

#1469 Political Brinksmanship Rekindling The Cold War (Ukraine Crisis)

Intro 2-9-22

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast* in which we shall take a look at the simmering geopolitical crisis in Ukraine, as Russia amasses military forces along the border. In particular, we're going to be hearing from those who do not predict the eminent outbreak of war and analyze the various motives at play.

Clips today are from the *Vlogbrothers*, the *PBS NewsHour*, *Democracy Now!*, *American Prestige*, and *The Dig*, with additional members-only clips from *Jacobin Radio* and *Gaslit Nation*.

Understanding Ukraine: The Problems Today and Some Historical Context - vlogbrothers - Air Date 3-4-14

[00:00:35] **JOHN GREEN - HOST, VLOGBROTHERS:** So this is Ukraine, the second largest country in Europe by area, and this is the Crimean peninsula, which saw much of the fighting in the Crimean war that lasted from 1853 to 1856.

It was sort of the Catholic versus Orthodox thing, but the larger cause was Europe fearing that Russia's power would expand as the Ottoman empire declined. So Britain, France, and the kind of still a thing Ottoman Empire teamed up to eventually defeat Russia, and 500,000 people died and it was generally pretty awful and obviously resolved very little since Europe, just 60 years later would go ahead and have World War I.

Then toward the end of World War I Russia had its famous communist revolution and Ukraine enjoyed a brief period of independence, although enjoyed may not be quite the right verb. In fact, from 1917 to 1921, Ukraine was mired in endless wars among competing factions, including Poland and the USSR and Ukrainian nationalists, even some real life anarchists, it was all very

complicated. It was also extremely violent, more than 1.5 million people died. And then finally Ukraine became part of the USSR and things became more stable for a while, but then Stalin.

As many as 10 million Ukrainians starved to death in 1932 in 1933 thanks to Stalin's agricultural policies, which were not just stupid, but also actively evil. I mean, there was widespread starvation in a country that is now the world's third largest exporter of grain. Then following World War II, Stalin forcibly deported the Crimean peninsula's entire indigenous population of ethnic Tatars to central Asia. So if you want to point to one individual whose responsible for a lot of this, I don't want to call anyone out, but Stalin.

Stalin also moved many ethnic Russians into Ukraine, especially into the Crimean peninsula and the Western part of the country, which is the industrial center, and then Stalin's successor Khrushchev decided to transfer the Crimean peninsula from Russia to Ukraine in 1954. Why? Well, Khrushchev had lots of ties to Ukraine, but also the Crimean peninsula is not actually physically attached to Russia. As you can see here, it is physically attached to Ukraine and it gets all of its electricity and water from Ukraine. And it's easier to administer places you are physically connected to, which is why Alaska should be part of Canada, but that is a different story.

Okay, so quick contemporary demographics snapshot: today about 67% of people living in Ukraine speak Ukrainian as their first language, about 30% speak Russian, although only about 17% of the population identify as ethnically Russian. And as you can see here, Russian is spoken mostly in the west and in the Crimean peninsula, many Tatars have returned to Crimea since the breakup of the Soviet Union, but today they only make up about 12% of the population.

Okay. So flash forward to December of 1991, after the Soviet Union has broken up, Ukraine had a nationwide referendum and 90% of people, including a majority of those living in the Crimean peninsula, voted for independence from Russia. But Ukraine remain much more closely aligned with Russia than many other former Soviet republics did like for instance Estonia, which is now part of the European Union.

In 2004, there was an election and there were widespread reports of vote rigging, but the Russian friendly Viktor Yanukovich was elected. The opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko, led to massive street protests in Kiev that came to be known as the Orange Revolution. That opposition leader Yushchenko was disfigured and almost died as a result of mysterious poisoning, side note, but the number of mysterious poisonings in Russia and Eastern

Europe has absolutely skyrocketed since Putin came to power in Russia, which I'm sure is a coincidence. Anyway, the Orange Revolution protests led to a second election and the poisoned opposition leader, Yushchenko won, and yay. everything would be made of puppies and freedom and rainbows and friendliness toward Europe forever, except no.

For one thing, a lot of people in Ukraine, especially in the Western part, want to be more closely allied with Russia, and also despite being an economist, Yushchenko wasn't very good at running the Ukrainian economy. Also, Yushchenko couldn't push through austerity measures needed to deal with Ukraine's rising debt, and its friendliness toward Europe infuriated Russia, which cut off gas supplies briefly but disastrously to Ukraine in 2006.

So by 2010, Ukraine was being led by the Europe friendly and somewhat corrupt Yulia Tymoshenko, and then there were elections. And the presidential election, declared free and fair by international observers, was won by the after mentioned Russian friendly Viktor Yanukovich. In November, 2013, Yanukovich announced that Ukraine would abandoned an agreement to strengthen ties with the EU and would instead become a closer ally of Russia. And to that is when the protest began in Kiev's Independence Square.

Those protests grew and grew until February 20th. When dozens of protesters were killed by military and police, and the next day Yanukovich disappeared from Kyiv. The protesters had won. They installed a new temporary government to prepare for new elections. And then the Putin regime marched into the Crimean peninsula, ostensibly to protect ethnic Russians there and Russian military installations, but this violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity is known in diplomatic circles as like a big effing deal.

Crimea is already an autonomous the province with its own government, so what does it want? Does it want independence? That would be hard, all of their electricity and water has to come through Ukraine. Does it want to be part of Russia again? That would be impossible without Ukrainian cooperation, which right now seems inconceivable. So that's where we are right now. I mean, unless something has happened in the last 30 minutes.

So here's one narrative of these events and unpopular and ineffective, but democratically elected politician was removed from power by a mob of protestors and the new unelected parliament briefly passed a law saying that only Ukrainian can be the official language of the country, even though many people in the country speak Russian. Furthermore, this new government wants to become part of the EU, which might bring NATO missiles to Russia's border,

and that is unacceptable to Russia. I mean, I'm American, we've had some very ineffective and unpopular leaders and what we've done is just waited for them not to be president anymore. But here's another narrative: a tyrannical leader who ordered the murder of peaceful protesters was chased from power and replaced by a government that will transition Ukraine toward free and fair elections, and Russia responded to that by invading Ukraine.

Hank, I'm not trying to make a false equivalence here, but I think it's really important to understand both of these narratives. And I want to give a little more historical context than we've been seeing on the news, because it helps us to understand that the pull between Western Europe and Russia in Ukraine is not new. I mean, the word Ukraine itself means border land. It has for centuries functioned as the border between west and east. What Ukraine needs is stability, decades of stability, so it can grow to have its own identity, to have relationships with both Europe and Russia without being controlled by either.

Right now, that dream seems really far away, but 60 years ago, Japan was in ruins. 25 years ago, Germany was divided into two countries. 12 years ago, Sierra Leone was mired in a horrific and seemingly endless civil war, but today it's the second fastest growing economy in the world. The arc of history is long let's hope that it bends toward peace.

Can the U.S. and Russia agree on Ukraine? Here's the latest on the negotiations - PBSNewsHour - Air Date 1-28-22

[00:07:23] **JUDY WOODRUFF - HOST, PBS NEWSHOUR:** President Biden confirmed tonight that US troops will be heading to Eastern Europe and NATO countries amid heightened tensions between Russia and Ukraine. He was asked by a reporter about any US troop movements this evening.

[00:07:38] **REPORTER:** Have you decided how soon you would be moving US troops to Eastern Europe?

[00:07:45] **PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN:** I will be moving US troops to Eastern Europe into NATO countries in the near term.

[00:07:49] **JUDY WOODRUFF - HOST, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Earlier today, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky downplayed fears of an imminent war

between Ukraine and Russia, urging the West not to panic over the escalating situation at the border.

Meanwhile, Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, said that Moscow doesn't want a war. But he also warned the West not to trample on his country's security interests, after the US delivered its response to Russia on the Ukraine crisis.

[00:08:17] **SERGEY LAVROV (THROUGH TRANSLATOR):** We have got the answers only the day before yesterday. They are written in Western-style, and make things as clear as mud in many aspects. But, as I have said before, there are some rational kernels in there regarding peripheral issues.

[00:08:29] **JUDY WOODRUFF - HOST, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Russia's President Vladimir Putin also spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron today and voiced his frustrations over his country's unmet demands.

Nick Schifrin is here, following all of these developments.

Hello, Nick. What the president, President Biden, had to say a few minutes ago caught our attention. Tell us what's behind these comments.

[00:08:51] **NICK SCHFRIN:** The US has put 8,500 troops on heightened alert, prepare-to-deploy orders—that's what the Pentagon calls it—and the reason it's done that is it's concerned not only about war in Ukraine, about war in Ukraine spreading into Eastern Europe. And so it wants to reassure eastern flank allies. It wants to reassure NATO. Part of that is giving US troops over to NATO command to reinforce that eastern flank along the Russian border.

And, at the same time, NATO countries are trying to do the same, reinforce with French, with Dutch jets, with soldiers moving to Eastern Europe to really try and make the message to Putin clear that, regardless of what happens in Ukraine, we are—we being the West, we being NATO—are able to deter you, are able to send you a message about how strong we feel about the number of troops that need to be in Eastern Europe and our commitment to defend our NATO allies.

[00:09:45] **JUDY WOODRUFF - HOST, PBS NEWSHOUR:** So, Nick, we reported what the Ukrainian president is saying, telling the West not to panic, but the Pentagon had something to say today. Tell us about that.

[00:09:55] **NICK SCHFRIN:** Yes, what's interesting here is, the Pentagon, the US and Kyiv really aren't on the same page when it comes to the threat. From

the US perspective, they see Russian troops, they see Russian material rushing to the Ukrainian border every day, these videos released by the Russian military defense every day. And what the US sees is a more serious and imminent threat than Europe has seen in decades, as we heard from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mark Milley, in a joint Pentagon press conference with the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin.

[00:10:25] **GEN. MARK MILLEY - CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF:** Sure, with 100,000 troops, and you have got combined arms formations, ground maneuver, artillery, rockets, you have got air and all the other piece parts that go with it, there's a potential that they could launch on very, very little warning. That's possible.

This is larger in scale and scope and the massing of forces than anything we have seen in recent memory, and I think you would have to go back quite a while into the Cold War days to see something of this magnitude.

[00:10:53] **NICK SCHFRIN:** Now, just before that, we heard Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky say that talk of imminent war was causing panic in Ukraine, and he criticized the US for making a decision last weekend for evacuating diplomats' families, as we heard today through Zelensky's official interpreter.

[00:11:11] **VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY (THROUGH TRANSLATOR):** Embassy employees should be here. These are the captains. I'm sorry, but these are the captains of the diplomatic corps, the representatives of their respective countries, and the captains are the last who should be leaving the ship. I don't think we have a Titanic here. Ukraine is moving forward. Sometimes, they're not even using diplomatic language. They're saying, tomorrow is the war. This means panic on the market, panic in the financial sector.

[00:11:41] **NICK SCHFRIN:** Ukrainian officials tell me, Judy, that they believe us is actually hyping the threat, and that is leading international investors to refuse to lend to Ukraine. And that reduces Ukraine's economic growth. They also say that they're frustrated that their requests for more weapons, for example, Patriot missiles, like you can see there, anti-ship missiles, are being denied by the administration.

Now, senior US officials tell me that they are sending a lot of weapons to Ukraine, and that they're, frankly, just calling it as they see it on the border with Russia, and that frank talk continued last night in the conversation between President Biden and President Zelensky. I'm told Biden told Zelensky that

Russia has the capacity to seize and hold territory and even overthrow the government in Kyiv.

[00:12:25] **JUDY WOODRUFF - HOST, PBS NEWSHOUR:** So, Nick, while all this is going on, is the diplomatic track still alive here?

[00:12:32] **NICK SCHFRIN:** Yes, very much so. Earlier this week, the US and NATO gave official responses to Russia's demands, rejecting Russia's demands that Ukraine never join NATO, and that NATO roll back, basically, to 1990s levels. Instead, the US wants to limit military exercises in Europe, restrict missile deployments and talk about new arms control.

Now, today, as you said, Judy, Vladimir Putin said the US had "failed to take Russian security concerns into account," but we heard something else from Sergey Lavrov. He said there was a kernel of rationality in the US proposals. And that could be a hint that diplomacy will move forward, US naval War College's Nikolas Gvosdev told me earlier today.

[00:13:11] **NIKOLAS GVOSDEV:** What it means is that the points which Lavrov believes that he can continue negotiating directly with the United States, perhaps understanding that the US can't make certain formal commitments, but you might be able to jury-rig a solution with the US that Moscow might find satisfactory. And this is where another diplomatic track is going to be quite critical, and that is the revival of the Normandy format with Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia.

[00:13:49] **NICK SCHFRIN:** That Normandy format focuses on the war that is ongoing, Judy, in Eastern Ukraine and requires Moscow to reduce violence, but it also requires Kyiv to give areas that are controlled by Russian separatists some autonomy, and those talks will continue over the next couple of weeks.

“It’s Not About Security”: Belgian Peace Activist Says NATO Has Outlived Its Purpose - Democracy Now! - Air Date 2-1-22

[00:14:05] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** We’re joined by Ludo De Brabander, who is with the group Vrede, which is the Flemish word for “peace.”

You are the country that is the home base of NATO. Talk about the response there.

[00:14:21] **LUDO DE BRABANDER:** Well, as you said, Belgium is hosting, in Brussels, the headquarters of NATO, and also is the capital, let's say, from the European Union; with the commission, for example, its headquarters in Brussels.

So, well, let's say, it's similar to what Reiner said concerning Germany. You know, the first thing that our government says — and they're also Greens and Social Democrats in the government — is that, we need to fulfill our obligations towards NATO. So, and if NATO asks us to deploy troops, for example, towards the Russian border, towards the east of Europe, then Belgium will do this. This is the message we are given.

And maybe to give you an example how the Ukraine crisis is playing also into the — let's say, into the interests of the military-industrial complex, and is used; just recently, last Friday, our government decided to increase military budgets, referring to the crisis with Russia, to 1.54% of the gross domestic product, which is an increase from 1.1% today. So, it's about, in eight years' time, 14 billion Euros, which is a lot of money; especially with the health crisis and the energy crisis now today.

And you see there is almost no debate in media. It seems, like, to be almost the political consensus, that this one is needed.

And I think this is due to the NATO policy and also to the propaganda, almost, we read in press, the voices that are standing for peace, and trying to give alternatives to military confrontation, are almost not heard. So, this is a little bit the atmosphere in Belgium.

[00:16:20] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** And, Ludo De Brabander, I wanted to ask you: For those listeners here who may not be familiar with the origins and evolution of NATO, could you talk a little bit about the original reason why NATO was created, and especially why it chose, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, to expand eastward?

[00:16:42] **LUDO DE BRABANDER:** Well, NATO has — you know, when it was first created in '49, it was to keep the Russians out; the Russians — the Germans down, and the United States in. That's the very famous phrase that is often used.

And, of course, the Warsaw Pact has been established six years later, but it was in the middle of, let's say, when Truman gave his speech in '47, let's say, that made the difference, that started the Cold War. It was, like, yeah, always with accompanying, what I call the propaganda of “We have to be careful for Russia. Russia will invade us,” like similar — that time, similar to what happens now.

And after, you know — it has already been said, I think, in the program today, but going further on in the '90s, when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, and the Soviet Union also became dissolved, with 10 states coming out of it, many in even mainstream politics thought NATO is not needed anymore.

But NATO — just the opposite happened. NATO, let's say, reinvented itself. It started in late '90s to expand its territory to the east. It's changed, let's say, its policy of a pure defense organization, through Article 5 — you know, when one country is attacked, all countries will help and support the country attacked; this is the central, let's say, task of the NATO. Suddenly, there was talk about non-Article 5 tasks, which became intervention policy of NATO. And third, it started to be global by making a lot of cooperation agreements with countries and regions worldwide.

So, NATO reestablished itself as a global actor now, more and more, as a global force. And as Reiner said, NATO, half — more than half of military spending is done by NATO. And now you see a big push towards all NATO countries, because this was decided in Wales in 2014, to increase their defense military budgets, and it will become even, in a few years, 60, 65% of all military expenditures in the world.

And so, it became a very important military force. And, I think, mainly to defend geostrategical interests. It's not about security. If it would be about security... let's say, the relationship with Russia would be treated differently. As Reiner said before, then it would be more cooperative. We would look for, what is called, common security, because security is indivisible. Security of the other is in the interest of the security of the one.

So, it is — but this policy is undermined by NATO, this principle.

[00:19:39] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** And to what degree is there an opportunity for the peace movement to be able to affect the policies of some of the key players, European players, within NATO?

[00:19:51] **LUDO DE BRABANDER:** Well, it's very difficult. As I said, I mean, there is not much coverage of the positions of a peace movement. What

we try to do, we have also, as media announced already in the United States on the 5th of December — 5th, sorry, of February-- so next Saturday-- a vigil in Brussels. And what we try to emphasize is that NATO is not in our interest, not in the interest of security and peace, but also not in the interest of, let's say, the needs of people.

Sanctions Sanctions Everywhere w/ Yar Batmanghelidj - American Prestige - Air Date 2-4-22

[00:20:20] **DEREK DAVISON - HOST, AMERICAN PRESTIGE:** There was an interesting development earlier this week. The Spanish newspaper El País managed, it seems, to get its hands on copies of the written replies that the US and NATO gave to Russia's security demands or requests or questions, whatever you want to call them, which they delivered to Russia last week. It's interesting to look at them, I don't know, you can't draw any conclusions until the Russian government offers its take, which they've done in dribs and drabs, but they say they're still reviewing these documents.

What's interesting to me about them is a couple of things. One, the NATO response is considerably more antagonistic than the US response. It's just very dismissive, almost insultingly so, of Russia's security concerns, whereas the US documents seems to outline a couple of ways that we could move forward here in a productive way, I think, and actually, if the Russians and they've said they like a couple of things about the US response, is they seize on this and it becomes a springboard to further progress.

You could get something that emerges from this crisis that could actually be positive. Those pathways, one of them has to do with the conflict in Ukraine and reviving the Normandy format, which is the French and German broker talks between Ukraine and Russia that are supposed to work on implementing what's called the Minsk agreement, which is to find a broad outline for what it would take to end that conflict. We've already seen that format get revived. There was a meeting of the four countries, the four principles, last month. There's supposed to be another one this month after a long period of dormancy. Ending that conflict would be a huge success. It would be a dramatic development. It would definitely take down the temperature in Eastern Ukraine, between Kyiv and Moscow, quite a bit, and it would do a lot for the people who are living in Eastern Ukraine, not just in the Donbas region, the separatist region, but all around that front line.

There was just a report, I think maybe Human Rights Watch, one of these international NGOs this week about the conditions under which people are living in that region, and it's just horrifying. Every day you gotta be worried that some unit on either side of the front is going to decide to shell the other side. You gotta be worried about landmines. You gotta be worried about getting access to basic needs like food. So it's just been a wretched existence for people and the conflict has been frozen for so long that they're just stuck in this limbo. That would be great. If you could re-energize peace talks around that conflict, that would be fantastic.

The other way out, potentially, is a discussion about weapons systems. The US response alluded to a willingness to re-engage with Russia on, basically, the contours of the old Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which the Trump administration scrapped, but which prevented or limited both NATO and on the Russian end from putting intermediate range missiles in Europe, really having intermediate range missiles in the field at all, to some extent. The US response suggested an openness to talking about weapon systems, so that would include those kinds of systems. It would probably include missile defense systems like the Aegis Ashore system, which takes these missile defense that the US Navy has developed and puts it on shore. The Russians have a lot of concerns about that because they feel it could be easily rejiggered from a defensive missile system to an offensive missiles system. So revival of arms control talks could be another way to progress out of the situation, which would be excellent.

I don't want to leave people on a happy note because really nothing has changed in terms of the dynamic. The Russians are still surrounding Ukraine. Everybody in the west is still talking about an invasion, although the US government has now said it's not going to talk about an imminent invasion anymore, because it's not sure that an invasion is in fact eminent.

[00:24:18] **DANIEL BESSNER - HOST, AMERICAN PRESTIGE:** Do you know what this reminds me of, Derek, tell me if you're familiar with this, but the second Berlin crisis of 1958 to 1961, when there was a lot of saber rattling around Berlin, and Soviet and US leaders went back and forth for literal years, and then nothing changed. This really reminds me of that. This reminds me of one of the highly tension-filled moments of geopolitical history that, in retrospect, don't appear that dangerous, but at the time seemed terrible. I don't think that's true for things like the Cuban Missile Crisis, but when one looks at the second Berlin crisis, this is really giving me echoes of that, what's going on with Ukraine today.

[00:24:50] **DEREK DAVISON - HOST, AMERICAN PRESTIGE:** I think the likeliest outcome here is nothing changes at all. Russia, the conflict in the Donbas is a tool that the Russians can use to keep Ukraine destabilized. They don't have necessarily an interest in seeing that conflict end completely, and the West certainly is always interested in hyping up potential conflict with Russia.

I think you're probably right. I think the likeliest outcome here is a lot of saber rattling, but nothing really happens. And yet the lingering shreds of optimism that I have inside me lead me to say it would be great if what came out of this was actually an end to the Donbas conflict and/or some re-engagement on arms control, those would be fantastic developments if they actually happen.

Russian Historian: We Need Both the U.S. & Russia to Deescalate Crisis over Ukraine - Democracy Now! - Air Date 2-3-22

[00:25:34] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** The Pentagon says it's deploying an additional 3,000 troops to Eastern Europe, as the Biden administration continues to accuse Russia of planning to invade Ukraine.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said U.S. troops would deploy to Germany, as well as Romania and Poland, which border Ukraine.

[00:25:52] **JOHN KIRBY:** The current situation demands that we reinforce the deterrent and defensive posture on NATO's eastern flank. President Biden has been clear that the United States will respond to the growing threat to Europe's security and stability.

[00:26:06] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** On Tuesday, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, spoke out about the situation for the first time publicly in a month. He accused the United States of stoking the crisis by ignoring its security concerns about NATO's expansion eastward.

We now go to Russia, where we're joined by Ilya Budraitskis, a Moscow-based historian and political writer, the author of *Dissidents Among Dissidents: Ideology, Politics and the Left in Post-Soviet Russia*. Verso Books has just published the English translation of his book.

We welcome you to Democracy Now!, Ilya.

If you can start off by responding to the increased tensions on the border with Ukraine; talk about whether you think Putin has decided to invade yet, and where this all comes from.

[00:26:55] **ILYA BUDRAITSKIS:** Thank you. Thank you for having me here.

So, first, to say that, in fact, if you look back to how this escalation began a couple of months ago, we'll see that, in the beginning, there was just some kind of informational fake coming from the Western media, coming from U.S., about the Russian plans to invade Ukraine.

And then, somehow, this fake was turned into reality, because Russia was answering to this fake, and really put the troops on the border. So, during this two months, we see how the escalation growing from the both sides.

And we see how each side use each other to heighten the risks and to gain more from this very dangerous escalation.

[00:28:15] **NERMEEN SHAIKH:** Ilya, given the fact that the situation has escalated to this extent, do you think now Putin is going to invade Ukraine? I mean, Zelensky himself, and other Ukrainian government officials, as well as, of course, Russian officials, have said that the threat of an invasion is highly exaggerated, and is far from imminent. Your response?

[00:28:43] **ILYA BUDRAITSKIS:** So, I think that if we are talking about the invasion to Ukraine as a, kind of, a plan of Putin, this plan sounds really strange; because what kind of result of this military solution could be? To change the regime in Ukraine, to provide some long-term military occupation of this country, which is actually a big country, with more than 40 million population?

So, somehow, this idea that Russia want to invade Ukraine replaced the actual crisis, the actual problem, in the east of Ukraine, where we see this dead end of so-called Minsk Agreements, which are not really followed, made by Russia and by Ukraine, and which deals with the so-called people's republics in the east of Ukraine.

But, as I said before, when this, kind of, fake, this, kind of, disinformation, about the possible Russian invasion in Ukraine became a real subject of talks, and real subject of concerns — and there is, of course, growing military presence of Russian troops on Ukrainian border — this, kind of, invasion became more and more possible, not in terms of a realization of some exact plan

of military occupation of Ukraine, but as the possibility of some, kind of, provocation, or incident, on the border between Russian and Ukrainian troops, which could lead to the further military escalation. That's why it is a really dangerous situation.

[00:31:04] **NERMEEN SHAIKH:** Ilya, could you comment on Russian demands with respect to the eastward expansion of NATO, and also the relevance of NATO, even as almost a dozen Eastern European countries have joined the military alliance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War?

[00:31:28] **ILYA BUDRAITSKIS:** Yes. So, on one hand, you have these demands, which were put forward by Russia in the middle of December last year, where Russia, concerned about the growing presence of, not just the expansion of, NATO, some possible plans to integrate Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, and so on.

But, on the other side, you have the situation where, during this escalation from the both sides, NATO somehow find its idea, find its legitimation, because NATO could exist only in the situation of the confrontation with a real enemy with some kind of equal force.

And, of course, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, NATO definitely lost this — lost this meaning, lost this idea.

And also, the [wary?] kind of support of NATO, of the membership of NATO, among the population of the countries, of the members of this military alliance, was — the support was not so much.

So the only reason why NATO now somehow get back its idea, its legitimacy, it's only because Putin's Russia is ready to play this role of the enemy of some equal force, which, actually, Russia is not, if you compare it with NATO. And, also, Putin's, like, worldview, it's — I will say, it's very comfortable for the explanation why the NATO should expand.

Ukraine w/ Volodymyr Ishchenko - The Dig - Air Date 1-28-22

[00:33:47] **DANIEL DENVIR - HOST, THE DIG:** Is Russia preparing to invade Ukraine, or is the west hyping the prospect of an invasion for its own

purposes? What are Putin's possible aims? What are those of the United States and the EU? What in short is going on right now?

[00:34:01] **VOLODYMYR ISHCHENKO:** Okay. I really hear these speculations and there've been like a lot of them, at least in the last three months, but even longer, of course. And many people turned into Putin experts and crowds of people who have their clichés about the U S policies.

I mean, I'm skeptical to any kind of like cliché style, one practical explanation for what's going on. And, at least I would say that there are at least two autonomous processes. One thing is what Russia is doing, is what they're really doing. And with moving their military and it's stating this demands for the NATO, and that's partially the effect. But there is also another autonomous process is the perception and media representation and the official representation in the Western countries, primarily in the US, in the UK, and kind of like different presentations in Germany, France, European Union countries.

And it may seem like the US might be reacting to what Russia is doing, and saying that it's going to be an imminent invasion and so on. But it's more like independent from that. And it should analyze both what's going on from the Russian side, but we should also keep a very critical distance from what the U S officials says, what the CIA is so generously feeding to the media, starting from like three months ago when there were no evidence or signs that anything like a very soon invasion is prepared by Russia. And their media of public and covert actions that may actually contribute to the escalation.

So what is becoming more known right now that actually Ukrainian government doesn't really take it so seriously, the possible invasion in the near future.

I mean, in the course of two or three weeks as it is very explicitly stated by the top officials in the US and just very recently by Boris Johnson, directly saying, and which has skeptically taken by Germany, by France, which supposedly looking at the same data that CIA provides them, but saying that no, they are not seeing any signs of what you are telling us is going on.

And the Ukrainian officials and the minister of defense in the Security Council, they say it's -- basically they almost explicitly allude that the United States is using this media scare for their domestic and geopolitical purposes. They are very awake because it's super important partner for Ukraine right now. And they're not ready to accuse them in very direct words. But what we can read from the interviews from their statements, it's basically this, that United States

are kind of like exploiting this story. And as I said, it's at least partially independent from the real actions from the Russian side.

And it's not only the Ukrainian government. It's also the independent analysts. Just recently, the Center for Defense Strategies -- it's a think-tank, Ukrainian think-tank which is headed by the former minister of defense -- published a report where they say in that regard, very unlikely any large-scale invasion from Russia to Ukraine, with occupation of large territories, with the cooperation of the big cities in the course of the next several weeks. But also they think it's very unlikely that they might do this in the course of 2022, until the end of the year.

So they believe it's much more probable that Russia might use so-called hybrid attacks, attacking the infrastructure. They can maybe do cyber attacks and, at the very most, they may do kind of like targeted strikes. But they don't really see the preparations for a really large-scale invasion.

Those 100,000 or whatever soldiers they amassed at the Ukrainian borders, at least as you are told, it looks far below the number of the military that would be required to attack such a big country as Ukraine. And Ukrainian military, it's at least 200,000, and actually even more, if you count all other institutions, I think units, that also have access to their arms.

So, yeah, that's at least we need to keep in mind that yes, Russia is doing something, and they might respond if they won't be satisfied by the NATO response to their demands. But their response, not necessarily will be targeted on Ukraine. And even if on Ukraine, it's not necessarily, and probably very unlikely, that it will be in that form of the large-scale attack and occupation.

Then there would be different consequences. And, as the report from the Center of Defense Strategies basically says, it will be simply suicidal for Putin. Even if they attack and occupy Ukraine, even if they would amass enough forces in a short time for this, then what are they going to do with this? How would it even solve their problems? And how are they going to solve the new problems that would arise for Russian geopolitical situation, for Russian economy, for the Russian government capacity to keep the working population in Ukraine.

So there have been many questions, and many, many, many problems with this.

Ukrainians Doubt a Russian Invasion Is Imminent as U.S. Peace Groups Urge Biden

to Halt Escalation - Democracy Now! - Air Date 2-1-22

[00:40:29] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** Medea, I wanted to ask you — we've been hearing now for weeks the same story repeated in almost every newscast: 100,000 Russian troops on the Ukrainian border. No one talks about the fact that there are 320,000 American troops still in Europe, 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. And those troops are somehow not considered a problem or a threat. Who are they there for, those [60-80,000] troops?

[00:41:06] **MEDEA BENJAMIN:** Well, that's right, Juan. I think this is a moment to educate the American people about all of the bases that the U.S. has surrounding Russia. What if Russia had bases in Mexico and Canada with missiles that were pointed at the United States? This is an educational moment, too, and I'm glad you're spending the hour on it, talking about NATO and how NATO has expanded from 16 members at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union to 30 members, including members that were part of the Soviet Republic, and how Ukraine has a 1,300-mile border with Russia. And of course this is extremely intimidating.

And so, I go back to saying the American people have to recognize how the U.S. is the expansionist country that has bases all over the world and that NATO is antagonizing not only Russia, but it's antagonizing China. It says that China is a threat to NATO's security. That's the North American Treaty Organization. China is in the Pacific. So, it is a moment to say not only do we want Ukraine not to be part of NATO, but we want NATO disbanded. And you can go to the CodePink website and see all kinds of ways that you can get involved in this peace movement right now.

[00:42:32] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** And, Medea, do you have contact with peace movements either in the Ukraine or Russia that are — what are they telling you about their concerns about this growing drumbeat for war?

[00:42:45] **MEDEA BENJAMIN:** Well, we are part of a movement that is called "No to NATO," and we have reached out to groups in Russia, in Ukraine, and they are all saying the same thing. Nobody wants to go to war. There are many people in Ukraine that are worried about Russia, but they say war is not the answer. We know that the only ones who benefit from war are the military-industrial complex, the media, that has been so sensationalist and increases its ratings. And that's why people in Ukraine itself are saying slow down, step back — and, of course, the people of Russia saying the same thing.

[00:43:26] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Several executives for U.S. military contractors have boasted that the worsening conflict in Ukraine is boosting their profits. This is Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes speaking last week during an earnings conference call with investors.

[00:43:44] **GREGORY HAYES:** The answer is obviously we are seeing, I would say, opportunities for international sales. We just have to look to the last week, where we saw the drone attack in the UAE, which attacked some of their other facilities, and of course the tensions in Eastern Europe, the tensions in the South China Sea. All of those things are putting pressure on some of the defense spending over there. So, I fully expect we're going to see some benefit from it.

[00:44:13] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics all fund the Center for Strategic and International Studies, an influential think tank that's supported U.S. military action in response to a Russian invasion. And, of course, you go back to the famous promise that then-Secretary of State James Baker made to Gorbachev — when was it? in 1990 — saying “not one inch eastward,” that promise that NATO would not expand to Russia's border. Medea Benjamin, if you can talk about what we hear in the United States on the corporate networks, the lack of presence of those who are opposed to a war with Russia?

[00:45:03] **MEDEA BENJAMIN:** Well, first, I think it's very important that you bring out who in these defense contractors — or military contractors, more accurately — are benefiting from this. We have given over \$3 billion in, quote, “lethal aid” to Ukraine since the 2014 coup. And the NATO alliance itself — you know, there are some organizations that come together to do things like reduce poverty or greenhouse gases. The NATO alliance has a goal of increasing the percentage of the GDP that countries spend on the military. It's actually a goal. Only 10 of the 30 so far have reached that goal, and there is pressure on those deadbeat countries that prefer to put money into education and healthcare instead of buying fighter jets and bombs. So NATO itself is really doing the bidding of the military-industrial complex.

And so, the media is another winner in this. Their ratings go up. They have sensationalized this. And as you said, they don't put voices of the peace movement. And I do want to say that we need the progressives in Congress to speak out more, because they have more access to the media than we do.

Explaining the US-Russia Saber-Rattling - Jacobin Radio w/ Suzi Weissman - Air Date 2-1-22

[00:46:18] **SUZI WEISSMAN - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** Maybe we should just start with that last question about how you see, I guess, where we are in the world and what Putin is doing within it. Don't I know that's gigantic, but I'm sure you'll take off from there.

[00:46:29] **HILLEL TICKTIN:** Yes. I think it's true that Putin himself is in trouble. That is to say, the presidency's in trouble.

Clearly when there were demonstrations in Moscow that showed. And of course the fact that people who simply went in the street were then in prison for going out in the street. There's an indication of the system that is there.

The only trouble with that statement I've made is that it's not a system. Something that lies in between everything. The United States effectively did not allow Russia to develop into a modern capitalist country. It didn't because it wouldn't allow the possibly rising factories, farms, corporations in the former Soviet Union a space within the world economy. Of course it would have meant that the United States would have had to give weight to some degree. But that explicitly stopped it.

And in fact, Putin is only there because they did it. He then became an acceptable candidate because he had effectively took a line, which was in between the line that was held before under Yeltsin, which was basically to completely change the system without -- he actually failed in doing so. But Putin took an intermediate line effectively, so that it was expressed, in fact, by the arrest of one of the chief budding capitalists, and his property was taken over by the state.

The point I'm making is that the United States made a mistake in not conceding something to some small number of rising Russian capitalists so that they could form a classical capitalist class in Russia itself, which in turn, the logic could have been one in which the United States formed some sort of interconnection with them. Obviously they would have been in competition, but nonetheless it would be a capitalist competition. Anyway, that was stopped. That was directly stopped. The Russian firms weren't recognized. And of course there was no

question of assistance in building up a capitalist class. So what was left was something which is neither one thing nor the other.

It's certainly not in any sense socialist. After all, the Soviet Union wasn't socialist on the one hand. And on the other hand, although if you look at these statistics in terms of the quantity of the economy which is private enterprise and which is not, then there's no question, but most of the present day Russian economy is indeed private enterprise. But major firms, certain major firms are held and continue to be held by the state.

And the fact is that the overall economy remains in the hands of the state. Not that they are directly owning everything, but they make the essential decisions. That's to say the state operators.

However, because the United States effectively made it impossible for the Russian bourgeoisie to establish itself as an independent global bourgeoisie, as it were, the development of Russia went backwards. So that today, if you look at its GDP and its composition, it's a backward country. Whereas under Stalinism there was substantial industrial development. The industries were uncompetitive, of course. But today that industry has either been wiped out or is that a much lower role, so that Russia doesn't play an industrial role in the world's economy at all. What it does is supply oil and gas on a massive scale. And that's what kept it going. But the fact is the result has been that as long as there was a boom in the price of oil and gas, that wasn't too bad. And in fact, the standard of living rose very considerably from 2002 up to the point where it stopped in 2014, approximately.

So what you had in Russia and have in Russia is this situation where Russia, although it was relatively backward, nonetheless was in fact a world power. Today it's not a world power. It does, of course, have atomic weapons. That is the case.

[00:51:26] **SUZI WEISSMAN - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** And I just interject here, Hillel Ticktin, because this is something that Nick brought up as well, that, of course we know that there's been declining living standards in Russia for the last, what? since like 2012 or so. But that the threat of sanctions that the US and Europe threatened on Russia right now, because of the war bluster, will have less effect because prices are going up so much. And Russia still, as you just said, is a petro state. It's not so much oil but gas to Western Europe. And so it could withstand sanctions for that reason. I just wanted to sort of interject that because you've basically laid out, I think really in a most intriguing way for our listeners, the way that Russia was on a trajectory toward

capitalism that was thwarted, and now somewhere it stands in between it. Maybe we can go back to that part. But I want you to continue on, on where you think it's standing in the world.

[00:52:23] **HILLEL TICKTIN:** It's not just true of Russia. That position is not just true of Russia today. The fact is the United States, being a modern capitalist power, wants to dominate the world economy -- and it does dominate the world economy.

So it's not just Russia which has been squashed in that regard, or prevented or whatever word you want. Any budding power or major country does find itself in competition of course, with other major firms, and the United States is the most powerful capitalist country in the world. So necessarily they find themselves in competition with it. And the United States is able to guard its own country, its own consumers and producers. So preventing, as it were, the would-be country -- or the country which would want to have a greater role in the world economy -- preventing it actually exporting to the United States. And in so far as the United States has influence in other countries, which it does, in terms of agreements on what is allowed in and not allowed in -- that is to say there are trade agreements among numbers of countries, that's not just the United States standing alone -- as a consequence of that, of course, is that if a rising power really wants to rise, it has to deal with United States. The United States has to concede. But from the point of view of a firm in the United States, it's not quite so easy because it means that the firm in some other part of the world wants to take a role both in the United States and elsewhere, which it might otherwise get, in other words. So you have that competition, but you have also the force of the United States, its overall state force, where it prevents. So I refer to Russia, but the same applies to China. And we know it's now, it's happening, exactly now. The United States has issued orders -- I've forgotten what level in the firms -- but it has just in the last week done precisely that to prevent China exporting to the United States. That is to say they've introduced a levy or a direct order in regard to certain Chinese goods.

So what's actually happening is that an interesting contradiction and absurdity, really, that if capitalism wants to survive, then United States should allow China to export its goods in competition at lower prices, as it were, to the United States. That would, of course allow the standard of living of ordinary people to rise. But it would of course, make it more difficult for the capitalist class.

Putin's Terrorism and What to Do About It - Gaslit Nation - Air Date 2-1-22

[00:55:20] **ANDREA CHALUPA - HOST, GASLIT NATION:** Around 130,000 Russian troops are amassed on Ukraine's borders in three key locations, including in Belarus, which is only a few hundred miles from the capital Kiev. This means Russia's military, the second most powerful military in the world, could take Ukraine's capital or at least lay siege to it to force new leadership in the government, in what's known as a coup -- a word Americans are all too familiar with these days. There was a report released by the UK that the Kremlin plan to install pro Kremlin politicians who are deeply unpopular among the Ukrainian people and have ties to -- guess who? -- Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's longtime friend and neighbor who ran his presidential campaign for free, allegedly to pay back a Russian oligarch close to Putin by the name of Oleg Deripaska, a notorious oligarch we've gone over in past episodes. So it's a name that should be familiar to our longtime listeners.

Quick recap: Oleg Deripaska is the thug who won the aluminum wars in the car bomb 1990s. The aluminum wars had an actual body count. And Deripaska emerged victorious, becoming one of the richest, most powerful oligarchs in Putin's court, where he lavishly spends his money in Western countries like the UK. He's been *persona non grata* in the US where he's not welcomed, except under Trump. They lessened sanctions for Deripaska and his company, then went on to invest millions to try to open an aluminum plant in Kentucky. It should be noted, Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell as Senate leader reportedly led the effort to minimize Russian sanctions.

All right. So Ukraine's national police just announced that they uncovered a well-organized plot to create fake uprisings in major Ukrainian cities, complete with paid and organized agitators who would essentially recreate the January 6th, 2021 coup attempt at our nation's capital, but in Ukrainian cities. This is already a well-known tactic used by Russia in parts of eastern Ukraine, which are currently under occupation.

So Ukraine is used to these sort of false flag events. The idea is that an organized, paid and trained militia creates unrest, which leads to violence, and ideally the overthrow of the local government; and Russian special forces come in and seize the city. That is how Crimea was taken over as well as the far east region of Ukraine currently under occupation. The Russian military brings in their heavy machinery and soldiers make themselves at home. How is Crimea doing, by the way? Well, it's currently riddled with human rights abuses, including many against the indigenous group known as the Crimea Tartars. How are parts of eastern Ukraine doing under Russian occupation, known as Donbas, where my mother's family is from?

Well, it's a Mad Max wasteland of lawlessness. When Russia invaded, they do what terrorists like the Taliban do: they released prisoners -- hardened, violent criminals. So what happened? Rule of law breaks down, corruption and criminals take over. It's completely lawless and has displaced around 2 million Ukrainians.

That's what Putin's trying to force on the Ukrainian people: an Orwellian nightmare. In all, only around 7% of Ukraine is currently under Russian occupation. Putin initially claimed he's going to seize significantly more than that, and bring back what is known as Novorossiya, New Russia, the parts of Ukraine seized by Catherine the Great.

Putin instead did not make it that far. What stopped him? Well, when Russia invaded, Ukraine's army was in terrible shape after years of corruption under Yanukovich and other leaders. People from across the country from all walks of life, men and women, had to scramble and quickly assemble as volunteer fighters.

Many of the activists in Kiev who fought in the revolution that overthrew Yanukovich went straight to volunteering for the military.

How did Ukraine's volunteer soldiers and hobbled military stop the second most powerful military in the world led by a ruthless mass murdering dictator? For one thing, Ukrainians had something to fight for: their freedom and independence, their children.

Putin thought he would be welcomed as a liberator. And instead he got pushed back by a fierce Ukrainian resistance that hates his guts.

Second, Obama and the EU moved quickly to pass sanctions for Crimea, and then again for Putin's invasion of the east. This forced Russia to slow things down and think things through. The Russians were not being welcomed as liberators, and Russia was increasingly isolated on the global stage that dictators like Putin crave.

The third reason: Ukraine received a lot of NATO support in the form of military training and defensive aid, which was sorely needed. And the volunteers that sprung up to help in any way they could, from leading medical trainings to volunteering in military hospitals, were extremely committed. I sat with a friend who is a musician who would go around to patients' beds in hospitals, military hospitals, and sing songs for wounded soldiers. That's what she did in her free time. There was a lot of national unity in pitching in like that.

That unity, east and west, across Ukraine, Russian-speaking Ukrainians, Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians, all multicultural communities in Ukraine, including Jewish-Ukrainian communities, spoke out and continue to speak out against the war.

Summary 2-9-22

[01:01:50] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with the Vlogbrothers giving some historical context on Ukraine. The *PBS NewsHour* broke down. Some of the news and negotiations. Democracy Now! Looked at the role of NATO. *American Prestige* compared to the responses to the news from NATO and the US. Democracy Now! discussed the situation with a Russian historian who sees invasion as a bad idea, but that expanding NATO is still necessary. *The Dig* looked at why Europe and Ukraine are not taking the threat of invasion as seriously as the US. And Democracy Now! Spoke with long-time peace activist Medea Benjamin about opposing NATO for the sake of peace. That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Jacobin Radio* discussing the economic history of Russia and the US since the end of the cold war. And *Gaslit Nation* explained the history of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, and why Ukraine will fight for their freedom.

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your new members-only podcast feed that you will receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now, we'll hear from you.

Value of curation regarding the recent Israel_Palestine episode - Craig from Ohio

[01:03:14] **VOICEMAILER: CRAIG FROM OHIO:** Hey, Jay it's Craig from Ohio. It's been a while since I called, and I just listened to your conversation with the conservative and the libertarian. And I wanted to... on curation, that was a topic that you talked about, maybe, a year ago, um, but sometime in 2021.

And it came up in... in this conversation that I just heard. And I wanted to give you some props for what an excellent job you do at curating the information you present on Best of the Left.

And, the particular example that I thought of, a year ago or so, was, during the latest incursion, the attacks, by the Israelis on, uh, the Palestinian Territories.

And I heard... I happened to listen to a podcast of, uh, Real Time with Bill Maher-- don't ask me why I still listen to that show; my short answers are, the jokes are sometimes amusing, and it's a good window into the liberal mindset; I think, you know, Bill Maher is a perfect example of that Democratic, establishment liberal way of thinking--

So he had a discussion about what was going on in Israel at the time, entirely in defense of the Israelis; I'm sure you and your audience can imagine all of the reasons that he gave.

And what was frustrating and disturbing to me about what he was saying and what his guests were saying, is that I could hear how persuasive that would be to an audience of liberals or people who were just casually paying attention to the commentary on the news of the day.

And I wasn't... you know, I was trying to think, "Well, how would I respond to what I know to be slanted, and giving such a less-of-a-picture, that it doesn't do justice to the issue, and how complicated it is, and why Bill Maher, ultimately, was wrong.

So then, within a few days, you had Best of the Left episode that talked about... or, that had a lot of different progressive and left wing voices going into all of the reasons why the Israeli... if you just took the Israeli position, without factoring in the needs, the humanity, of the Palestinians, you were going to get a very biased picture.

And that episode was excellent in laying out all of the reasoning why.

I just want to let you know, I love that show. It was just the perfect distillation of why the Best of the Left is so good at curation. And thought I would call because your conversation with... with the libertarian and conservative triggered that in my mind.

So thought I would finally give you a call, just let you know. Thank you. Keep doing a great job. Talk to you later.

Maybe Neil Postman is actually the devil - Nick from California

[01:06:10] **VOICEMAILER: NICK FROM CALIFORNIA:** So the audio-fixed clip in.... the first time he talks, the guy posting still sounds like the devil.

Secondly, he describes the impact of the internet 30 years ahead of time in a way where... I think he might be the devil. I mean, who else could know so well about Faustian bargains, and the decline of a civilization, and the cost of the internet... besides the devil!

I think he might've been the devil, and might have taken, you know, the soul for the price of the internet. And that's why we have it now.

And he was actually explaining, well ahead of time, when, like, I mean... modem... And people didn't even have personal [computers]... I was still using a typewriter. I was 12, but I was definitely still using a typewriter. We did not have a family computer until 1996.

So this guy, first of all, not only knows, um, how the internet is going to be, before the internet really was a thing; but then, further, he actually explained the ramifications of how it will affect our society 30 years in the future.

So, I mean, I am not a believer in the supernatural, but I think this convinced me. I'm like, is this a deep-fake? Or what... was this guy, actually, maybe he... maybe he sounded like the devil because he was.

No. Umm, joking aside, man, that was... uh, the audio wasn't perfect at times, but: holy crap. I... I... I trust you not too deep... to, not to fake me. But, like, how did someone in 1992 predict all this? Is this just one guy getting lucky out of hundreds of voices, and we're just selecting the one person who got it right? You know, a thousand monkeys, on a thousand typewriters, infinitely, one of them is going to type a sentence? Or was he really just that good? I don't know, but I was blown away by his analysis.

And also the relevance of his three questions: regarding what problem does it solve; and for whom to solve it; and, at the top of my head, I'm not remembering certain questions, but it was, you know, I was, kind of, spooky. I mean, futurists rarely get it right. That guy nailed everything. That's amazing.

All right, Jay, I'm done rambling. I wish you all the best. Take care. Bye-bye.

Final comments on Russia plans besides war and their new agreement with China

[01:08:49] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991, or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

Now, real quick, Nick, the second voicemail we heard, he's referring to a Neil Postman clip from episode 1466 on the Faustian bargain of technology. There was a clip that had bad audio when I initially posted it-- and, I mean, unlistenable bad-- and then I fixed it, and it, you know, the fixed version is only merely distorted.

But, after having done all that, I discovered that there actually does exist a better version of that interview on the internet, but we'd only found the distorted one during the production process. And I figured, honestly, we're just lucky to have any record of what was happening back in the nineties, since those wax cylinders they used to use to record everything can deteriorate over time. You never know what you're going to be left with.

Now, on today's topic, just a couple of quick things that came to my attention a bit late to be included in the show itself in the form of a clip:

The first is a pretty reasonable sounding theory put forward in a New York Times op-ed, titled, "Europe Thinks Putin is Planning Something Even Worse Than War." And it's, basically, arguing that Europe and Ukraine aren't downplaying the threat from Russia, compared to the U S ..The way it sometimes sounds; instead, they just see the threat differently.

They think it's much less likely that Russia will invade, than they're using the threat of invasion as a more effective tool to destabilize and divide Western Europe and the U S. than an actual war would. Like, if they invaded, it would probably have the opposite effect, of galvanizing a united force against Russia.

So, using the threat of invasion, plus propaganda, plus probably cyber attacks, and that all the sorts of things that we know they've already been doing, seems like a much more likely, and potentially more successful, strategy, for Russia to use in this situation. So: normal war actually seems very unlikely for many of

the reasons discussed on the show, but you know, there are other thoughts at play.

Secondly, I just wanted to point out some news that also came in too late, which is, that Russia and China have just announced a much more formal and detailed agreement between the two countries than seems to have been made before, according to people who pay attention closely to this sort of thing.

It's not a full NATO-like military support pact, but it's as close to something like that as we've seen between those two countries. And the primary point of the agreement is, pretty clearly, to create a new power dynamic to stand up against the collective NATO countries.

And we heard from American and European peace advocates speaking in the show today against the continuation of NATO, full stop.

And one could see this new development between Russia and China, I think, in a couple of different ways. What seems likely, is that it is the existence of NATO, and how it has acted, that has actually precipitated the Russia and China agreement, creating a combined power of autocratic nations that makes the collective west quite nervous.

But, of course, supporters of NATO will now point right at this new agreement as the reason why NATO needs to be kept in place, and expanded. In fact, we heard that point made on the show, even though it was made before the news of this agreement had broken. So, the cycle goes on.

As always keep the comments coming in at 202 999 3991, or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.Com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening.

Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes;

thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together;

thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting;

and thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being an extra content, and no ads, in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com