

# #1575 Cluster Headache, Matching War Crimes with War Crimes Against Russia in Ukraine

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast, in which we shall take a look at the status of the war in Ukraine and the decision made recently for the U. S. to provide cluster bombs to Ukraine, a munition that Biden's press secretary referred to as a potential war crime when it was reported that Russia had used them.

Sources today include *Gaslit Nation*, *The Good Fight*, *The Majority Report*, *Democracy Now!*, *Deconstructed*, and *Intercepted*, with additional members-only clips from *Intercepted* and *The Good Fight*.

## Is Russia Headed Towards Collapse - Gaslit Nation - Air Date 6-27-23

**ANDREA CHALUPA:** Olga, what the hell happened this weekend in Russia? Are we witnessing the inevitable collapse of Russia?

**OLGA LAUTMAN:** Oh, yes, we are. And this was a very fun weekend. Definitely everyone, the whole world was watching this unraveling of Russia. But the collapse actually started last year, and it basically after Russia launched its full scale invasion in genocide in [00:01:00] Ukraine, they took territory, about 13, 14% of territory aside from what they had occupied in 2014. The late summer -- around I would say August, September -- when Ukraine launched its successful counter offensive and started taking back territory, that is when everything started unraveling.

And from there we saw the Russian military bloggers that have a lot of influence inside of Russia being critical of the Ministry of Defense, being critical of Putin himself, one even said, why did we even bother electing him in 2012? We should have found a new leader back then. And we also saw the fight with Prigozhin escalating with Ministry of Defense.

But now, this has been going on. Russia launched its full invasion in Ukraine. You would think that their main objective would be fighting in Ukraine. But since I probably last May for over a year now, they are busy shooting each

[00:02:00] other on the front lines, and you have the Chechens who are shooting the Wagner -- I call them Wagnerites -- and you have both shooting the Russian military, anyone who's trying to surrender to Ukrainian armed forces, and it's been a shit show basically, since this started. And come September, Prigozhin starts getting extremely critical of Ministry of Defense. The more losses that Russia is taking inside of Ukraine, the more humiliation there is.

And Russia has always been a very well-oiled propaganda machine, and suddenly you see the propagandist on TV unraveling. No one is on the same page. You see the Russian military bloggers start fighting and being critical of different -- of the elites, of the Ministry of Defense, even the Duma members.

And you just see this whole thing being created, all these divisions, and the fractures kept growing to the point come around November where things got started getting [00:03:00] extremely worse and Prigozhin came out and called the general chief of staff a [censored], Gerasimov, and a fucking devil -- excuse my language -- coming from him. But this is something that they trust, the code of conduct, because you don't cross these lines. Not in the past few centuries inside of Soviet Union or Russian Empire --

**ANDREA CHALUPA:** Which is straight up the Real Housewives of the Kremlin.

**OLGA LAUTMAN:** It is, it is. And from there the feud kept growing, growing, growing between Ministry of Defense and Prigozhin and then we basically see Friday start where Prigozhin released the video and says that Russia, since they invaded Ukraine in 2014, that basically the lease have been robbing Crimea and Donbas, that everyone's pocketing money and that it was unnecessary. And there's no demarkification. That's all a lie. There's no de-militarization. That's a lie. And that he's going to, basically, march to the Kremlin.

Now, by no means is Prigozhin a good guy. Prigozhin is a terrorist. Wagner is a terrorist organization. [00:04:00] They are responsible for beheading people, for raping, for tortures across Africa, across the Middle East, Latin America, and then obviously Ukraine. And Wagner was created specifically for annexation of Crimea in 2014 by a GRU colonel who seems to always go unscathed from US media.

So that's who really is behind Wagner, and Prigozhin is the public face of it. And that's it. And this is where it's gonna be. And basically, as I say, Andrea loves history. This is another example of Russia being Russia over the past few

centuries. When there's pressure on the system, they become self-destructive and they start attacking each other.

**ANDREA CHALUPA:** And then it all descends into chaos and the meanest dog in the fight tends to win.

## **Tim Mak on the Ukrainian Counteroffensive - The Good Fight - Air Date 7-1-23**

**YASCHA MOUNK:** The spring offensive ended up starting much later than we anticipated. I'd love to understand the reasons for why that is. I mean, we're recording this on June the [00:05:00] 20th, so technically the last day of a spring offensive, and by the time that people listen to this, spring is technically over. And then it sounds like even once the offensive actually started, Progress was slower than at least some people hoped. Does this mean that we have to reevaluate some of the assumptions about the morale and the strength of the Russian army? Is it just in the nature of what's effectively now a form of trench warfare that, you know, defensive lines are very strong and you get the kind of meat grinder attempts to move lines that we might associate with World War I? You know, what is the explanation for why some of these hopes seem to be being dashed at the moment?

**TIM MAK:** I think you have to understand that, and then you alluded to this a little bit, that the idea of a spring counteroffensive in particular is driven by political demands, by the wishes of allies who have put a lot of money and aid and military equipment and training and diplomatic support into Ukraine to say, Hey, show us something, show us some progress. And that's primarily a [00:06:00] political pressure and not a military or strategic one, that there was a real vibrant and is a real vibrant debate even within the Ukraine's own military community as to whether to wait or to go. And you can see some of that diplomatic pressure taking the form of trying to show some evidence of advances and progress ahead of a NATO summit next month. To show, Hey, thank you NATO, for your support. Not only should Ukraine be given a pathway into NATO, but look at what we've done so far with all the support you've provided us. So, a lot of this on the timing of the counteroffensive has been based on this political pressure that has arisen and these expectations that have arisen from the West and other Ukrainian allies.

**YASCHA MOUNK:** So you are effectively suggesting that some of the expectations and the success of a spring offensive were never realistic, but

they're always driven by these kind of political demands. I mean, one of the things that strikes me, I'm not an expert in Ukraine, I'm certainly not an expert in military campaigns, is how often the war has shifted [00:07:00] over the course of its first year, and perhaps particularly over the course of the first eight or nine months. I mean, the first day of the war, most military experts were expecting tanks to roll down the streets of Kiev imminently. It nearly felt like, you know, cable channels were just waiting for those images to "finally appear" on the TV screens, because of course, they would make for good ratings. Then there was a huge surprise in how successful Ukraine was in resisting the attack and then pushing them back to some extent. But then there was a few more shifts where, you know, for a while people started to think Russia's really on the defensive, the Russian army might be about to collapse. That didn't happen. And then the Russians seemed to be only be offensive again. But again, they didn't get as far as they might. Do you expect those kind of surprises to keep happening or was that in part caused by an early phase of a war where defensive positions had not been dug and reinforced to the extent that they have been now, such that the sort of quite volatile war with lots of opportunities for experts to get things wrong, uh, might now be giving away to a much [00:08:00] more grinding, stable war in which, you know, it might move a few meters this way and a few meters that way, but effectively we can expect this grinding process to go on for the next little bit? Or, to put this question another way, if there isn't some form of armistice or some form of negotiated settlement, what are the realistic scenarios for how this war might end?

**TIM MAK:** You talk to Ukrainians and they're not remotely close to some sort of diplomatic arrangement. The way I describe it is that there have been two phases of the war in terms of public opinion and the interest in a diplomatic solution to the war. There's the pre-Bucha phase and there's the post-Bucha phase. You know, I was in Kyiv when the invasion started, and I remember talking to people hoping that it would be over in three weeks, four weeks, two months, three months. But public opinion dramatically changed and hearts really hardened after it became clear that Russia had committed these terrible atrocities just outside Kyiv. And it wasn't nearly that they had killed unarmed civilians or looted [00:09:00] areas as they were leaving that area around Kyiv, but it's that I think a lot of Ukrainians had visited those places, had seen the apartments where these atrocities happened and thought, Well, my apartment looks quite a lot like that. That family looks a lot like my family. And after that moment, I think there really was no prospect for any sort of negotiated piece in the medium term. I spoke to one woman and that conversation will always stick with me. We spoke right after the atrocities in Bucha were revealed, and she works in the medical field. She's a former doctor. She is as empathetic as one can get. She told me, I'm a Christian. I know that I'm taught to love everyone, but I can't forget this. She described this hatred, this burning inside her, that

really hardened her towards any sort of sympathy or interest in talking to the Russian forces that had invaded her country. And I think that probably represents the vast [00:10:00] majority of public opinion in Ukraine right now.

So how does this end? If that's the public opinion, if that's the median person in Ukraine, then it doesn't end. That the only way it ends is on the battlefield. I mean, you look at where the Ukrainian diplomatic position and the Russian diplomatic position is, and it could, I mean, it could not be further apart, right? The plans that each side has proposed is basically the other side must give up, and that's not really a recipe for a diplomatic agreement.

In terms of, you know, where things are on the battlefield, the expectations have been set, as you wisely point out, by these dramatic movements in terms of control of territory and the first year of the war. And what's obvious is that it's easier to be on the defensive than it is to be on the offensive. American military doctrine is clear about how you need to have a multiple to attack than to defend. And we've spoken about this counter-offensive for months and months and months and months. And so, what have the Russians been able to do? They've been able to heavily mine likely approaches towards their territory and create really very solid defensive structures. [00:11:00] One advantage they have is that they still have superiority in the sky. They don't have total control of the skies, but they're able to operate with relative impunity, due to Ukraine's lack of kind of tactical air defense that supports their troops. Ukraine has made a strategic decision to locate its air defense in the cities to protect civilians, and so that leaves their troops more vulnerable on the move. And so yes, it will be a long and grinding process.

Now, the big issue is the issue of morale, right? Can we see a collapse in the Russian lines due to inexperienced soldiers, soldiers who don't have a lot of training, and don't have a lot of will to be there? They have been, for example, conscripted or they're not particularly motivated to be in a foreign country fighting. And as the war goes on, you can imagine a scenario where there is a collapse in Russian lines. We're not there yet, obviously, but the counter-offensive is just starting, and I wouldn't try to draw too many conclusions from a couple weeks of fighting.

## **NATO, Ukraine, and The American Empire**

### **Daniel Bessner & Derek Davison - The Majority Report - Air Date 7-23-23**

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** [00:12:00] We're, I don't know, a week out from the NATO summit in Vilnius. Before we get to the summit and where we are, I don't know which one of you wanna take this question, but give us just sort of like the brief history of NATO since '93, right? When the Soviet Union falls, I mean, I think everybody understands where NATO sort of developed in the wake of World War II, an alliance, uh, that was created across the Atlantic between allies from World War II, but also in terms of like the burgeoning Soviet block. But since '93, give us a little bit of a thumbnail.

**DANIEL BESSNER:** Sure. Derek, maybe I could start and you could, uh, correct me where I'm wrong. Uh, it's interesting to look back on what happened to NATO because the question was, at the time, was the United States con going to continue to try to dominate the world? The justification for US hegemony for the previous half century was really that the Soviet Union, if it wasn't confronted, would take over the world and communism would go forward.

So the question was, was there going to be a peace dividend that was going to be [00:13:00] used to, you know, spend money on things like social welfare instead of military alliances abroad, particularly when there was no perceived existential threat? NATO was related to that, was maybe, you know, the prime discussion when we were talking about the trans-Atlantic alliance, but of course, the US did continue to commit itself to hegemony, and since 1993, roughly speaking, NATO has become more and more involved in a bunch of areas that it previously didn't really do it. It had deployed troops in Eastern Europe. It even deployed troops out of area in 2011 - right, Derek? - during Libya. So I think the story over the last 30 years is just NATO becoming larger and larger, doing more and more things that it didn't really do during the Cold War and becoming really a synecdoche for US empire and the United States' desire to dominate writ large.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Well, we should also say the troops are deployed in Afghanistan. NATO has a, you know, their treaty is that you attack one of us and the rest of us will come. And that's what justified their [00:14:00] involvement in Afghanistan. Although oddly it wasn't necessarily Afghanistan that was, uh, that attacked us on 9/11. I mean, there's a lot of asterisks there, let's put it that way.

But let's go to like, uh, 2004 where 11 years after and the ostensible rationale for NATO sort of falls apart, right? And at that time, there was a deal struck with Ukraine of their defense to get rid of nukes. And I remember in '93 the sort of the peace dividend that was gonna show up and never sort of did. But in 2004

there's an expansion. Just talk a little bit about that because that really gives you a sense of where this is all going.

**DEREK DAVISON:** To sort of build on what Danny was talking about and also to pick up on something you said there, which was NATO's ostensible purpose is no longer relevant, I think if you dig into what NATO was really supposed to be about, and there's a great piece in the *New York Times* maybe a week ago now by Grey Anderson and Thomas Meaney, that really argues that [00:15:00] NATO was never really a Cold War defense alliance. It was an arm of American empire. It was a way to make, to maintain US hegemony over European politics in a much broader sense than just defense. But it was a way to keep US military contractors selling weapons. It was a way to make sure that basically US primacy was maintained across Europe throughout that period, and I think that just continued. So, in a sense it's real mission never went away, and in fact was expanded after the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. So, that expansion that you get in the '90s and then in 2004 into Central/Eastern Europe, into places that were very much in the Soviet periphery during the Cold War, that's just a natural continuation of this process. And it's part of the story if we talk about the war in Ukraine and, you know, the drama obviously that surrounds Ukraine potentially becoming a NATO member, is this steady expansion into eastern Europe, which of course, you know, you get arguments that effectively take NATO's agency away in a sense. You know, these countries wanted to join NATO, so don't they have the right to do so, [00:16:00] which, you know, they have the right to apply, I guess, but NATO doesn't have necessarily any obligation to admit these places. But it is part of the backdrop to escalating Russian grievances over the past now 30 years about its relationship with the West.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Now, my understanding though, and recollection, was in 2004, in that expansion, Putin did not have or make an issue, let's put it that way, I guess, with the expansion of that. And if I remember correctly, like, half of, maybe it was seven or eight, countries and maybe a half of them were literally part of the USSR. And then the other half, more or less, you guys will know the details, were part of the Warsaw Pact. So they were in the Iron Curtain version of NATO, if you will. And there was no big issue with that. But clearly NATO could have said, No, sorry. That's not what our plan is to expand our membership. But why did these countries want to join NATO at that time?

**DANIEL BESSNER:** [00:17:00] Yeah, I think the way to describe it is that these were countries that were part of the USSR were part of the Eastern bloc, but weren't core countries like Georgia or Ukraine. They were countries that, for example, if you look at Lithuania, a country that went back and forth between

the Nazis and Soviets between 1939 and 1941. So they were part of it, but they weren't core. And I think that explains why later on, in 2008, Putin got, you know, more concerned with what he considered to be NATO expansion.

But the reason that these countries would wanna be part of NATO is obvious. They don't want the - I almost said the Soviet Union - they don't want the Russian Federation to invade them. They don't wanna be pressured by the Russian Federation. This provides some sort of shield against Russian encroachment and Russian pressure. So it's very obvious and understandable why these countries would wanna be part of NATO now.

But the question that I think we as Americans or people within this country have to ask is, how does that relate to the perceived national interest? Because there are lots of countries around the world that would want the United States or alliances to provide for their defense, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we [00:18:00] want to do that because that could be, if you consider, uh, the US empire to be a problem, that would just necessarily mean the total expansion of the US empire. And I think this gets into difficult questions when you have... populations genuinely want to be part of this alliance. Does that necessarily mean that we should allow them to join? Or that left wing critics, people who don't like things like war and imperialism even, should allow them to join. And it raises really, um, thorny questions that I think got played out a lot in this recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## **William Arkin CIA Is Playing Outsize Role in Ukraine Despite Biden Pledge Not to Send U.S. Forces - Democracy Now! - Air Date 7-19-23**

**AMY GOODMAN:** Why don't you start off by telling us, in this many-month investigation what you did, what surprised you most? And don't speak in soundbites.

**WILLIAM ARKIN:** [laughing] Thank you, Amy, for having me on again. You know, I worked on this question of what the role of the CIA was in Ukraine, and I wanted to know particularly whether or not all of the Hollywood rumors surrounding the agency — its possible involvement in the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines, its possible [00:19:00] involvement in other sabotage attacks inside Russia, a lot of the news that I was hearing about the presence of the CIA



on the ground and its covert assistance — I wanted to know how much of it was true. And I went down this path to try to get to the truth.

What I came up with, most importantly — and, really, this is most importantly — is that the CIA is an intelligence agency, and so its number one mission in Ukraine is to collect intelligence, collect intelligence not just on what the Russians are doing, but also on what the Ukrainians are doing. And that's the biggest blind spot, as I identified, which is that the United States knows as little about what Zelensky is up to and what he's thinking and what his views are about the future as it does about Vladimir Putin and his future plans and intentions.

And so, this might come as a surprise to some people, but, as my sources explained it to me, the reality is that Ukraine is not an ally of the United States. We have no treaty [00:20:00] obligations towards Ukraine. And the United States is not at war with Russia. So this is a particularly unique battlefield in which the CIA is playing an outsize role, but it is playing an outsize role because the Biden administration has been firm in saying that the U.S. military will not be involved in any direct way in the fighting or on the battlefield or, indeed, inside Ukraine.

So you have this situation where the CIA's primary mission, which is to figure out what it is that the Russians and the Ukrainians are doing, as well as now its augmented mission, which is to play a greater role in the provision of arms to Ukraine, a greater role in counterintelligence, a greater role in corralling all of the neighbor states to Ukraine so that they stay firmly engaged in the war, some countries of which the domestic population is not as enthusiastic about war with Russia as is, say, for instance, Poland, that this role [00:21:00] really stretches the CIA quite thin in terms of what it's doing, but also it's got its hand in a little bit of everything.

And I would say that I would give it low marks on understanding the intentions of Putin or Zelensky, very high marks on understanding what's going on on the battlefield, but the most high marks are in moving the billions of dollars' worth of weapons that the United States and NATO has pledged to Kyiv.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** But now, William Arkin, the CIA is no stranger to Ukraine. Clearly, in the post-World War II period, it was involved in developing right-wing groups within Ukraine that were opposing the Soviet Union, a lot of them former neo-Nazis. And as you write, the CIA has been central to the war, this war, even before it began, when Biden tapped Director William Burns as his global troubleshooter. Could you talk about Burns' [00:22:00] role and this historic connection between the CIA and groups in Ukraine?

**WILLIAM ARKIN:** Well, when Joe Biden became president, he appointed a number of his close associates — Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan — to be his main national security actors. But the person that was appointed to be the director of the CIA, former Ambassador to Russia William Burns and a Foreign Service officer in his career, was somebody who was much more considered to be the senior statesman of the administration, if you will, the person with the most experience. And so, when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it was no surprise that Burns became the central figure in this war and that he had both the superior knowledge of Putin and of Russia, but also he had had a long career specializing in Eastern Europe.

So, when he was appointed [00:23:00] sort of the Biden administration's back-channel negotiator, diplomat, and main spy, it fell to him to handle relations with Kyiv. Remember, the U.S. Embassy was closed for a long time. It fell to the CIA to handle the clandestine relations that existed with Poland and other countries, relationships which had been built up since 9/11 and since even the end of the Cold War. So the CIA has played an extremely important role in the modern era, and I would say that the legacy of what the CIA may have done in the Soviet era just is not represented by those who work in the CIA today, nor is it part of what the CIA thinks its main purpose is.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** And in terms of why the Biden administration has not insisted on more openness on the part of Ukraine's government, given the enormous amount of aid that the U.S. is giving, [00:24:00] why hasn't it pressed President Zelensky to be more forthcoming about what Ukraine is doing?

**WILLIAM ARKIN:** Well, I think that the CIA and the U.S. government has pressed the Ukrainians. It doesn't necessarily mean that they have full control over them. The reality is that the U.S.'s main objective and the Biden administration's supreme objective has always been to see that the war not be escalated, that the United States not be put into a situation where it's fighting against Russia directly. And part of that was to urge Ukraine not to attack Russia, not to attack Belarus, where Russian forces were deployed.

And that really pretty much worked, up until about September or October of last year, first when the Nord Stream bombings occurred and then, second, when the attack on the Kerch Bridge occurred, in which case the United States, U.S. intelligence, believed that Ukraine was behind both of them. And though it believed that Ukrainian factions were [00:25:00] behind both of those attacks, it wasn't altogether clear to the CIA that Zelensky himself had foreknowledge or even had been read in on those operations, because Zelensky's power — those powers are himself limited inside Ukraine.

And so, the CIA might have put a lot of pressure on Zelensky and his government in order to be more transparent or to deal with corruption or to deal with accountability, but it's not altogether clear that Zelensky has full control over the Ukrainian military or the Ukrainian secret services, nor is it necessarily the case that the United States is in a position to really exert much leverage against Ukraine at this point. It's like "too big to fail," that the United States has invested so much in the Ukraine war that it can't really credibly say to Zelensky, "If you don't do X, we're going to stop supplying you with arms." It's just not a tenable policy anymore.

So, the CIA represents these many interests, the interest not to [00:26:00] escalate with Russia, the interest not to have Russia resort to the use of nuclear weapons, trying to understand what Putin's position and Putin's thinking is. But at the same time, it struggles with the question of whether or not it understands well enough what it is that Ukraine wants, and also what it is that Ukraine will accept, beyond its public rhetoric, in trying to end the war.

## **Cluster Bomb Fight in the House - Deconstructed - Air Date 7-15-23**

**NASKA RENNER - EDITOR, DECONSTRUCTED:** So Ryan, this week you and another Intercept politics reporter, Daniel Boguslaw, reported on an amendment that would block the transfer of cluster munitions to Ukraine as well as everywhere else in the world. It was introduced by Democratic representative Sarah Jacobs and Ilhan Omar. And it looked like it was gaining some bipartisan support, including from representative Gaetz. So here's a clip of Matt Gaetz talking about supporting the bill on his podcast.

**MATT GAETZ:** Democrat Congresswoman Sarah Jacobs, who we've criticized a great deal on this show for some of her views -- she's probably criticized me a great deal for some of mine -- but she has introduced an [00:27:00] amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that reads, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no military assistance shall be furnished for cluster munitions. No defense export license for cluster munitions may be issued and no cluster munitions or cluster munitions technology shall be sold or transferred."

And what I'm here to tell you is that I'm going to be the Republican co-sponsor of the Jacobs Amendment before the House Rules Committee. We have an opportunity with bipartisanship to stand against the warmongering Bidens.

And these cluster bombs will not end the war in Ukraine. Let's look at the countries where cluster bombs have been used: Laos, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria. Cluster bombs are features of the world's bloodiest and most inhumane wars, and some of the longest. It's hardly the cornerstone of a path to peace.

**NASKA RENNER - EDITOR, DECONSTRUCTED:** Ryan, can you give us a little background into the Omar and Jacobs amendment and why the transfer of [00:28:00] cluster munitions is a progressive priority?

**RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED:** Yeah, this sprang from the Biden administration's announcement that they were going to start shipping munitions, which they seem to be suggesting -- on background was happening because they were running out of regular munitions, which doesn't really make those any less harmful to civilians in the future.

The problem with cluster munitions: a) more than a hundred countries have banned them. Now among those who have not banned them is China, Russia, Turkey, which appears to be shipping them to Ukraine, and the United States. And so while it is against international law for most countries, it's not against international law for us to do it. The problem with these cluster munitions is that, when they blow up and they spread out, they need a pretty hard surface to explode. And so they get tested out in this very hard Southwest desert, and the ones that we're sending over there have something like a 6% dud rate, which means that if you drop several hundred thousand of them, or if you drop several million clusters, you're gonna wind up with several hundred thousand unexploded cluster munitions sitting around in the ground for decades, waiting for somebody to come along and to have their legs blown off [00:29:00] by them. And those are under conditions with a pretty tough ground. If you're dropping them in mud, you might be lucky to get a 6% dud rate, you might actually be looking at a much, much higher rate, which means that you'd have many more people.

Now, the Biden administration made a kind of macabre argument, which is that, well, there's already a lot of clustered munitions and landmines flying all over Ukraine. So what's a few more million of them? Once that's your argument, you've taken a wrong turn somewhere. Eric, am I missing anything there?

**ERIK SPERLING:** Yeah, no, I think that's exactly right. And I think one of the fundamental issues in Washington really relates to a whole range of US interventions and policies abroad is that there isn't an understanding that it actually matters. Our primary duty as Americans is to not do harm ourselves. Of course we all really, we wanna help also as many good, well-intentioned,

progressive people and compassionate people that we wanna stop harm being done by others. But in this case, I think we're going to see -- unfortunately we're gonna hear, for probably a very long time, reports of children and civilians being hurt. And [00:30:00] those who supported this action will have that on their conscience, and able to be directly attributable to this decision. So I think that's what's often missing is saying Russia does it, then it's okay if we do it, except for that we don't support Russia doing it. We've actually criticized Russia for doing it. So it's one thing that they just skip over in the debates.

**RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED:** And so the way that these things work in the Rules Committee, to answer your other question, is that you typically, if you're going to get to the House floor, you're going to want bipartisan support. If you're a Republican and you have a Republican amendment and you're in the majority you're probably okay, but it helps to have Democratic support. But if you are trying to get a cluster munitions ban onto the floor for a vote, you're gonna need Republican support, because there's nine Republicans on the Rules Committee and just four Democrats, three of those Republicans are tea party folks who were added because of that McCarthy revolt.

And so getting Gaetz was a big step forward to say that, okay, maybe you're gonna get some Freedom Caucus support because it's just enough that, if you add up the four Democrats and three tea party folks, you can win seven-six and get onto the House floor. And advocates were encouraged that it was gonna make it at that [00:31:00] point. And then I think we'll talk about some of the shenanigans that went on after that.

**ERIK SPERLING:** I think this is actually a really good opportunity to play an interview that my colleague Daniel Boguslaw did with Gaetz outside of the Rules Committee that gets into some of his thinking around this issue.

Do we have that handy?

**MATT GAETZ:** Who's next?

**DANIEL BOGUSLAW - INTERCEPT:** Last time we spoke you said you were going Mr. Worldwide, you were looking to reduce military transfers all over the world. There's amendments looking at reducing military transfers to Ecuador, Guatemala, Central American countries, in addition to Yemen, which you said you were interested in. Do you think that there's any consensus in the Freedom Caucus around some of these other issues outside?

**MATT GAETZ:** So I think about our hemisphere considerably different than I think about Syria and Yemen. I think that we do have equities at play in Latin America. I support a reinvigorated Monroe Doctrine. So I wouldn't lump Guatemala and El Salvador in with Yemen and Syria.

**RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED:** So like a half isolationism. What does that tell us, Erik, about this kind of New Right, Republican foreign policy?

**ERIK SPERLING:** Yeah. It is a more traditional "America First" approach. I think it's focused [00:32:00] on protecting the border, protecting what they see as core American interests. And, just like with so many other politicians, but particularly with these folks, there's limited areas of overlap. And you can look for those where you can to the extent they're helpful and and then oftentimes it can be unhelpful as well, depending on which member or, has happened with the cluster bombs amendment, which we'll probably discuss more shortly.

## **The Indiscriminate Rain of Cluster Bombs - Intercepted - Air Date 7-18-23**

**JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED:** So Mark, I'm gonna ask you to explain the basic fundamental issue of what cluster munitions are, the impact that they have when they're used, but also the impact that they continue to have if they're dropped and they don't actually explode.

First I just wanted to get your reaction to the position that the Biden White House has taken here. A lot of the social media commentary, and commentary from people who are supportive of transferring the cluster munitions to Ukraine, basically boils down to; whatever weapons Ukraine needs to fight off this illegal invasion we should give them.

When you get to a more granular level, people will say Russia is using these also. So it's only fair that Ukraine be able [00:33:00] to use them as well. The Biden White House has come out with a defense of transferring these cluster munitions to Ukraine. So first of all, just your response to what Biden personally has been saying, and the position of the administration.

**MARC GARLASCO:** Look, I just wanna start by saying I am fully supportive of Ukraine and their defense in this unlawful invasion by Russia, but there have to be lines drawn. There must be limits, and transferring a weapon that has been

banned by 123 states, including two thirds of NATO, is just a step too far. A bridge too far.

Honestly, I think is morally bankrupt. Particularly when you look at the Biden administration, and the White House's response when it was revealed that Russia was using cluster bombs. Let's be clear here, Russia has used cluster bombs throughout this conflict.

They've used them to target civilians. There was one incident in 2022, the single largest number of civilians killed by Russia was in a cluster bomb strike. It was in the city of Kramatorsk. [00:34:00] There was a train station and 58 civilians we're killed by Russian cluster bombs in that attack. The Biden Administration's response when it first came out that the Russians were using cluster bombs was; hey, this is potentially a war crime.

So the White House sees Russia's use of cluster munitions as a war crime, but we're perfectly fine with sending them to Ukraine. Which for me is just a morally bankrupt position, and I think highly questionable. So I'm very troubled by it. I've been looking at cluster bombs for the past 20 years.

The US has not used them since 2003. There was one incident in 2009, when a single weapon was used. In 20 years of war against ISIS and others, the US has not used these weapons. So shocked and really incredibly dismayed, particularly with a democratic president. Which has been so supportive of the different weapon bans, and no use. So I'm just very upset, as you can tell.

**JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED:** [00:35:00] Walk us through the mechanics of what cluster munitions are, how they function, and what they do when they hit.

**MARC GARLASCO:** A cluster munition or, as many people call them, a cluster bomb is basically a large carrier. It's a big bomb. So it can be an artillery shell, it can be a rocket, or it can be an aerial bomb dropped by a plane.

It's this mother bomb and, when it goes over the target, it opens up and it releases anywhere from dozens to hundreds of smaller bombs. These are called either bomblets, or submunitions by the military. They pretty much use that interchangeably. The idea here is that it gives the military a reach and an economy of force.

So you're using one bomb to drop many bombs. That's great, from the military's perspective. That gives them an ability to reach out and drop a lot of munitions

in a single strike. So they don't have to send many aircraft or many munitions over. It's a lot cheaper and easier.

[00:36:00] What the military likes about them is also what's problematic about them. So they cover a very large area. This is a saturation weapon. This is not a precision weapon, like we see a bomb going into a window, for example, or taking a tank out directly. You are covering about a football field with, potentially, hundreds of these small bombs.

That's great if you've got tanks or infantry in the field that you're trying to attack, not so great if you're using it in a populated area or near a populated area, a city or a town or whatnot. So you have a problem, first of all, during the attack. So when the strike happens and the mother bomb opens up, that cargo section opens up and all of these hundreds of bombs come down.

Now they may hit a tank, they may hit some infantry, but you also have a very high potential of civilian harm. For them to come down and hit civilians, to hit homes, et cetera. So that's the first problem. The first problem is at the time of use, it's such a [00:37:00] wide area of effect. The second problem is these bombs don't work very well.

They have a very high, what's called, dud rate, or unexploded rate. So just think about it like anything else that you go out and buy. You buy a television at an electronic shop and you take it home, you plug it in, TV works super. Some of those TVs may have had some problems in the manufacturing process and, that's why you have warranties.

You plug it in, it doesn't work, you bring it back to the shop. Bombs? You're not bringing them back to the shop. Not only that, we're not talking about a low dud rate here, we're talking about fairly high dud rates. Which leave large minefields on the ground. Now when we talk about the specific munition that the US is sending, it's the M864.

Please excuse me, we're gonna throw some numbers out here. I'm gonna try not to be too technical, but it's important to have an understanding of baseline of some of the technicalities here, because part of the Biden administration's argument really lies on the technical lines.

So the M864 is an artillery [00:38:00] shell. Inside the M864 you have 72, what are called, DPICMs (dual purpose improved conventional munitions). Now it's dual purpose because it has both an anti armor and an anti-personnel capability.



So it's got a shape charge in it that will blow through about two and a half inches of armor.

Then when the munition explodes you're sending out fragments out to about 50 feet. So they're lethal to about 50 feet. Inside the M864 are these 72 DPICMs, and you have two types; the M42 and the M46. It's really immaterial here, the difference between the two. The 46 is a little bit thicker, has a little bit more of an anti-personnel capability. When the weapon is fired, there are a number of steps that must happen for it to operate correctly.

So the carrier munition opens up, the base slides off, the 72 small D sized battery bomblets come out. They have these nylon ribbon stabilizers on them, and the nylon ribbon spins. That's gonna do two [00:39:00] things; one, it's gonna stabilize munition so it hits at the right angle, because if they hit it anything more than a 45 degree angle, they won't explode.

Also, when the ribbon spins it arms the bomb, and if that ribbon gets caught up, doesn't spin correctly, et cetera, the bomb won't operate correctly. Then they also get caught in trees, and in vegetation, et cetera. So you've got a problem with that, but that process of arming the munition and getting it to finally activate is highly problematic, because many of those steps sometimes don't happen.

The bombs hit each other in the air, and then they fail. The failure rate, according to the White House, is 2.35%. The problem with that is, that's just bullshit. The military's own numbers, from US testing for the specific munition that we're talking about here, the M42 and M46 DPICMs, is actually 14%.

Then we have another DPICM that the US has, that's not being used here, it may be sent eventually. That has even higher, that has a 23%, but let's just deal with a 14% dud rate for a [00:40:00] moment. We're sending hundreds of thousands of these artillery shells. For every 100,000 artillery shells, that is a million unexploded cluster munitions on the ground.

Those are cluster munitions that kids can pick up. People can get hurt when they go back to their home, go back to their farm.

## **Cluster Bomb Fight in the House Part 2 - Deconstructed - Air Date 7-15-23**

**NASKA RENNER - EDITOR, DECONSTRUCTED:** So yesterday, on Thursday, the Marjorie Taylor Greene measure went to the floor. There were a lot of floor speeches about whether or not we're in a proxy war with Russia. And what ended up happening?

**ERIK SPERLING:** It's a very similar dynamic to some recent votes where you do have these members like Matt Gaetz, who you know, people on the left have no ability to even barely communicate with this person, much less guide them or reason with them on what the strategy should be, and you're just forced to essentially respond and make the best of a very stressful situation. In this case, Marjorie Taylor Greene, again I can't get in her head or what her intentions are, but the intentions of the people that placed the amendment with her was clearly to use it to essentially support the war effort. But she doesn't even realize that is their [00:41:00] intent. So she's allowing herself, or ends up being used, for essentially pro-war purposes, which is a huge challenge for us.

But I think it was a really great opportunity for progressive groups. You had progressive organizations, anti-war organizations on the left and also on the right. And then you have members of Congress who have been doing this left work for years -- going back in my career to the 2013 Syria fight, you had similar activity in Libya, and then of course the Yemen work, and then a bunch of Syria work more recently as well, going back several years with Jamal Bowman leading multiple amendments and Matt Gaetz then leading a war powers resolution on Syria this year.

So members are starting to see that what really matters here is the policy, not the personality. That doesn't mean members who are on the fence are certainly swayed by that. But we do have an increasingly strong group of members who are able to look past these really difficult personalities and look at what's on the substance.

And so essentially I think with between advocacy groups that are saying, let's vote on this policy here, you don't want to be -- and I think the key message for this one is just the historical lasting impact of these [00:42:00] weapons. Members really shouldn't wanna be on the record as having voted for this, but much like Elliot Engel was in 2016 sending cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen, because this is something that's gonna continue to cause harm and it's something that could reflect on them in a primary or on just even in their conscience.

And so I think by just essentially organizing, reflecting, understanding people's frustrations about these really difficult members and just how unbelievably unfortunate it is that they are leading, but keeping it focused on the substance.

And by doing that, we were able to get again this very core group of the most progressive members, the entire squad, we were able to keep all of those members and bring a ton of other members along as well.

And then, get the Republicans that come along as well. Which in this case, given the Marjorie Taylor Greene's leadership is the bigger number.

**NASKA RENNER - EDITOR, DECONSTRUCTED:** So I think ultimately 147 representatives voted in favor of Greene's measure, was that more than you were expecting based on her leadership of it? And did you ultimately see it as a success?

**ERIK SPERLING:** Yeah. It's a success in the sense [00:43:00] that it limited the harm that could have come from this. For example, if groups had said Marjorie Taylor Greene is supporting this, we're not gonna vote for something that she's doing or we're gonna protest it, that would reintroduce a more partisan character to the foreign policy, which is the exact opposite of what we need to really end these wars and these interventions. And so I think it's really important. I wouldn't say it's a success, of course, because it was a very shrewd move by leadership to have her do it and to be able to manage even her psychology so that you can have her lead it, and she doesn't even realize she's leading it to undermine it. It's just remarkable move that they did. So in a sense it was successful that there wasn't really devastating harm that we have a group of all, of at least many of our favorite progressive members and a ton of other, even more moderate members, that said, I'm gonna vote on the principle.

And the good news is, there's no member more toxic than her. So little by little, as we go through this process, we're learning about the tricks that leadership -- that hawks in leadership -- have. And that's the same story of the Yemen war fight over eight years is little by little, at each stage of the process, you're learning the different tricks that they have. And here I [00:44:00] think both advocacy groups and members of Congress saw this trick and it's gonna be less potent next time. And I think we could be able to continue to convince members to vote on the impact of the policy and what's on the paper rather than on the personality of the member, because otherwise it's just gonna be very difficult in this current climate where you have these right wingers that are getting a little bit more engaged on foreign policy.

**NASKA RENNER - EDITOR, DECONSTRUCTED:** And presumably the White House also saw how it unfolded and got the message.

**ERIK SPERLING:** The White House I think is very aware that this support for the Ukraine war, and especially the huge amounts of funding for it, support for that war is solid in a sense, but it's also there's definitely potential for it to weaken depending on how things are approached and depending how developments happen. So I think the White House is very aware of that. And I wouldn't be surprised if they were engaged on this and, pretty engaged with Congress on this, because it was certainly a worry if you read some of the reporting from the Axios piece, you had Senators already preparing what they were gonna do if it passed the House.

And so this was certainly a major topic and I think this [00:45:00] amazing Marjorie Taylor Greene play spared them some of that. But I, they know that there's an increasingly growing group of principled members that are pretty consistently standing up for reasonable human-rights focus and restraint-focused foreign policy.

## **NATO, Ukraine, and The American Empire Daniel Bessner & Derek Davison Part 3 - The Majority Report - Air Date 7-23-23**

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** What do you— from the perspective of leftists, what should we be doing regarding Ukraine? You've got 60 seconds. No, I'm joking, but honestly what—

**DANIEL BESSNER:** Nothing, basically we should be doing nothing.

We should not be expanding around the world, sending weapons around the world, to conflicts that are only peripheral to any possible perception of the national interest. Why should we do that? Why is this a hot take? Because I think people need to analyze what is the actually existing American Empire done to both abroad, and at home.

At home we have a militarized society. We continue to empower defense contractors. We have a society organized around the military and we're spending money on warfare when we should be spending money on welfare. Beyond that, if people wanna say, "That's selfish Danny, what are you talking about?"

If you look at the actually existing history of the United States Empire abroad, it's not really [00:46:00] a question. Whenever the United States gets involved with a foreign country, basically bad things happen. I think the United States, for example, tried to covertly overthrow regimes during the Cold War 66 times.

It succeeded in a certain amount of those, but every time that the US got involved, or nearly every time the US got involved; you have incidences of mass killing.

You have democratic backsliding, you have human rights abuses and things along those lines. So from both a domestic and international perspective, we really need to restrict the power of the US empire abroad. The military industrial complex at home, and constantly funding wars — even wars that are just, from a dead alien perspective.

If you were looking at it from 40,000 feet, it's absolutely horrible that Putin invaded Ukraine. Even wars that are just, if the United States just continues to be involved in them, then this empire will last forever. Which I believe, and I think Derek agrees with me, is bad in both the short, medium, and long terms.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** The question then is, we made this agreement with Ukraine back in 93, 94, for them [00:47:00] to get rid of their nuclear stockpile and us to come to their defenses. That is, I would say the central question here. Keeping our obligations and incentivizing further denuclearization from other countries by maintaining that promise.

**DEREK DAVISON:** I think you're right, Emma. There is an obligation there. I think, to some extent, you have to say the Biden administration has been fairly measured here in limiting us support to what it has been, and not escalating. Even this sort of dance that we go through with every new weapon system that the Ukrainians ask for; where the US says no, and then it says maybe, and then it finally says yes.

Even that, as part of the process of keeping this at a level that doesn't risk escalating into something much worse than it already is. To get to your question, my answer is vague hocus I guess. I think, for the left, it's very important to support any outlet for diplomacy with respect to this conflict.[00:48:00]

I was somewhat heartened to see a little while ago there was the report of some kind of old retired, ex US diplomats engaging in some track to diplomacy. Including Richard Haass, the former now president of the Council on Foreign Relations. Friend of our pod, Richard Haass, absolutely friend of the pod, guiding light for American prestige.

Anyway, just to see that happening at some level. Of course, the immediate reaction to that was; these people are all Vladimir Putin's puppets. Richard Haas

is is somehow on the Kremlin's payroll. Just to have any amount of negotiation going on because it's so clear that there's very little of it happening right now.

It's equally clear that there's really no planning or thought being put into how this conflict ends. I think all the eggs were put into the basket of this counter offensive that the Ukrainians are still engaged in, and somehow, that was gonna be a dramatic success. It hasn't been, and I'm not sure anybody knows what to do at this point.

Diplomacy even on issues on the margin. The Black Sea [00:49:00] Initiative just fell apart today. The Russians pulled out of it, right? That's gonna have huge repercussions for global food security, especially in places like Africa and the Middle East that are struggling anyway, again, because of climate change and instability. Struggling to feed themselves.

Now this adds a whole new level difficulty here. .So, argument would be; it's important to support those efforts just to talk, to keep talking, even if the talks aren't going anywhere right now. I'm not saying, pressure Ukraine to surrender or anything like that. Just maintain some open channels of communication.

## **The Indiscriminate Rain of Cluster Bombs Part 2 - Intercepted - Air Date 7-18-23**

**JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED:** Moz, there's a lot of talk right now in the United States and around the world about the escalating war in Ukraine. There's a pretty dramatic situation that's been unfolding in Crimea, and in the waters surrounding Crimea. A lot of questions about where all of this is headed in the US media.

For the first time in a long time, there was discussion of munitions called cluster bombs. The reason that this was being talked about is because [00:50:00] the Biden administration very publicly acknowledged that it was going to be giving, and in fact has started to give, Ukraine a fresh batch of cluster bombs.

These are really devastating indiscriminate weapons. They're essentially flying landmines that are dropped down over large areas, and they scatter into tiny bomblets. As a young reporter, in 1999, I was in what was then called Yugoslavia. At the time it was just Serbia and Montenegro.

I was in Serbia when the United States was leading a 78 day bombing campaign against Serbia. This was, what was referred to at the time as, the

Kosovo War. The NATO bombing wasn't just happening in Kosovo, which at the time was a southern province of Serbia, but was happening throughout Serbia and parts of Montenegro.

In May of 1999, I believe it was May 7th, 1999, NATO warplanes conducted an attack on the southern [00:51:00] Serbian city of Niš. The alleged target of the attack was supposedly the airport in Niš, but they dropped cluster bombs that then ended up hitting basically in the center of the city. The bombs scattered and just blasted everywhere.

One of the places that these cluster munitions exploded was in a very crowded marketplace. That attack ended up killing at least 14 civilians, and that was documented by human rights watch. Local figures put the number much higher, but then there were subsequent deaths that occurred as a result of the bomb.

Some of the bombs not exploding when they were dropped. These dud bombs. In fact, Serbia, up until 2009 there were still cluster munitions that were being recovered from various parts of the country. When I went there and I had never really seen the aftermath of a missile attack. I had just started doing international reporting.

[00:52:00] You could see when we walked to the marketplace some days after this bombing had happened — it was something shocking because it almost looked like a fossil in the concrete. When the bombs hit, and the charge on it hit, it almost like spidered out.

It was as though concrete was actually Plato in terms of the scatter marks that it made. And also then talked to people who had witnessed it. And it was horrifying because they described watching fellow human beings shred into meat. Basically, they were describing how human beings looked like they had been turned into ground meat.

I'm sorry for such a graphic description, When you meet people whose loved ones were killed in this manner, or their neighbors were killed in this manner, it just haunts you. I don't know that I would've been so closely paying attention to this particular bomb. Had I not spoken to people whose lives were ruined by cluster bombs.

[00:53:00] I then really studied what these were, and they're a terrifying, indiscriminate weapon. They continue to kill years after they're actually dropped, and I often think about that trip that I took to the city of Niche in 1999 in Serbia. I think it really gave me a very clear sense that these bombs were

dropped by forces being controlled by the government of the country that I came from.

**MARC GARLASCO:** You see shrapnel from these cluster bombs, and in fact, in some places it's fossilized into the ground. The epicenter of the blast leaves a little crater in the cement. Then you see, almost like the rays of a sun going out from this epicenter, fossilized marks from where the shrapnel, or smaller bombs from the cluster bomb, spread out. Another concern that people have here is that some of these haven't exploded.

It's like landmines sitting in hospital compounds or outside of schools or along the road. I actually saw some of the cluster bombs, and I know you've been talking about that on DemocracyNow! as well. A lot of people here seem to be trying to move on with their lives, but it's always in the back of their head that they could get bombed at [00:54:00] any moment.

It really is the fact that civilians feel here, that they have been targeted, that civilian infrastructure has been targeted. So they really are afraid, and in Niš they're more afraid during the day than they are at night because that's really when NATO has hit them the heaviest. Some years after this 1999 attack, I had a chance to confront the man who was the supreme allied commander of the NATO forces during that war.

That was the US General Wesley Clark. He was running for the Democratic nomination for President in 2004. I caught, I chased him in New Hampshire, and then I questioned him about a number of very terrible attacks that had taken place against civilians. Clark admitted to me that; yes— when I said, you used depleted uranium, you used cluster bombs, and he said to me; sure did.

Then I asked him directly about the cluster bombing of the Niš marketplace.

"And what about the bombing of the niche marketplace with cluster bombs? Shredding human beings. "

**WESLEY CLARK:** It was terrible, but in [00:55:00] that instance, if we've got the same incident, there was a cluster bomb that opened prematurely. It was an accident, and every one of these incidents was fully investigated. All of the material from the Yugoslav government was given to the International Criminal Tribunal. Plus, as the NATO commander, I made a full report to the International Criminal Tribunal, and it was all investigated. The pilots who did it, nobody could have felt worse than the pilots who did it.



I got a letter from a man in Serbia who said; you killed my granddaughter on the schoolyard at Niš. I know how he must have felt. I felt so helpless about it. Every night, before I let those bombs go, I pray that we wouldn't kill innocent people. Unfortunately, when you're at war, terrible things happen even when you don't want 'em to.

**JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED:** I was doing that reporting for DemocracyNow!, both the confrontation of Wesley Clark and the reporting that I had done during the 1999 NATO bombing. Then when I did my book and film Dirty Wars, I then reported on President Obama authorizing a cruise missile attack on a village in Yemen, and it killed several dozen people, [00:56:00] the majority of them women and children.

## **Tim Mak on the Ukrainian Counteroffensive Part 3 - The Good Fight - Air Date 7-1-23**

**TIM MAK:** just last month I launched a publication to address this very issue. There's this problem which I identify, which some people called Ukraine fatigue. That folks are not so interested in hearing the technical details of the front lines from this village that you've never heard of, to another village you've never heard of, or that 12 people were killed in a city in the east and three people were wounded.

We launched counteroffensive.news to try to do compelling human interest journalism, that motivates people to care about the humans in the war. We look at the news through the lens of a single person who's affected by the news, and we're hoping that breaks through. In the sense that people are much more interested if they can empathize with something in a story. That people are much more interested in reading stories about things where they can see themselves.

Let me give you an example; we have been writing [00:57:00] about the strikes in Kyiv, but unlike other news outlets who might say, "at three o'clock in the morning, 12 ballistic missiles were shot down over the skies of Kyiv." What we did instead was; we zoomed in on a single individual. One of the ballistic missiles was shot down over the Kyiv Zoo and the shrapnel tore through a tree right in the middle of the zoo. We found a sketch artist there named Georgie. We tried to look at the attacks overnight through his experience.

We looked at how he heard the explosions at three o'clock in the morning from his home on the left bank. Came to work the next day and sat on a bench to work as an artist, getting paid for sketches for people who visited the zoo. We talk not only about his experience of the overnight strikes, but his life as an artist during the war. How difficult it has been to make a living.

How difficult it's been to find himself in a position where he's forced to draw sketches at a zoo to make ends meet. His shame, for example, in having to do this sort of work when [00:58:00] he believes that he has a much higher level of education in art. We kind of weave that whole story together in a way that, we hope, is more interesting for the public. That you can relate, if you're interested in art for example, that you could relate to that sort of thing. Then in the course of reading about a story, you learn the news. You learn about the strikes that happen overnight, almost incidentally, to the human narrative that we're trying to bring to it.

So over the course of the last month and a half, what we've done is we've profiled people like Ukrainian fishermen along the Nepo River. Who are enduring this terrible ecological catastrophe, due to the blowing of The Kakhovka Dam. We've talked to a US fighter who's fighting for Ukraine, and we try to give a sort of immersive experience. What it was like fighting in Bakhmut in the last days before that eastern Ukrainian city fell.

We profiled Ukrainian female partisans who are training for action behind enemy lines, and how can they can continue to resist in areas of Russian occupation. The way we covered this ongoing counter offensive, for example, is not just by talking about the [00:59:00] movement of military troops. We profiled a 76 year old woman who once lived in Orikhiv, which is one of the towns that is a focal point now of the counter offensive. How she was forced out of her town due to constant shelling, but still sneaks back into the city despite extreme personal danger to herself because she loves the cats and dogs that are living there with no one to feed them.

So she sneaks back into the city to feed the neighborhood cats and dogs. That's the sort of personal, narrative driven, intimate reporting that we've been doing, that we think will cut through. That brings you a little closer, immerses you a little bit more in the facts. I think of these stories as stories that I hope people wanna read regardless of whether or not they were in Ukraine, but they happen to be in Ukraine. That gives it a little edge and that people can maybe see themselves in some of these stories, that maybe you too love cats and dogs and would take deep personal risk to do it.

You also can see yourself in a fisherman that's fishing along the Nepo River as the water recedes and you realize; I'm not gonna be able to do this [01:00:00] thing that I've been doing my entire life, and what a travesty that would be. These are the kinds of stories that we're trying to put out there to combat the so-called Ukraine fatigue.

**YASCHA MOUNK:** It strikes me that there can be a kind of catch 22 in portraying countries at war. Where the natural thing to do is to write about the horror of war, the deep suffering of war, the person who has lost a family, or who's severely injured, people who die. That can make it very hard for people to fully relate because for people, who frankly, have not experienced that kind of tragedy it feels terrible moving, but it also feels very abstract and far away. It's hard to completely inhabit that.

Then you also see that when journalists try to go in the other direction, or when you have things on social media that shows a different kind of reality. That can create a strange kind of backlash. I saw a little bit of complaining from people who are unhappy with the US government's policy towards Ukraine. When there's a video of a McDonald's in Kyiv where things looked relatively normal, that [01:01:00] moment they're saying, why are we sending all of this money over there? They're just hanging out in the McDonald's.

So when you normalize that visa flesh about human beings who are trying as best they can under incredibly traumatic, difficult circumstances to go about their lives. Then it can somehow play into this narrative of; oh look, they're living it up. Which is of course silly and absurd, but how do you strike that middle distance as it were?

How do you show the horrors in a way where people who haven't been there, who haven't perhaps experienced war, can nevertheless relate to the protagonist or the stories. Is this something you think through in your work, and do you have any experience of how that narrative means can actually help create that kind of empathy and kind of imagination for what people are going through?

**TIM MAK:** Deeply, deeply, deeply, right? That I think about this all the time, and so it's something that I've put some effort into doing. I think you're right that people don't want to read constantly about suffering and trauma and deep personal problems, and of course, war involves [01:02:00] a lot of that. You mentioned this issue with the McDonald's.

We did a deep story into what it's like to understand how life goes on in Kyiv. The fact that you can get a Big Mac here is one thing, but you have to realize

that after folks eat their McNuggets, everyone heads home before curfew and they wait for a likely bombardment in the city to start.

More nights than not, there have been explosions and air alarms at 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning in Kyiv. It's one of the most difficult things to explain to people who are not in Ukraine right now. The fact that you can get sushi in Kyiv, but also there's this low level, constant fear, this tension of imminent violence at any time.

I really found the McDonald's controversy, the fact that there's a functioning and bustling McDonald's in Kyiv, to be a really interesting one 'cause I think that it touches on a deeper point here. The video was posted originally by someone who heads the Kyiv School of Economics and his point was; Ukrainians are still trying to live their life. That they're resilient and the city remains vibrant as an F U to the Russians who are trying to [01:03:00] destroy their way of life and their sense of normalcy.

As you point out, it was then seized upon by opponents of Ukraine, or additional aid to Ukraine to say, that looks like a pretty nice McDonald's to me. Now, reality delivered a pretty striking comeback because almost as soon as this controversy started, a number of caliber missiles were launched by Russia at the southern port city of Odessa. It hit a residential complex, and an educational institution, and a business center, and would you know it, also a McDonald's. It damaged and destroyed the outside of a McDonald's in Odessa.

## Final comments on the coming civic renewal of 2024

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today starting with *Gaslit Nation* discussing the evident instability within Russia. *The Good Fight* looked at the slow progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. *The Majority Report* hosted the requisite discussion on the role of NATO in all this. *Democracy Now!* looked at some of the ways the CIA is involved in the war. *Deconstructed*, in two parts, discussed the bipartisan effort in the House to ban the export of clusterbombs. [01:04:00] *Intercepted* looked at the long term impacts of clusterbombs. And *The Majority Report* got two responses on what the left should be doing regarding the war in Ukraine. That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Intercepted* featuring Jeremy Scahill's first-hand account of the use of clusterbombs in Serbia. And *The Good Fight* discussed a media venture's effort to humanize the war in Ukraine through human interest reporting. To hear that

and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support).

And now to wrap up for the day, I, you know, was just checking the news as I was prepping the show and, lo and behold, it turns out Trump is being indicted for his role in attempting to overturn the 2020 election, and I had some thoughts about that.

The trials, I mean, not just the trial for the new indictment, but basically all of the various [01:05:00] trials for his various indictments are going to be happening next year, right in the middle of primary season. And so, it's quite clear and evident to anyone paying just a little bit of attention that this is going to be a stressful year coming up. Not just the election. But all of the trials to watch, potential civil unrest, I mean, Amanda and I discussed making some plans for next year, just to get ahead of it so that we wouldn't be living through chaos and also having to, like, make life plans at the same time. Like, let's just make a plan this year for next year so that we can follow it and have one less thing to think about or maybe several less things to think about. You know, this upcoming year has the potential to be like quite an upheaval and big upheavals make people feel helpless. And doing nothing and just watching makes that feeling worse. [01:06:00] So, it's sort of nice that we have a lot of time between now and when things, you know, when we're really in the thick of it, so that we can sort of mentally prepare and maybe prepare in other ways. So, I thought I would just suggest that the best solution is to take part in something bigger than yourself that is connected to the issue at hand when there is a big upheaval going on.

This election and prosecution cycle could be, and I think at least should be, seen as a time of attempted civic renewal. And so now is the perfect time to start making plans to be involved in civic institutions: support our election system, you know, help run the elections, both in the primaries and the general, help register voters, volunteer to help transport people to the polls, I mean, and there are plenty of other [01:07:00] examples of things that you could do. There are organizations dedicated to providing volunteer opportunities to people surrounding elections and civic duties. And so if you're equal parts excited that Trump is finally being prosecuted for his, you know, what to most of us are clearly evident crimes, and also concerned and nervous for how this is all going to play out, taking action, doing something, putting your time to use in service of a greater cause, for now, I would argue that the maintenance of American democracy is pretty high up on the list of major causes that are worth your time. Consider getting involved. That's my advice.

That is going to be it for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this, or today's topic, or anything else. You can leave as a voicemail, or send a text message at [01:08:00] 202-999-3991, or simply email me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). 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 our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian, and LaWendy, 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, webmastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support). You can join them by signing up today. It would be greatly appreciated. If you want to continue the discussion, join our Discord community, there's a link to join in the show notes.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, D.C., 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](https://bestoftheleft.com).