

Poking The Bear

Ross: Welcome to Renegade Inc. After so many military blunders, NATO and neocon credibility is in tatters. Yet that unhinged rhetoric continues and is supported by a dotting corporate media. Vladimir Putin recently commented that the citizens of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia have seen how peaceful NATO is. So whilst these decimated countries try to rebuild, is it time for us to question the narrative fed to us by so-called Western humanitarians?

Ross: Scott Ritter, great to have you back on the programme.

Scott Ritter: Well, thanks for having me.

Ross: Scott, every time you come on, you've been right. You were right about the police brutality in the US and how the police are militarily trained and shouldn't be. You were right about the Afghanistan debacle. Withdrawal should be called debacle. Now we're going to talk about Ukraine. Can you cut through all the guff and all the rhetoric that we have to wade through and tell us what's really going on in the Ukraine and answer this question? Why is it that the US and the UK are more interested in what's going on in the Ukrainian border than they are on the southern border in the US or our own borders here in the UK?

Scott Ritter: Well, you know, I'm not party to the internal deliberations that are taking place at 10 Downing Street or the White House. But what I can say is this: Historically speaking, when democratically elected leaders are confronted with domestic problems, they often seek external distractions. I would say that Ukraine is the ideal external distraction because you can create a narrative and you see this in the mainstream media. It's a narrative of the heroic Ukrainian resistance against the evil Russian bear, but not just the Russian bear, Vladimir Putin in person. I mean, this is Voldemort. He's the personification of evil, all that is bad in the world. He is impulsive, irrational, he acts on a whim. It's as if the Russian nation didn't exist. It's all wrapped up into a person of one. And this is how, unfortunately, in the UK and in the United States, stories are sold to the public. They're sold by a narrative built around perception, not reality.

Ross: Tell us what the reality is on the ground. I know you're not there, but you're a military man. You understand these moves. You understand the propaganda wars and the misinformation that goes on. From your viewpoint, what's really going on there? And why have you written that America couldn't defend Ukraine even if it wanted to?

Scott Ritter: Well, we couldn't. I mean, it's sort of a statement of fact. First of all, okay, well, you're asking me a military question, not a political question. When I was in the military, I was part of what I call the finest military force the world has ever seen and that's the US military that existed in the mid to late 1980s. We were singularly focused on closing with, and destroying, the Soviet enemy. We're talking about an American military that a two hundred and thirteen thousand troops deployed in West Germany capable of reinforcing them with three hundred thousand troops. We had tens of thousands of tanks, artillery, aircraft, and we were trained to fight combined arms warfare using an air-land battle doctrine that had been perfected in thousands of hours of training, realistic training, back in the United States.

Today we have barely 60,000 military forces in Europe, of whom probably only 20,000 are combat forces. The rest of them are involved in logistics and command staff in fighting wars in Africa and the Middle East and everything but ready to fight the Russians. The Russians, meanwhile, have come out of the collapse of the Soviet Union, come out of the Yeltsin debacle, and have emerged from the difficulties from the Chechen War, from a war with Georgia, where the Russian troops did not do so well in 2008. That was an embarrassment for Russia and they have rebuilt their military. They have reconstituted large scale combined arms combat forces, the first guard's tank army, the 20th Combined Arms Army. These are Cold War-era forces that used to be deployed in East Germany, ready to punch across the border and fight NATO. Russia disbanded them because they said, We're not going to be fighting a ground war in Europe anymore. Well, guess what? You might be. So they reconstituted them. They are trained, equipped, organised and have a doctrine to close with, and destroy, NATO. They've been training this way for close to half a decade now. Meanwhile, NATO and the United States has spent the last 20 years kicking down doors in Iraq and slaughtering goat herders in Afghanistan in a losing fight. We didn't even win that fight. We got beat. And now we evacuated whatever you want to call what happened in Afghanistan? We retreated in defeat. It was a humiliation, not only for the United States, but for NATO. And remember, it's not just the United States that can't fight this fight. NATO can't either. NATO and the United States are not equipped, trained, organised, prepared - psychologically, physically, mentally - to fight a war with Russia. If they did, they would lose. It would be a humiliation along lines that the United States has not experienced. It would be something akin to what happened to France in 1940, what happened to Poland in 1939, what happened to Iraq in 1991. This is the level of defeat that would occur. So no, the United States can't fight the war. The generals know this, but the politicians can't admit this. But the politicians who say, right now, send 3,000 troops. Really? Do you think the Russians use them anything other than for speed bumps because that's all they are?

Ross: When you talk about the generals, you are absolutely scathing about the generals who've been decorated in Afghanistan. Basically, you were saying last time we spoke that it was a gravy train there. And these generals have come out looking like Christmas trees, heavily decorated, but having not done much at all. Aren't the generals aware of the analysis that you've just come out with?

Scott Ritter: Well, you know, H.R. McMaster, who used to be, you know, a prominent American general who gained fame in Iraq and Afghanistan, he's one of the Christmas trees we're talking about here. He spent some time at Fort Leavenworth. And in 2015, I believe, published a study called The New Russian Military Threat or something of that nature. The study was amazing because it pretty much said the following: Russia will kill us all in a war. That was the conclusion. We're not ready to fight Russians. They have overwhelming artillery supremacy, armoured supremacy, electronic warfare supremacy. If we go to war against Russia today, our troops will be stumbling back on their battlefield deaf, dumb and blind, and they'll just be surrendering. It wasn't just him that said this. In 2017, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which is component that's based in Italy, continued the rapid deployment force of NATO, did a study that said, We're coming out of this conflict in the Middle East - because the 173rd was deployed frequently to Afghanistan and Iraq - unable to fight the Russians. We don't have the equipment. We don't have the training. We don't have the doctrine. We got nothing. And everything the Russians have is superior to us. We will lose this fight. So it's not that, you know, they've been saying this in private to Biden. They've

been saying this in public to the American people and to Congress, and we haven't done anything about it.

Ross: But what would the American people say - because let's face it, and I'm going to put this diplomatically. If we go to the American electorate and say, by the way, the generals know that if you start this fight, you're going to lose badly, surely the American people aren't going to take that very well. Is that diplomatic enough for me to say it that way?

Scott Ritter: It's very diplomatic. For me, I'm infuriated. As a taxpayer, I contribute to a defence budget of seven hundred and sixty-plus billion dollars a year.

Ross: So all this rhetoric is just augmenting profits for Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and all the arms companies. Is that the purpose of this?

Scott Ritter: That's what it's looking like because it sure as hell isn't putting a combat-capable military force in the field. Not only are we being told we can't fight the Russians, we can't fight the Chinese. This is why you have to be careful. This is why American politicians have to spin and bluster and lie and create perception over reality, because if they ever told the truth, I mean, there would be a revolt in the streets that made January 6 pale in comparison. And it should happen if the American people are being lied to in this way. 760 billion dollars, if we can't win a war, when I was in the military, we could fight two and a half wars and win all of them.

Ross: So back to your first point, which is, look over there. I know we're collapsing over here. We've got a political impasse. We've got a lame duck president often doesn't know where he is. Same in the UK. Boris Johnson, failing and floundering. Is it as simple as that, actually, a big dust up over there just is the easier option, politically?

Scott Ritter: Well, I think actually both Boris Johnson and Joe Biden would prefer that there wasn't a big dust up over there. You know, first of all, let's understand that we're not driving this boat.

Ross: Who is?

Scott Ritter: Well, I would say that Ukraine is and then Russia.

Ross: But not even President Zelensky wants a dust up.

Scott Ritter: Today, he doesn't want a dust up because he's confronted. You know, he's the boy who cried wolf thinking there was not a wolf and suddenly there's a damn wolf at his door. Zelensky has been saying for some time that it is the policy of Ukraine to reincorporate Crimea, to reoccupy, to get the Russians out. And he's spoken of, you know, diplomacy - we want to achieve this diplomatically. But he's also told the Ukrainian people and the military that we will use all force as necessary, to include war, to get this done. We are not backing down from this whatsoever. And he said, this is why we need to join NATO. We need to join NATO so that we can achieve this militarily. I'm not making this up. This is his own words.

Ross: But listen, NATO don't want him. NATO don't want Ukraine.

Scott Ritter: Except that NATO's trapped by its own rhetoric. It's a prisoner to the principles of NATO. You know, I mean, the notion that we have an open door policy, we have to let anybody who qualifies in. And if this poor European country called Ukraine says, we want to be a member, we have to give that credence. I say, you don't. There's nothing in the NATO charter that requires that at all. In fact, NATO is obligated, I think, under Article 10 of the charter, to carefully evaluate any application to see what would impact the overall security of NATO. Understand this NATO, if you let Ukraine in, it's a suicide pill. Russia has been saying since 2008, since the NATO-Bucharest summit where they floated the concept of Ukrainian-Georgian membership, Russia has been saying, 'nyet'. In 2009, then U.S. Ambassador, William Burns, wrote a cable where he said: This is what the Russian position is and we need to respect it. Russia followed through in 2016, I believe, with a foreign policy statement that said the exact same thing. In this, Ukraine is a red line. This is very important to us. Putin has repeatedly gone on and said: Hey, guys, I'm speaking over here, but you're not listening. And at some point in time, you've got to understand that when you don't listen to me speak, I'm going to punch you in the face because then you're going to listen. He did that from a nuclear standpoint by creating nuclear weapons that the West has to pay attention to. Suddenly, arms control was cool in the West. Wanna know why? Because Russia build weapons that scare the crap out of us. Now, we have a situation where Russia is saying this Ukraine thing's a red line. Let's see what scares you? The military. So I'm going to deploy the military on my own soil, but in a manner which, even though I'm saying I'm not going to invade Ukraine, any military professional will look at it and go, Oh Christ, this guy could move across the border and take you guys out. And there's nothing NATO can do about it short of a nuclear conflict, which is why, by the way, this is all very dangerous, because if it ever did get to a war, you know, the Russians would have to be careful about the scope and scale of their victory. Because if they did what they're capable of doing and crushing, annihilate and wipe NATO forces off the map, the only option NATO has left is to employ tactical nukes. And then it's all over, you and I won't even be here. We'll be crispy critters. The world will end. And the Russians know this. But the Russians are forcing the United States and NATO to listen. And guess what? It's working. Inside NATO and the European Union now are conversations that should have been taking place over the course of the past 10 years, but haven't because the United States has said, don't worry about Russia, it's just a gas station masquerading as a country. It's not real, and don't worry about it. Their military is not as good as they think they are. Yeah, they produced that tank but they can only produce four of them. They've got a couple of planes. Well guess what? The Russian military is real and it's ready to kick your a**e. So, you know, that's where we stand today. Russia is in control. This is a table set by Russia, a menu defined by Russia and eventually United States are going to have to sit down at the table and eat chicken Kiev. They think they're going to serve up a Texas T-Bone, but they're eating chicken Kiev, man, because that's what the Russians say you're gonna eat.

Ross: Michael Averko, welcome to Renegade Inc. Really great to have you on the programme.

Michael Averko: Thank you, sir.

Ross: Michael, we have heard in the first half about the military capacity and capability of Russia. We've also heard about Ukraine and their intentions. And we've also heard about NATO and the fact that they're not battle-ready. And in fact, if any conflict broke out on this border, it would be pretty ugly scenes for NATO, the US, et cetera. Just give us the historical context, if you will, about this conflict and why we, once again, find ourselves in this position poking the bear.

Michael Averko: Ukraine has very much a sort of regional history. There's an area in the west of Ukraine, notably in Galicia-Volhynia, Transcarphia, that was ruled by the Austrian Habsburgs and before that, Poland. And when these people became part of the Soviet Union in 1940, they realised, you know, there was a great cultural divide, and the western part of Ukraine is not comfortable with Russian speakers, Russian culture. And the same is true the opposite way because a lot of these west Ukrainians developed an anti-Russian attitude. And I believe that when the Soviet Union broke up, the Western NGOs were very much influenced by this west Ukrainian component. And so when the West was strong in the 1990s and Russia was not as strong, this anti-Russian variant was getting an upper hand in Kiev, the capital. And what you have basically is a sort of culture clash. Among the west Ukrainians with an anti-Russian lean, they were complaining about Yanukovich's culture minister being biased against them. But in the meantime, the person they had under Yushchenko was biased against a pro-Russian perspective. And now we have a clear anti-Russian bias as well, and this rubs the pro-Russian areas the wrong way.

Ross: With that sort of analysis and the sort of frozen conflict within that, how then do you see a way through? And is that through diplomatic means? Is it through military means? Or is there another way of going to try and get unity and some kind of thawing of these warring factions?

Michael Averko: Diplomatic is the way to go. The problem is the Kiev regime, anti-Russian component, they want to have, like totally anti-Russian Ukraine. But for Ukraine to exist - and Putin, in his press conference, said Crimea could have still been part of Ukraine - the problem is they have to understand that if it's going to maintain its communist drawn boundaries, they have to give a little. They have to understand the different regional component. But for them, the idea of federalism and autonomy is wrong because they feel the country is more likely to break up. But hello, the country is in the condition it is right now. And we do have this Minsk protocol, which the United States says they're committed to, but they're not really leaning on the Kiev regime to honour it. And the Kiev regime, even though they signed it, they have said in no uncertain terms, they don't want to go through with it. So that's the problem.

Ross: If this is a wicked problem from a diplomacy point of view, what is a sort of safety-net measure that you could take to in some way smooth the way, in some way to get some sort of traction? Because again, back to this frozen conflict, no one wins.

Michael Averko: Right. And I think in a way, what's helping the situation - because I'm sorry to say, the government in my country appears very clueless. When Lavrov presented to Blinken the Istanbul and Astana declarations, saying that an expanded military alliance can't threaten another nation, Blinken reportedly just shrugged his shoulders. And we saw this

cluelessness, if you may, when Blinken and Nuland approached the Chinese to openly be critical of Russia and they should know what the Chinese answer would be. For openness, the Biden administration has dissed the Beijing Olympics with this diplomatic boycott. But also, China said in no uncertain terms, Hello how about getting the Kiev regime to do this Minsk protocol? It's a UN approved agreement where the Kiev regime is supposed to negotiate for this greater autonomy. We are also seeing Russia talking to France and talking to Germany. And the United States, they tried to cover for Biden that, you know, he has the world behind him. But the reality is that it's quite the contrary. We had the Croat president, democratically elected. He said that, you know, this is about American domestic politics. He was sort of insinuating that Biden's low poll numbers he creates this problem, exaggerates it and it takes attention away from that. And so the less American involvement and greater involvement of others - inside NATO, outside NATO, like the Chinese - I think, will definitely help the situation and in a way kind of coerce the elites here who often are clueless to see reality, whether they want to admit it or not.

Ross: This idea that we heard in the first half about an open door policy for NATO. How is that the case? Surely every member, every NATO member, should be in agreement if there is to be a new member?

Michael Averko: Yes. But as we've seen, there have been two waves of NATO's expansion where, despite Russian objections, they were able to get it through. And from a Russian standpoint, NATO is definitely an existential threat. You know, when the Soviet Union broke up, Russia openly inquired about joining NATO and that was met with a staunch amusement. But then when Poland and some others shortly thereafter sought NATO membership, it was justified and included blatantly inaccurate anti-Russian propaganda along the lines of Russia is an inherent threat to the West. NATO was created to keep Russia down. Russia lost the Cold War. Russia doesn't like NATO expansion. Too bad. And again, because it's to keep Russia down, Russia could never be in NATO. Now this is bad history. Germany fought two wars against the West. Russia was allied with the West. When you go back to history, at times Russia was allied with the West against other Western countries. So this idea that Russia is an inherent threat is faulty. On top of that, NATO, whenever they have new conflicts like Georgia, 2008, Ukraine, 2014, it's been patently biased. And when you see their leaders, Jens Stoltenberg, his predecessor, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, clearly anti-Russian. But then people tell me, calm down, they're just figureheads. And I say, fine. But what happens like the German naval commander? He says something to the contrary that Putin should be respected. Crimea's going to remain a part of Russia, and there should be a greater concentration on China. He is forced to resign for saying that. So clearly, this is giving Russia a notice - and this is the most powerful military bloc in the world - it needs to be contained somehow for their own sense of security.

Ross: You touched on the fact that when politicians are doing badly at home, whether it be in ratings or having parties in Downing Street, what they do is they go and create a scenario somewhere else so they can distract from their own leadership failings. With this situation, when we know that militarily, Russia is so far advanced, NATO's fractured, unable to fight, really, meaningfully, do you think that these politicians who are talking in this way, genuinely believe their own rhetoric and are deluded, or do you think they know, deep down, that actually, if this was to go off as it were, then actually it would be catastrophic, not just for Europe, but for the world?

Michael Averko: Some of them, it's the latter, others, it's the former. And you touched on something that was evident recently with this New Jersey Senator, Bob Menendez. He clearly caters to the anti-Russian-Ukrainian expat community here. And a lot of them are people who are American born but with a Ukraine background and their family have, you know, a past with this extremist Stepan Bandera group. He recently talked about how Russians are going to come home in body bags in the event of a Kiev regime-Russia war. Now does this buffoon realise that in the unfortunate event of such a conflict, Russia's not going to be needing the most body bags? But you know, he's not challenged and he's playing to a certain element that has disproportionate influence. And it's just simply allowed, unfortunately.

Ross: With the rise of social media, is it the case that we now really need to purge the newsrooms because back in the day the CNN's of this world were allowed to - during the Gulf War, for instance, Iraq war - have hold of the narrative and keep pushing it out? Rise of social media means that there are different narratives out there and are different points of views. Is that purge necessary now or are people more informed?

Michael Averko: People are more informed, but there also should be a purge as well. When we hear Brian Stelter here in New York on CNN, be aghast at Joe Rogan. A lot of people are following him. And likewise, in my country, the disdain for the Fox News host, Tucker Carlson, for openly questioning why the United States should prefer Ukraine over Russia, and he's treated like a pariah, it shows you the lack of intellectual give and take in the upper echelons of mass media, much different from what we're doing right now. You know, look, if they're going to say that what I'm saying or Scott Ritter is saying is crock, you know what, if it's really so bad, you don't mudsling them and censor them? No, you have them on for an honest dialogue, because if your view is really right, then you should be able to cream them. But they know in their heart of hearts that's not the case.

Ross: It's brilliantly put but they don't invite these people on. Michael, before we wrap up, tell me from where you stand, how this plays out.

Michael Averko: OK. The only way Russia goes into Ukraine is if the Kiev regime launches a strike into Donbass. There are some people believing that by the end of February, they will go in and take the territory east of the Dnieper River. I respectfully disagree. Because if they do that, that leaves a rump Kiev regime in Ukraine, which is going to be more anti-Russian and also invites a greater NATO presence. I believe that the Russian endgame is that Kiev used to not be so anti-Russian, ditto Odessa, that in the long run, they can win back these areas. But it's going to be a long, drawn out process and certain things have to be put in place to do so. And that includes Russia not rocking the boat too much unless they have to, because if the Kiev regime attacks, yeah, Russia is going to have to come in and the Kiev regime could lose some additional territory as a result.

Ross: Michael Averko, thank you very much for your time. This program's all about thinking differently. You certainly do. Thanks again.

Michael Averko: Thank you for your time.