. You can argue about that, but the Soviet Union [00:25:00] collapsed. There was no reason for those countries to remain under Russian domination and they didn't want to because the quality of life wasn't what they

wanted and the political freedoms weren't what they wanted. All that is true, but then the Russians extracted promises from us that we wouldn't expand NATO further, and certainly not to Ukraine, and we broke those promises. Absolutely broke those promises.

We invited Ukraine to join NATO and we made them a kind of associate member anyway, [00:25:30] even without being voted on so that we could begin training the Ukrainian army and moving the equipment, especially electronics and other stuff, intelligence capabilities, all that into Ukraine over seven or eight years. The Russians said, well, what's this all about? They're going to attack us and we better attack them first. That's really what the basis of this invasion was. Russians tried it's last ditch effort to get negotiations. We refused, which only [00:26:00] confirmed again in their minds that our intention was to turn Ukraine into a NATO stronghold facing Moscow. It's quite close to Moscow after all.

Bill Walton: Let me jump in here. This is the Bill Walden Show and we're here talking with David Goldman and Stephen Bryen about the situation in Ukraine and Russia. We seem to be coming up to some point of no return. Is there a point of no return, and what should we be doing to shape [00:26:30] public opinion in the United States to get Victoria Nuland out of the catbird seat and somebody else in who can bring this thing to negotiated settlement?

Stephen Bryen: I wish I knew how you do that.

David Goldman: I think there are a number of things that can happen that will shift sentiment. Let me give you an example. Russia, as I mentioned before, announces in advance that it's going to destroy [00:27:00] Ukrainian coal fired plant, tells people to evacuate and then drops a small nuclear weapon on it, a thousand kiloton weapon. That's the end of it. What happens in the west then? Is there an appetite for nuclear escalation with Russia? Well, no. We don't want a nuclear war. At that point, the west will freeze up and the Russians will have won. If we push [00:27:30] this to the point where the Russians use a so-called non-strategic nuclear weapon, that's an endgame, which loses for us. Of course, a permanent sanctioning against Russia and permanent entity and so forth.

Stephen Bryen: You're talking about hundreds of thousands of deaths if the [inaudible 00:27:48].

David Goldman: Not necessarily.

Stephen Bryen: Because these are not small weapons. These are megaton weapons. They're not kiloton weapons. The Hiroshima [00:28:00] was 11 kilotons.

David Goldman: Yes, the Russians have one kiloton weapons, and I'm talking about the use of one of those in an area which they've already told the Ukrainians to evacuate, so it's not hundreds of thousands of deaths.

Stephen Bryen: Well, I really hope that Putin has more common sense than to try that scenario, because I don't know what we would do. We have gravity bombs and we could start dropping [00:28:30] them on Russian territory. The whole notion of this is very, very dangerous. Extremely dangerous. In my opinion, the end game should be to stabilize Ukraine, to get Europe back on a peaceful track if it's possible, to work out something with the Russians that makes some sense, and to drop all this garbage about war crimes and all this stuff, because all that's going to lead to is trouble and [00:29:00] see if there's a way to sort it out.

That's what Minsk was supposed to do. Unfortunately then, Angela Merkel and Macron said, oh, well, it was all a ruse. It was all a fake. We weren't serious. We just wanted to buy time. The Russians said, we negotiated something in good faith and you guys weren't operating good faith. It is a very complicated problem to even get a negotiation, but we ought to be trying, but we're not. [00:29:30] It seems to me that that's where if we can get public opinion to say to the White House, it's time to talk to the Russians, maybe that's the way to go. I don't know. It's not much of a plan, but it's the only plan I can think of.

Bill Walton: Well, we've been talking about the need to get them to the table for over a year now, about a year exactly.

Stephen Bryen: They've been doing the reverse to dial 1-800-Putin.

Bill Walton: [00:30:00] David, how would you bring this about both if you're in the administration, which would be ideal, but since you're not, how can we help influence events so we don't end up with the worst case scenario?

David Goldman: Well, I think the United States should step back and ask what our strategic interests are. Do we have an existential [00:30:30] or even an important strategic interest? [inaudible 00:30:33] for Ukraine to be a part of NATO? The answer is no. We do not have a compelling strategic interest in Ukraine. To have [inaudible 00:30:45] areas remain under Russian influences, either as separate states or part of Russia or autonomous zones within the sovereign Ukraine, is not an enormous concern of ours.

The difficulty we have is walking back off [00:31:00] the branch, because having put a gun to the head of every NATO member and demanded the [foreign language 00:31:09], the expression for the German support of Austria in 1914 forced everyone to stick their neck out for us and we say, oh, we changed our minds. Then the credibility of the United States is severely damaged. We have a very unpleasant choice now of losing [00:31:30] credibility or actually losing a war, losing something strategically, which would be even more devastating. It's very difficult to walk back. The best we could get now is to say, look, this isn't getting anywhere. Just have a ceasefire, North Korea, South Korea kind of ceasefire, and then let's negotiate it, let everything settle down for a year or two, and then eventually iterate back to Minsk two, because the American public, as you know from Afghanistan and Iraq and [00:32:00] so forth, has a

very short memory about these things. If you let it sit in place for a year, then you can probably after that interval negotiate something sensible.

Bill Walton: So if we just stop... I'm sorry, go ahead.

David Goldman: Immediate cease fire in place. Tell everyone to stop shooting and start negotiating. Took five years for Kissinger to negotiate the surrender of South Vietnam, which is effectively what he did. Let them argue for a year about the shape of the table. Just stop the shooting.

Bill Walton: [00:32:30] Stephen?

Stephen Bryen: Well, it depends a little bit on the military situation. Russians are making gains now, as I pointed out earlier. It won't be an easy task to convince the Russians to stop. However, and the big however is that the Russians firmly believe that the only negotiation is with Washington. [00:33:00] They don't believe there's any negotiation with Europe because they consider it toothless and they don't believe there's any negotiation with Zelenskyy because they hate him and he hates them, so there's no grounds for talking. The only thing the Russians say is, well, if Washington wants to really negotiate, let's see, but Washington has said no. Anyway, maybe the ceasefire idea works if Washington leads [00:33:30] like a Kissinger style, except we don't have a Kissinger, leads the effort and appoint someone with real gravitas and a seriousness, and who can stand up to any fakery or any misleading. The Russians won't be misled this time. I think they felt like they've been sold and they can't [inaudible 00:33:54].

Bill Walton: Do the politics change now that we've got a house controlled slightly by [00:34:00] Republicans, because we've shipped a hundred billion dollars, who's counting, who knows where it went to Ukraine, and we've shipped a lot of weapons. At some point, and you would know this, Stephen, at some point our cupboard runs bare of stuff.

Stephen Bryen: It's run bare already.

Bill Walton: It seems like we've run out our strategic string here where there's not a whole lot the United States can do to keep this going. Had we not shipped all that, it [00:34:30] would've ended with a Russian takeover of portions of the country probably seven or eight months ago, but that didn't happen. At what point do you think if we just said, we're cutting off the first, we're not funding this and then see how it plays out? Is that a scenario that could work?

Stephen Bryen: No, I think that would be tricky. I think the more logical thing would be to try and open a negotiation [00:35:00] with the Russians openly, publicly, and say, look, it's time to try to find an answer and ask the Russians to stop if they can, but they have to get the Ukrainians to stop as well. I'm not sure they would. Zelenskyy is hard over about pursuing the war there.

David Goldman: Yes. Well, if you stop shipping them weapons, they'll have to.

Stephen Bryen: Well, that may help. Yeah. His burn rate on weapons is staggering.

David Goldman: Yes. We have [00:35:30] lots of precedents for dealing with people like Zelenskyy. I'm thinking, for example, of Diem.

Stephen Bryen: Well, he disappeared and he died.

David Goldman: Tragically, yes.

Stephen Bryen: In a church, if I remember right, in Saigon.

David Goldman: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: Yeah. Look, we have ways to deal with that, but I think that Zelenskyy has managed to control the Europeans in the United States 100% [00:36:00] to the extent he's driving it, but it's because he has Washington. If he doesn't have Washington, then he has a whole different situation for himself and for his government. It's a very suppressive government in Ukraine. It's arrested all its opposition. Now it's arresting Russian Orthodox priests and that kind of thing. It's got snipers out trying to shoot Russian Orthodox chaplains. [00:36:30] It's actually assassinating them in battle areas. There's a lot of stuff going on here. It's pretty lousy. That has to be stopped.

Bill Walton: Well, we need to wrap this up, and it seems to me that time seems to be, based on what you all are saying, is time seems to be in Russia's side, not ours. As this drags on, they end up doing what Russia's always done, winning with time [00:37:00] and inertia and massive numbers of people to flood the zone.

Stephen Bryen: That's kind of what Neil Milley has told us. He's reading the intel. I don't have the intelligence. He has it. It seems like he's getting at least reasonably solid information that the war is starting to turn against Ukraine.

David Goldman: I think that's the most likely scenario. I think the great risk is that the real fanatics, like [00:37:30] the British, for example, who are the biggest lobby for giving the Ukrainians long-range weapons, will do things that widen the war and that it becomes unpredictable and extremely dangerous. In the interim, best idea is let's make Milley Secretary of State and give him the mandate to negotiate.

Stephen Bryen: That wouldn't be a bad idea at all. Milley would be respected by the Russian side. [inaudible 00:38:00] [00:38:00] would respect him.

David Goldman: I'm not in this world that you are, but it'd be nice to have a grownup in the room. We've got our rock musician, Secretary of State, I'm unimpressed, and the more he performs in a job, the less impressed I get.

Stephen Bryen: Well, Russian...

Bill Walton: Interesting idea that would be. Biden has changed exactly zero cabinet appointments in the two years he's been there.

David Goldman: That's [00:38:30] okay. He probably doesn't remember them.

Stephen Bryen: Taking David's point, all that Milley would have to do is call his counterpart and say, let's meet wherever and really have a serious conversation, or even fly to Moscow. It's not closed. You could go there.

David Goldman: Yeah. We saw....

Stephen Bryen: That would be the right gesture. I was involved very much when Sadat flew to Jerusalem. [00:39:00] It's in the doable.

Bill Walton: Well, he called the Chinese, didn't he too?

Stephen Bryen: He certainly did, and he told the Chinese not to be alarmed.

Bill Walton: Yeah.

Stephen Bryen: Whether that was right or wrong, I don't know, but he's clearly a heavy player and he's about the only heavy player in the administration that exists at the moment. He seems realistic, and he is not wedded to the war one way or another. It seems to me he's not invested. From the Russian [00:39:30] point of view, he's a professional. He's the commander-in-chief of the US military. From their point of view, he's the big guy. If he opened the door, and they have been in conversations. He's not been totally silent, but if he actually made a big move with administration's support, it might work.

Bill Walton: Stephen, David, thank you.

David Goldman: Bill, thank you very much.

Stephen Bryen: Thank you. Sorry, I hope we haven't ruined your day.

Bill Walton: Steve and Bryan. I'm [00:40:00] sorry, Stephen, what did you say?

Stephen Bryen: I said I hope we haven't ruined your day.

Bill Walton: Well, you have, but I've never thought Mark Milley was my guy, but you're making me think maybe he is. We need to find somebody there who's a grownup, and maybe that's it. Maybe we ought to start pushing him into the job. Anyway, thanks a lot.

David Goldman: Thank you.

Bill Walton: We'll be back. This has been the Bill Walton Show, and as usual, you can find us on all the major podcast [00:40:30] platforms, Substack, Rumble, YouTube. We're also in the CPAC Now channel on Monday nights, and stay tuned. I'm sure given the nature of this conflict we'll be back and love to get David Goldman and Stephen Bryen back as events develop. Anyway, thanks guys, and thanks all for listening.

Stephen Bryen: Thank you.

David Goldman: Thank you.