

Bill Walton:

Okay, good. Well, let's save this for the show. Let me jump right in here. Let me get this thing opened here. Okay, let me just with ... Okay. Welcome to The Bill Walton ... Let's start that over. Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Well, according to most accounts Russia is mounting a major winter offensive into Ukraine. Ukrainian President Zelensky says Ukraine will not surrender one square meter of land to Russia. Russia demands that the world accept the territorial acquisitions they've already claimed. Just today, President Putin ... Biden ... Putin ... Maybe Putin made a surprise visit. President Biden just made a surprise visit to Kyiv and pledged more military aid.

Adding to the mix, Secretary of State Tony Blinken says that China is actively considering lethal support to aid Russia against Ukraine. And secretary Lindsey Graham, always helpful, says the U.S. should declare Russia a state sponsor of terrorism and start training Ukrainian pilots on how to use and fly F-16 fighter jets. Kamala Harris, vice president, she's formally declared Putin's Russia is a state sponsor of terrorism as well, and has committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine. The United States State Department has told American citizens to leave Russia immediately. And so far, the United States has vetoed all peace initiatives in a war-ending settlement.

To this average man in the street, this looks beyond grim. And so to sort this out where this might be going, I've asked Stephen Bryen and David Goldman back to join and follow up our conversation we had a few weeks ago. Stephen, as you all recollect, is a senior fellow at the Center for Security Policy and the Yorktown Institute. David is Spengler columnist and deputy editor for the Asia Times and PJ Media. Stephen, you just wrote a piece in the Asia Times concluding that the chances for a peaceful resolution look further away than ever. Let's start there.

Stephen Bryen:

Sure, I think we can. Well as you know, the big battles in Ukraine right now are going badly for the Ukrainians. That's around Bakhmut, which is a city in the Luhansk district, on the fringe of it. The Russians have made significant gains, very significant gains, and they're pretty close to cutting off supply support to the city by cutting the main roads, within a few kilometers now. So I would not be surprised to see the city fall in the next few weeks, maybe sooner, or the Ukrainians pull out. Mr. Zelensky today in fact said that maybe this is not a battle to the death. Maybe we better consider saving lives.

So I think the bottom line is that the Ukrainians now recognize that they're about to lose the Bakhmut, and that's a critical city because it offers a launching pad for Russian forces to move across the center of Ukraine toward the Dnieper River and toward Kyiv. So that's essentially where the battle lies at the moment. There have been a lot of casualties in that battle, but basically it's a defensive battle from the Ukrainian point of view. They have very little offensive punch left. They tried one assault in the southern part of Bakhmut, with some limited success, but that's been partly driven back already and probably will be in the next few days completely eliminated. Ukrainians are out of ammunition. They're out of air power. They're out of air defenses. Their artillery is running low. I think it's a very grim situation for them.

Bill Walton:

David, you've expressed some skepticism that Russia's mounting invasion may not even happen. That would be a minority report from everything I've been reading. What's your take?

David Goldman:

Well, Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, declared four weeks ago that Russia is in the midst of a major offensive. He has repeated that each week, and the Western media has said Russia is in

the middle of or preparing a major offensive. I think there are two very good reasons why Russia is not going to conduct a major offensive in the sense or the kind ... That of January 1945 massive assault which the Russians had against the Germans. Remember, until January 1945 in World War II, Zhukov largely conducted defensive operations to prevent encirclement of Russian forces and maintain their integrity. It was only after the Germans were seriously degraded after the Battle of Kursk that they went on a full-scale offensive.

The two reasons are number one, Russia simply doesn't have enough manpower to conduct an offensive. It's brought about 250,000 troops into the area. It had done its initial invasion of Ukraine with 120,000 and came to grief through inadequate manpower. It lost a lot of territory that it initially took, and regrouped and successfully reduced its front lines by a very large margin, by more than half, and then proceeded to a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces in Donbas. It would be quite some time, probably months, before Russia could even consider a serious offensive just based on the amount of troops.

But the most important thing, I think, which a point made by a leading Chinese military analyst in the website Observer a couple of days ago is, "The Russian army believes that the existing war of attrition is enough to shake Ukraine's will to resist and create a favorable ratio of exchange of casualties for the Russian army." In that sense, I basically agree with Steve's point that the Ukrainians would have the worst of it. In a war of attrition, the side with the larger resources wins arithmetically. Russia has a population four or five times that of Ukraine, depending on how you count the refugee situation. Although Ukraine has mobilized virtually its whole military manpower, the casualties taken by both sides are comparable, in the Bakhmut battle and the battles around it, the casualty rate is probably similar on both sides. So over time, Ukraine will be degraded.

Although the United States has done some talk about upgrading arms capabilities, as Steve points out, there are shortages of ammunition on the Ukrainian side. Russia produces, I've heard estimates of 9,000 to 15,000 artillery shells per day. The United States produces 15,000 per month, and if you throw in all the rest of NATO it might be 30,000 a month. So Russia's arms industry is an order of magnitude more productive than that of the combined West. It would take a very long time to change that. So Russia does not need to risk ... To then perform, let's say, on an offensive.

Because when you've exposed your forces by breaking through and attempting to encircle the enemy, you can be encircled yourself. That's an extremely risky gamble. They tried that before, and they got their heads handed to them. So the more cautious and more certain strategy for Russia, at least for the next several months, is to keep grinding the Ukrainians down. So I think we'll see more of the same, degradation of Ukrainian forces, high levels of casualties on both sides, but casualties which the Ukrainians will have much more difficulty replacing than the Russians.

Bill Walton:

Well, what's the end game for both sides? Because Zelensky declaring not another square meter of land when they've already ceded quite a bit, and now Russia ... Even if they're not mounting an offensive, it looks like their end game is still to control an awful lot of Ukraine. And so where does this ... How does this thing resolve itself?

Stephen Bryen:

Well, I'll give you my opinion. I think it's not territorial, it's political. They want NATO out of Ukraine. They want a neutral Ukraine and a pro-Russia Ukraine. That's their goal. I mean, Putin's made that very clear. Virtually every Russian commentator, for what it's worth, say more or less the same thing, so I think that's their goal. Whether they can achieve it is a different story. That's open to question, but at

least that is where they're going. Does that mean they have to take ... David's point about a war of attrition, a long war like that ... Is a possibility, but it doesn't look that way to me.

It looks to me like the Russians want to get something done decisively before there is actual Western intervention in the war, which is I think something that's worrying Moscow. You can fight a war of attrition all day, if the other guys don't have some ace up their sleeve. If it turns out the 101st Airborne gets into the fight, which is warming up in Romania, then you have a different kind of picture and the Russians are very nervous about that. They don't trust NATO. They don't trust the United States at all, and that's where we are.

Bill Walton:

Well, did I hear the 101st Airborne? That would be United States Army-

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

Parachuting into Russia, or parachuting into Ukraine to help them, to fight alongside the Ukrainians?

Stephen Bryen:

The Russians are speculating that the key property, if you want, for the United States is Odessa. And so far, Odessa has been mostly out of the war. It's the key to the Black Sea, and the U.S. has been improving the port facilities there for U.S. warships for some time. There's some speculation, and it's only speculation, is that if Ukraine really gets squeezed, the U.S. is going to come in and hold on to certain parts of Ukraine that are strategically important. Odessa would be pretty much first on the list.

Bill Walton:

David, let me ask you a question I'd love to have you answer. You talk about NATO and NATO response, I mean how does the Nord Stream story reported out by Sey Hersh affect the level of trust inside NATO? Because you've got reports the United States blew up the pipeline between Germany and Russia, actively interfering in a commercial relationship, to really further our own ends. Now, that's one side of the report. Does that have a potentially shattering effect on NATO, and do we end up ... Second part of the question is, do we end up with some sort of coalition of the willing fighting this war, including Poland?

David Goldman:

The Sey Hersh story about a joint U.S./Norwegian operation has been questioned in some of its details, and Hersh of course is not citing sources. That story has been circulating in NATO military circles for many months. We've heard it. Many other news outlets have heard it. We didn't publish it because we couldn't verify the details, we simply had anonymous sources. We chose not to run with the story. Hersh decided to run with the story, whose details may or may not be credible. But the broad outlines of the story, that the United States was behind the destruction of Nord Stream 2, are universally believed by the European media. It's a gigantic story in Germany. It's as big as the balloon story in the United States, and it's led to a lot of grumbling on the part of the Germans about the acts of the United States. So certainly yes, it hurt NATO. Will that by itself shatter NATO? Of course not. If that were true we already would have seen the impact, but it is a problem.

I would like to go back to your question though of how this thing ends, and we don't know. One way it could end is that there's a North Korea/South Korea kind of divide, ceasefire in place, no war, no peace. They simply stop shooting, because the Ukrainians are exhausted and the Russians are able to hold enough of the territory that they annexed in order to declare a certain kind of victory. Another way this could happen is the 101st could come in, or I think more likely than that, the Ukrainians are given long-range artillery like the small-diameter bowling bomb that we're supposed to be providing them. And they use that to destroy major Russian infrastructure, so like the Kerch bridge which connects the Russian mainland to Crimea.

The Russians at the same time might destroy the bridges over the Dnieper in order to prevent Ukraine from acquiring the tanks that are being sent to it. I mean, these are 60-ton monsters and it's hard to get them across a major river without a bridge. Once you start destroying major Russian infrastructure, you risk the possibility of widening the war. And when not just Lindsey Graham but the Vice President of the United States says that Russia is guilty of warm crimes, in effect you're sounding like Franklin Roosevelt in World War II saying unconditional surrender is the only possible outcome, because we have a criminal regime that has to be destroyed. You have any number of American entities, oh, like the Hudson Institute last week held a conference preparing for the dissolution of the Russian Federation.

So in effect we're telling the Russians, "This is an existential war." I don't believe the Russians are easily disposed to using nuclear weapons. But if you tell the Russians, "We're going to destroy the regime and dissolve the Russian Federation," if that's what the Russians believe our war objective is, then nuclear weapons certainly could come into play and then we're in a very dangerous world.

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah. Can I stick my nose in here a little bit?

Bill Walton:

Please.

Stephen Bryen:

It seems to me that David has just argued against his earlier position about a war of attrition. That is to say that the Russians have strong motives to try and end this war if they can by military means, as soon as they can, and I think that's what they're going for. At least all the indications are that they have built up a force of about 400,000 men behind, that's not in the fight yet, that is partly sitting on Russian territory and part of it's up in the Belarus and it's been moving around. The Russians do a game about moving things around, so it's hard to say what their objective's going to be and where they're going to attack from. I provided you a notional map that you have, that's called the cauldron.

Bill Walton:

Let's take a look at that now.

Stephen Bryen:

It's called the cauldron.

Bill Walton:

The cauldron? Okay.

Stephen Bryen:

The cauldron, and if you'd put it up you can see some speculation by some pretty smart people, not me, but some pretty smart people about how the Russians may launch an attack with these extra forces. I am not sure that's the right ... Some of it's coming from the north. Some of it's coming from the east, because once Bakhmut is gone they're going to have a free shot through that area. The Ukrainians will have very great difficulty mustering another defensive line, and then up from Zaporizhzhia from the south, moving again in the direction of Kyiv.

The point being of this invasion would be to break the Ukrainian army so that it can't fight effectively and I have ... I mean, I don't know what Putin's going to say in his speech to the Russian Duma, how he's going to characterize the next steps in this conflict, but I think that's where they're going. And I think they're in a hurry because as David says, well, you know, the U.S. may start plugging in. They already said they're going to ... Small-diameter bombs and longer-range HIMARS missiles and all this stuff, if we have enough to give, which is another issue. But-

Bill Walton:

Well, we talked about this last time but hasn't the ... What David pointed out, the war crimes and implicit, the Nuremberg-style trials, haven't we really solidified Putin's support in Russia and make them more intransigent than ever?

Stephen Bryen:

Well, we certainly closed the door, I mean by cutting off Russians from any kind of dialogue and relationship with the West, plus the accusations of war crimes, plus all the rest. You have made a dialogue virtually impossible, that's for sure.

David Goldman:

Yes, and it's worth mentioning, as of course is widely reported, that the Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, a year ago, went to Moscow, spoke to Putin believing that he had the backing of the United States. Came back with what he thought was a formula for a compromise, and was sandbagged by the United States, by Washington and London, as then Bennett complained quite vocally in a recent interview.

Stephen Bryen:

Yes, he-

Bill Walton:

Well, it seems like your argument, your thought of North Korea/South Korea type of partition would be a sensible one if we had some grown-ups in charge. But I fear in this administration we have really the ... It's really an amateur hour and a lot of ideologues. I'm not sure they really can engineer something like that. I worry about who's playing for our side.

David Goldman:

I agree. I agree with you, Bill. It's not so much a matter of engineering it. It's a matter I think of living with it, because that would allow Putin to say, "Well, we won. We had a special military operation. We wanted to protect the Russian-speakers of the Donbas. We've annexed these territories. We've managed to keep most of them." Just as North Korea could in a sense declare victory in the Korean War

and say, "You know, the imperialists failed to destroy us," Putin can claim victory. It would be a major humiliation for the war party in the United States, that is the regime change party, which is led by people like Under Secretary Victoria Nuland, who has been a prominent advocate for regime change in Russia for the last decade and more.

Stephen Bryen:

Right, that's correct. I mean, I think that that's why I'm so pessimistic about any chance of a negotiation of any sort. The only other possible negotiation would be if the Ukrainian army surrenders and asks for peace talks, they ask for an armistice without the United States. That can't be ruled out, because they're taking a terrible beating. But when you have the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and now the President of the United States saying, "Russia has lost the war already," [inaudible 00:26:56]-

Bill Walton:

Well, I'm just imagining being Zelensky in that meeting with Biden today, taking Biden's measure as an 80-year-old-

Stephen Bryen:

Careful with that age stuff.

Bill Walton:

I'm getting there. I'm getting there. Let's not do age.

Stephen Bryen:

I'd really be careful [inaudible 00:27:16].

Bill Walton:

Just taking a measure-

Stephen Bryen:

I'm the same age as Biden, so-

Bill Walton:

I stand corrected. I need to ... I'll drop the octogenarian-

Stephen Bryen:

Wash your mouth out with some soap, yes, please.

Bill Walton:

Okay.

David Goldman:

I'm old enough to remember the Pentagon reading out the body count during the Vietnam War every day during the 1960s, and declaring that the North Vietnamese were losing, until they didn't.

Stephen Bryen:

Until they won.

David Goldman:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

What about the Chinese now? I mean, where are we? The thing of, Blinken goes on a morning talk show and talks about the Chinese are planning on providing lethal aid to Russia. What is that about?

David Goldman:

Okay, so if we had reporters as opposed to echo chamber bots some would have said, "Can you name one weapon that the Russians want that the Chinese have, that they don't have themselves?"

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

David Goldman:

The Chinese don't make heavy battle tanks. They make light tanks, which are designed to fight the Indians in the Himalayas. They certainly don't have anything they can ship there. You've got Quadcopter drones, the same kind that hobbyists use, that the Russians use for spying. The Chinese are certainly sending tons of spare parts; aircraft parts, computer chips and so forth to Russia, but not directly. Turkey is buying them, and Turkey is transshipping them, and they turn up as 25 billion dollars of errors in omissions on Turkey's balance of payments. They're very hard to trace. But the Chinese buy Russian weapons. There are no Chinese weapons that the Russians want that they could source in China. Someone can correct me if I'm wrong, but I can't thin of anything.

Bill Walton:

Well I agree, but what would Blinken's motive be to come on Sunday morning shows and talk about this? That seems to be again-

David Goldman:

I think he wants to look tough against the Chinese, just propaganda.

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah. Yeah, I agree. Wang Yi is now in Moscow or is arriving in Moscow this week. He's the key foreign policy guy for China. The Chinese want to stay close to the Russians. I don't think there's any ... Politically, that's for sure. But I would just mention one thing which we haven't talked about, which is the fact that as we keep shifting our weapons supplies, what's left of them, into Ukraine, we're exposing ourselves in the Pacific. It's a very dangerous thing to do. It's almost unprecedented that we would do something like that.

And by the way, we're also weakening European defense because when you burn all this stuff up, you have nothing left. I mean, now the Germans are saying, "We don't have anything." The British are saying, "We don't have anything, and we haven't had anything for a long time. There were no real war

stocks because well, after all, we weren't engaged in any kind of conflict for a long while." And well, the bottom line is that what's happened is that there are very little in the way of war supply capabilities in Europe or the United States. That's where we are.

David Goldman:

I'm reliably told that the Germans have in inventory 3,000 Howitzer shells and no more.

Bill Walton:

3,000.

David Goldman:

3,000; that's enough for breakfast in Ukraine.

Bill Walton:

Exactly.

David Goldman:

Then what do you do for lunch?

Bill Walton:

Yeah, so-

Stephen Bryen:

And their tanks are ... You know, they're talking about tanks. Now everyone's figuring out that they don't have any tanks that work. I mean, "Oh, we've got 100 tanks." Maybe 10 of them are operational, so what are you going to do with that?

Bill Walton:

Well, what about the notion of a coalition of the willing? I read that Poland has called up 200,000 or may be calling up 200,000 reservists to active duty, seemingly arming for action.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, I don't know what the Poles are going to do but [inaudible 00:31:28] if I were advising them I'd tell them, "You don't want to fight the Russians."

Bill Walton:

But they're right there, and it just seems like we've got all these people acting [inaudible 00:31:35]-

Stephen Bryen:

Well, they also have some of their own ambitions, you know?

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Stephen Bryen:

They have an interest in that western part of Ukraine, because it used to be Polishy.

Bill Walton:

Wouldn't their dream of half of the western Ukraine is Polish, and they'll just give the other half to Russia?

Stephen Bryen:

Could be [inaudible 00:31:54].

David Goldman:

The western Ukrainians and the Poles in particular have some really bloody history between them. There were perhaps 100,000 Poles murdered by the Stepan Bandera Ukrainian nationalists, which the Poles remember bitterly. So I think there are probably parts of western Ukraine, to paraphrase Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca, that the Poles wouldn't want to invade. The most important thing that happened with NATO in the past two weeks, which barely got reported in the American press, is that there was supposed to be a tank coalition which included Germany, Denmark, Holland, Spain and Finland, who would all give tanks to Ukraine. Now Germany [inaudible 00:32:42]-

Stephen Bryen:

Plus Poland. Plus Poland-

David Goldman:

Plus Poland, yeah, and those are going to be older tanks. You have some Leopard 2s sitting around in Denmark and Holland and Finland, but Denmark, Holland and Finland have decided they can't spare their tanks and are not going to give any tanks to Ukraine, and the Spanish, who don't have much to begin with, so they're not going to give anything. So the Germans ... German press last week said, "Gee, all of a sudden we're standing here by ourself. We thought we had a coalition, and now everyone's backed out." So if anything, despite all the rhetoric, NATO members have been backtracking on their commitment to rearming Ukraine in the last couple of weeks, in a significant way. That's about 50 fewer tanks than the Ukrainians expected to get.

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah, and Scholz is complaining about it, the German chancellor, saying, "Hey, they promised and now they've unpromised."

Bill Walton:

Is-

Stephen Bryen:

But look, these tanks aren't going to make any different in the war, anyway.

Bill Walton:

Is Zelensky an independent actor here? I mean we talked last time, that I'd heard that last March, 2022, he was willing to negotiate a settlement and Valerie Nuland wouldn't let him do that, or Victoria Nuland, whichever. And that the U.S. has been the hardliner here in terms of bringing this thing to an end. At what point could Zelensky say, "We've seen enough Ukrainians fight and die. It's time to call it quits"?

David Goldman:

Well, that's one possibility. Another possibility is that the Ukrainian army decides that Zelensky is expendable, and you either put him on a plane to his teaching job at the University of Wisconsin or wherever he ends up, or you have a Diem situation like in Vietnam.

Bill Walton:

Stephen?

Stephen Bryen:

Well, I don't know how it will ... Whether it will result in that or not. But I think that there's ... As the supply of ammunition dries up, which is happening already, it makes it almost impossible for the Ukrainians to continue the war. I mean, that's the reality. There just isn't any more in the cupboards to send there. And even if the Russians don't bomb the rail lines or the transit through Poland or other ways to get arms into Ukraine, there aren't any arms to get into Ukraine. What are you going to do? I mean I think that this Bakhmut battle kind of shows where we're heading and-

Bill Walton:

Well-

Stephen Bryen:

That looks like a disaster for the Ukrainians.

Bill Walton:

Well, is Bakhmut Stalingrad, or is it Verdun? I read an interesting piece comparing it to Verdun.

Stephen Bryen:

Well I think-

David Goldman:

Verdun was-

Stephen Bryen:

I don't know. Actually I think it's, in the Russian mind, it's much more like Stalingrad.

David Goldman:

Verdun of course, the German strategy was to bleed the French to death. It was to inflict casualties. The Germans might have succeeded in a war of attrition against France had not the United States come in and introduced a couple of billion troops and massive amounts of materiel, which turned the tide in the Allies' favor. I still believe that with rough parity of Ukrainian and Russian forces in the Bakhmut area,

the standard formula, which is three to one concentration of forces locally for the attacker, does not yet apply. The Russians could build out more, and some months down the road they might have sufficient manpower.

But as we're looking at the ground now, the simple numerical situation of the Russians does not permit a major offensive. It doesn't mean they won't threaten. The threat is often [inaudible 00:36:54] execution. You want to threaten an offensive in many directions, to prevent the other side from concentrating forces. They've got many bases to cover. They've got to keep their forces dispersed, so I think the threat of the offensive will be a Russian instrument throughout. But again, I don't expect an actual offensive anytime soon.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, we'll find out, won't we?

David Goldman:

[inaudible 00:37:19]

Stephen Bryen:

Pretty soon, I mean one way or the other. But I don't think you can keep 400,000 or 500,000 troops sitting on the sidelines for very long. Either you use them or send them home. That's one thing. But beyond that, I think the Russians smell a real opportunity now. They've degraded the Ukrainian air force almost to the point it no longer exists. They have destroyed a lot of the Ukrainian air defenses. They're minimal. They are doing a good job of knocking out the Ukrainian artillery, and especially counter-battery radars, which are essentially for targeting the artillery on Russian forces. The Ukrainian strategy is mostly to try and dig in and hold lines. They have very little offensive capability.

Their casualties, as David says, are about equal to the Russians but the problem here is that they don't have the manpower to go with it. Some people say they're on their third army. They have certainly been dragooning people off the streets, and they've been shooting deserters and doing a lot of awful things to try and build up some forces. So I think they're in desperate shape, and I think the Russians know it and the Russians have put their act together pretty well, so I think it's grim, period, really grim.

Bill Walton:

Do you think that our ever-helpful Lindsey Graham is going to convince people that F-16s that we would teach Ukrainians how to fly would be the next step?

Stephen Bryen:

Well you know, the F-16 is a really good airplane but it's a fourth-generation fighter. It really can't escape air defenses very well. Russians have in-depth air defenses that they're moving more and more towards the center of Ukraine. So yeah, they could bring them in but whether they would make a difference in the war, I don't think so.

David Goldman:

It's also the case that even a relatively experienced fighter pilot, who's flown say a MiG-29, would take typically a year's training to be effective in the F-16. And a [inaudible 00:39:33] fighter pilot, the F-16 depends on a huge amount of ground support communication, the whole kill chain, which is a log of

logistics and a lot of training of ancillary personnel. So that's not something that would ... Even if it would make a difference at some point, it wouldn't make a difference soon enough to turn the tide.

Bill Walton:

Well, the thing that's so disheartening to this civilian observer is we've got all these ... The political class making all these incredibly reckless statements, and then shooting off about this or that. "We're going to do this," and I guess the U.S. ambassador ... Maybe I mentioned at the outset of this that China's involvement would be a red line. You know, we've heard about red lines from our politicians before. It just seems like my concern is we don't have anybody that has the temperament or wisdom to try to bring this to a resolution.

Stephen Bryen:

Right, I agree with that.

David Goldman:

The only voices of caution that we've heard are from the uniformed military. In November Mark Milley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the New York Economic Club that the war was unwinnable on the ground. He reiterated that statement. Apparently he's been told to change his tune, because in the interview he gave at the Pentagon last week, which is available on defense.gov, he said, "The Russians are losing." When someone asked him about Bakhmut he said, "It's a terrible situation. It's horrible there. It's really awful, but the Russians are losing." It was-

Stephen Bryen:

"They've been defeated."

David Goldman:

A painful interview to read. Yes, they're defeated, right; painful to read.

Stephen Bryen:

[inaudible 00:41:19] And Austin said the same thing, and now Biden is saying the same thing. That's their mantra. Look, I think it's unreal. I mean, I think they're crazy, to be honest with you, simply crazy.

Bill Walton:

Well, if we think about all the players we've mentioned, do we have a leader in the middle of that group that is actually going to ... I haven't seen one. I don't know if I-

Stephen Bryen:

Well, I mean Biden's using it as a political campaign slogan. "I stood by Ukraine. We're with them all the way. We're going," you know-

Bill Walton:

"Yeah, forget all about Afghanistan. Look what we're doing for Ukraine."

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah, right. I mean well, of course he has to live down that one, doesn't he?

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Stephen Bryen:

So I mean, it's tragic for the Ukrainian people. It's really tragic.

David Goldman:

Yeah, Lindsey Graham is a dyed-in-the-wool neoconservative who has cheered every silly foreign adventure we've ever had the misfortune to undertake, so he's not necessarily representative of the whole of the Republican party. There is certainly on the Republican rank in the ... If you will, the America First, Trump-oriented part of the Republican party, an enormous amount of skepticism about this war. Trump has said various things about it, but I think he was right to say that in his watch, it never would have happened because he would have found a way to give the Russians an out. He was willing to live with the Russians, where the global utopians, or the Biden administration, want regime change. Some of them at least, if not all of them, want the dissolution of the Russian Federation. So my hope is that before this thing gets out of hand and risks a real catastrophe, that the presidential campaign will draw out from America-centric Republicans a more realistic foreign policy view.

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah, the problem is that people in political campaigns usually go the other way. You know, they think that holding up the bloody flag is the way to go, and it's not likely to be a productive debate, at least I don't think so. I don't understand ... I mean, I think we've lost our sense of strategy in this country, what's strategically important to us. Ukraine was never strategically important to us, ever, and we've made it into something it's not, and that's foolish. That's foolish, and now we've got ourselves in the trap because if the Russians actually are successful, as I kind of think they will be, it's going to have terrible consequences for Europe and for NATO, which is very important to our security here. So we've risked an awful lot in this conflict that we didn't need to risk. This could have been settled in 2015. We had a basis for settlement with the Minsk-2 agreements at the time, and the United States refused to participate in it, and it hasn't changed since.

David Goldman:

No, I agree with Steve completely there.

Bill Walton:

So if I could make you two agree to come back in six to eight weeks, when we find out whether the winter offensive has taken place, I think this seems to be grinding out much more slowly than we'd all hoped. We'll have to wait for events to become events to know where we are. But in between now and then, do you see any trigger that would make this thing get very hot right away, or do we just kind of watch this thing wander down this war of words and attrition?

David Goldman:

Well, critical will be whether the Ukrainians are able to destroy infrastructure inside Russian, and the Kerch bridge, which was of course damaged by Ukrainian sabotage operation, by a boat that was floated

under it and blew up. Well, that would be the thing to watch. The Ukrainians don't have the capability to hit it with long-range artilleries. You may recall a weapons system called ATACMS. It's basically a long-range rocket we were supposed to give the Ukrainians, then we found out that Lockheed stopped making them in 2007. We have 3,000 of the rockets left in inventory, and some of them might even still fire, so we decided that we can't give that to them. How effective the small-diameter bowling bomb will be, I really don't have enough information about that.

But the real trigger for expansion of the war would be Ukrainian attacks on key Russian infrastructure deep inside Russia, which would lead to significant retaliation. That's what most worries me. Of course if the Ukrainian army were to collapse, which I don't think it will immediately ... I mean we simply don't know, or Steve may. I don't have enough information. But certainly if the Ukrainian army were to collapse and panic, there is the possibility that the United States might deploy the 101st Airborne, but I don't think that would be a good idea. [inaudible 00:46:46]

Stephen Bryen:

No, I think it's a terrible idea, a terrible idea.

David Goldman:

We have-

Stephen Bryen:

But look, the problem, David, is that what's going to tell the tale here is supplies ... Is logistics and supplies.

David Goldman:

Yes.

Stephen Bryen:

And I don't know, how do you fight without bullets?

David Goldman:

Yep, and plus the fact that American forces haven't fought a peer in a long time. The Ukrainians probably fight a lot better than any American unit could at this point, who have only fought goat herders for the past 40 years. So I'm not sure how well American troops would perform, and that would be a real risk to take.

Stephen Bryen:

I don't think the United States can fight in Ukraine at present without the full capabilities. You have to build up all the logistics, all the capabilities. It would take years. It's not going to happen. The only thing you'll possibly see are two things. There's two risks from the U.S. side. One is the U.S. commits air power to try and save the Ukrainians from defeat. That can't be ruled out. And the second is the U.S. tries to grab some pieces of Ukraine it thinks is of strategic significance, and that can't be ruled out. But both of those things involve a war in Europe. There's no way out of it, because it is the same thing. Even without NATO agreeing, it's a war in Europe so I don't think the Russians will stand for that. So, where are we? Well, we're going to wait it out. I think Bidens praying that this thing lasts until he's out of office, that's all.

Bill Walton:

Well, and he wants to run for re-election.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, that may be.

Bill Walton:

That can't happen. Well let's ... Any final ... That sounded like pretty close to wrapping it up, Stephen. David, you want to add anything to that, and then we'll get out of here for our next conversation in a bit?

David Goldman:

We need a realist foreign policy. Donald Trump, of whom I have a long list of criticisms, managed to get out of office with no real important conflicts with the Russians, with a peace agreement between Israel and some of the Gulf states, and a generally stable world. The global utopians, led by the likes of Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan and Victoria Nuland, have plunged us into a war which could take us into a real catastrophe. The best outcome would be a humiliation feedback for the United States, because we stuck our neck out and we've got to bring it back, so that's going to hurt. It's going to sting no matter what we do.

So to say the best-case scenario is strategic humiliation for the U.S. is not pleasant. The one thought I have is that the North Vietnamese did us a big favor in 1975. They humiliated us before the Soviet Union did, and they motivated us to rethink our military, start a campaign to transform military technology, which succeeded and won the Cold War. So perhaps the Russians will do us a favor and humiliate us before China does.

Bill Walton:

Well, on that-

Stephen Bryen:

So I don't know if that's a favor. I think the other way around. I wish this could be settled. I think that this is crying out for a political settlement. It's absolutely crying. It's in our international interests, in our strategic interests, in our leadership interests in the world, which is all important, that we settle this thing. And the lack of desire by Biden and his people, all of them, to want to settle it, is really disgraceful in my personal opinion.

Bill Walton:

Okay, that's a wrap. I'm glad you guys are following this so I don't have to as much, but every time we dip into this it looks bleaker. But we will persevere and work our way through to the next time we get together. Dr. Stephen Bryen and David P. Goldman, Center for Security Policy and Asia Times respectively, thanks. [inaudible 00:51:21] Thanks for joining and explaining where we are with Ukraine and Russia.

David Goldman:

Well Bill, I would say it's a pleasure to talk to you. It would be a pleasure if we were talking about anything else.

Bill Walton:

Right, I'll think about some other topics for us-

David Goldman:

Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Stephen.

Bill Walton:

For next time. That's an excellent idea. So anyway, all of you that have been listening and watching, thanks for joining. This has been The Bill Walton Show, and as you know, you can find us on all the major podcast platforms, Substack, on CPAC Now on Monday nights. Please send us your comments, either on Substack or our website, thebillwaltonshow.com. We pay a lot of attention to what you want to hear about, and program accordingly. So anyway, thanks for joining and we'll talk soon.

David Goldman:

Thanks for the kind invitation, Bill.

Stephen Bryen:

Thank you.

Bill Walton:

So you guys are good.

Stephen Bryen:

I don't know about that, but anyway, thank you.

Bill Walton:

Good in the sense that you know what you're talking about, that's-

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah, but we're not going to quit our day jobs.

Bill Walton:

Well, I'm not quitting my day job to webcast, but it is a good way to get stuff out there that people don't ordinarily hear. They're not hearing what we talked about from all different aspects.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, you know the reporting on the war is awful.

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Stephen Bryen:

Absolutely awful. I spend a lot of time tracking the war, and I have to look all over everywhere to get reasonably decent amount of information. You're not finding it in the U.S. press. You're not finding it in the European press, actually. I mean, it's just a ... To some extent, they repeat Ukrainian propaganda because it's easy for them to just rewrite the press releases that come out of Kyiv, but that's about it.

David Goldman:

Or MODUK.

Stephen Bryen:

Or MODUK.

Bill Walton:

MODUK

Stephen Bryen:

Yeah, Ministry of Defense in the U.K., MODUK. They're awful. They are plain awful.

David Goldman:

Yeah, because they're-

Stephen Bryen:

They're a country with no army-

David Goldman:

Sure.

Stephen Bryen:

No navy, really nothing, no tanks, no nothing at all, who tell the world-

David Goldman:

Elbridge-

Stephen Bryen:

Who tell the world what to think about Ukraine. I mean, what a bunch of jokes.

David Goldman:

Elbridge Colby, who used to be sort of a protégé of mine, poor fellow, wrote a piece in The Daily Telegraph. Said, "The United States can't defend Europe, so Britain will have to." Britain has exactly 33 battalions of regular infantry. That's 20,000 men. That might be enough to defend Kent or Sussex. Then what do you do about Leicester and Leeds? I mean, it's ridiculous.

Stephen Bryen:

I mean, they're completely off the wall. But the latest reports even from the British defense secretary ... I don't want to call him the secretary ... Minister, says that they're not equipped to fight any war. I

mean, he's been very blunt about it. So here you've got this bellicose nonsense on the one side, and then you have the admission that they lack the capability, period.

David Goldman:

Yes, it's like that wonderful ... The second act finale of *The Pirates of Penzance*. "Go ye heroes, go to glory, go and die in combat gory. You sell it in song and story, go ye heroes, go and die."

Stephen Bryen:

What was the famous song in the ... David, you know better than me about ... The admiral sings the song, oh ...

David Goldman:

Oh, in *The Major General*? (singing)

Bill Walton:

I am the very model of a modern major general, I've information vegetable, animal and mineral.

David Goldman:

I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical, from Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical.

Stephen Bryen:

You got it.

Bill Walton:

It sounds like we all love these great plays and these old movies. I think our next show is going to be about bringing all those into-

Stephen Bryen:

The Mikado.

Bill Walton:

I tried to very ... It was very hard for me not to compare Lindsey Graham using a Warner Brothers Looney Tune to Elmer Fudd. But you know, the show gets around and I don't want to ... I didn't want that one.

Stephen Bryen:

Well, that's the only problem. The Congress is not an offset right now to this war. I mean Congress is pro-war, right?

Bill Walton:

Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, overwhelmingly, and McConnell.

David Goldman:

I knew it from the second I left [inaudible 00:55:54] at Albuquerque.

Stephen Bryen:

I've got to go.

Bill Walton:

Okay, you guys are great.

David Goldman:

[inaudible 00:56:00]

Bill Walton:

All right. We'll talk soon.

David Goldman:

Thank you. It's been a pleasure, Bill.

Stephen Bryen:

It's been a pleasure, David.

Bill Walton:

Yeah, it was fun, great.

David Goldman:

Take care. Bye-bye, now.

Stephen Bryen:

Bye.