

Transcript: Update Alex Motyl 10/14/22

VC: Hello, I'm VC

KK: And I'm KK

00:04 VC: Back in June, we published our first interview with Ukraine and Russia expert, Professor Alexander Motyl. The situation with Ukraine continues to evolve, and we are pleased to have Alex with us again today to give us an update. Alex, welcome and thanks for joining us today.

00:23 KK: Welcome, Alex.

:25 AM: Thank you for having me. It's always a pleasure.

00:29: OK, so let's just dive right in. So Putin has threatened to use nuclear weapons and this time some in Ukraine are actually preparing for this possibility. So in your view, how likely is this?

00:49: AM: The answer that I have for you is, I don't know. And frankly, no one really does. Some people say absolutely yes, some people say absolutely no, but we're all guessing. The bottom line is this. There is no advantage for Putin or for Russia from using nuclear weapons in Ukraine or anyplace else. I've thought about this, my friends have thought about this and we can't think of a single advantage, other than the fact that it makes Putin feel good, or something like that. But there is no gain for Russia, no gain for Putin's regime, no gain for the war effort. Quite the opposite. A nuclear strike would lead to all sorts of very painful consequences. The United States, as you know, has been very open about the fact that if there are-- nuclear arms are used, we will destroy the Russian army, at least in Ukraine and possibly elsewhere. You can't get more direct than that. The head of NATO has said something very similar, some Europeans have hinted at something similar and some have not. But in general, it's clear that the consequences for Putin and for Russia would be devastating and the benefits would be virtually zero. So if you calculate that one would come to the conclusion that no rational person, no person with a head on his or her shoulders would do that. You'd have to be crazy. And then I'm reminded of my own argument back in February that there was absolutely no benefit for Russia or for Putin for invading Ukraine. And that one would have to be crazy. And lo and behold he did invade. And as you can see from the events of the last seven months there has been absolutely no benefit for Russia or Putin. It's been a disaster. And yet he did it.

3:09 KK: Yeah, well I think he's crazy. And that's the scary part.

3:13 AM: Yes, that's perfectly possible. He's been called a sociopath, a madman. Something along those lines is perfectly applicable to Putin, so we don't know. Now the good news is, and this is the semi-good news is, it's not up to Putin alone to press the button. He first gives an order and that's sort of the equivalent of a yellow light. And then it's something like five or maybe even six generals on the generals staff have to press the button in sequence. Essentially the fifth guy or the sixth guy will carry the burden of the world's future on his shoulders, and one can hope that the Russian general staff, having seen its army get battered and bruised, calculations are, estimates are that the Russians have lost some 65,000 dead. That's phenomenal. The war has obviously not been good to the Russian army and one has to hope that there's at least one sane Russian general who would figure that throwing a bomb on the Ukrainians would only accelerate the destruction of the Russian army that is presumably dear to him.

4:43 VC: Yeah, and with the opposition to the war growing in Russia, even among the generals, what you're saying is absolutely quite likely that one or more of the generals would not authorize that nuclear strike.

5:05 KK: And also, have you seen ever before this kind of opposition not only by the army but the general public in Russia fleeing.

5:17 AM: Well, this is remarkable. I mean Putin institutes this mobilization, he says he's going to draft 300,000 young men and within the last two weeks – this is two weeks ago, more or less, right? Even less than that, actually, it's been estimated that something like 1.2 million young Russian men have fled the country. This is remarkable. That clearly bespeaks a lack of confidence in Putin and a belief that the war is at best likely to kill them. At worst likely to maim them in some awful way. 1.2 million, This is amazing. And when you consider who these people are, the majority of them are likely to be on the young side, they're likely to be professionals of one kind or another, they're likely to be well educated and they're likely to have small and medium sized businesses. So basically what Putin has managed to do in two weeks is destroy the Russian economy. You know, it's as if the sanctions weren't enough, he then decides he's going to chase out of Russia the people who are critically important for Russia's economic future. This is profoundly stupid. And Putin has been warned time and time again by his people, by his opponents, by Russians, by Ukrainians, by Americans, "Do not mobilize. This will be very unpopular. " So he can't claim not to have known. And he did it anyway.

And then you begin to wonder, is this guy all here? Which is the scary part because if he's a sociopath, if he's crazy or even semi-crazy then in principle anything is possible. Fortunately, again, as I said, if there is at least one normal Russian general and perhaps even more...

7:25 KK: The Ukrainian forces have been pushing back pretty successfully. I've seen some documentaries on Ukraine and it is so beautiful. I did not realize how beautiful it was and when you see what the Russians have done to the infrastructure, it's so sad. And even though they are pushing back a number of the towns that Putin and his annexed regions, so to say, the abuse of the civilians is—I think he is desperate. Is he going to be attacked by NATO and the other countries and pay for this?

8:20 AM: I don't think NATO will intervene militarily, that is to say with boots on the ground. But generally what NATO countries have been doing thus far is providing Ukraine with truly significant assistance. Now the lion's share of the military assistance that Ukraine has, about 75% comes from the US. Another significant portion comes from the United Kingdom. So places like Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, I mean they provide bits and pieces but it's not really the hardware. That's coming from us and the Brits. But the French, the British, the Dutch, even the Austrians and the Swiss, they provide humanitarian assistance, they provide things like helmets, body armor, things of that sort which is important. That too saves lives. And based on what Putin did last Monday, when he rained something like 100 missiles on Ukrainian cities and civilian infrastructure, last I looked it was something like 14 to 15 dead—but the number of people who die is around 10-15 on a daily basis—regardless of how many missiles are fired. I mean civilians, not military. Based on that savage attack which again, according to international law, when you're destroying civilian infrastructure, that's considered a war crime (KK: Yes.). So it's arguably a genocide but it's definitely a war crime and it's obviously an atrocity. And Putin is doing this, he thinks he's making some kind of difference, but in effect it's really, as I was reading today in the Financial Times, one of the analysts there said, it's really just a psychopath's tantrum (KK: wow) because it won't have any effect on the military battlefield. What it's done to the Ukrainian population is made them mad as hell. A few months ago, when they were being bombarded people were fearful, they were anxious, they were uncertain. I'm not suggesting that the anxiety has disappeared but it's been superseded by the hatred and anger. They want payback and it's virtually certain that none of this kind of civilian bombardment will persuade the Ukrainian population to give up. It ain't gonna happen. And we know from past examples in other parts of the world, bombarding the civilian population destroys it, kills it, but it doesn't break the will of the people. Quite the opposite, it actually strengthens the will of the people.

And then last but not least, the bombardment mobilized public opinion in the West. The Ukrainians have been pleading with the US and Europe to give them anti-aircraft rockets to protect them from precisely these kinds of barrages and the West has sort of been hemming and hawing and now everybody's on board and the US says, yeah, we'll provide you with some of these missiles and the Brits are saying something similar. This is the irony of it all, you can always count on Putin to shoot himself in the foot in such a way that mobilizes Western opinion against him.

12:03 KK: One of the questions that you kind of brought up just now is requesting additional air shields. President Zelensky had a special meeting with the G7s requesting this. Can you explain what an air shields are?

12:21 AM: Well, ideally it would be something like a huge dome (VC laughter). Obviously not a real dome but the equivalent of a dome that would protect an entire country from outside rockets. That is to say, every time a rocket approaches, you fire a rocket and you destroy it, thereby there is no damage or very minimal damage. Inevitably some rockets get through but it would be significantly fewer than now. That said, you need to remember that the Ukrainians, with their current anti-aircraft, anti-missile systems are able to shoot down roughly 55% of the missiles and the drones that are sent at them which is a remarkable achievement but it also means that 45% get through so hence the damage and hence the destruction. What they're hoping to get is more of these systems, these anti-missile systems, which will enable them not necessarily to create an entire dome. The Israelis have an entire dome but of course that's relatively easy because it's a small country, but rather to have localized protection for particular cities, or particular infrastructure targets, so they could protect, say, the top 5 or 6 cities and the nuclear power plants, the hydroelectric power plants, things like that, that would be very important, it would be an enormous achievement, right? I mean Putin could still fire the rockets but (xxx) would still come in and fewer would hit these highly important, strategically important targets. And the West seems to be willing to give these sorts of systems so that's very positive news for the population of Ukraine because it means that unless Putin just unleashes another barrage tomorrow that they may be relatively safe or safer within a few weeks, maybe sooner.

14:40 VC; Now, former President Poroshenko said that the Russian threats should motivate NATO to expedite the process of admitting Ukraine. So do you think that they will accept Ukraine into NATO and will they recognize Russia formally as a terrorist country?

15:06 AM: Well, in terms of terrorism, I mean the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, which is essentially a representative body without any particular clout, nevertheless it kind of reflects public opinion, it declared yesterday that, and I quote, that the Russian Federation has a terrorist regime. So the first step in that direction has been made. NATO wouldn't necessarily be the appropriate channel for this, it would be individual countries, possibly the European Union. But the Council of Europe, which is part of the European Union framework, making this decision, rather, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, then it's perfectly possible and plausible for the European Union to take the next step. There's also been a lot of pressure on the US to declare Russia a terrorist state. And that looks far more plausible now than it did in the past. So much for the terrorism. In terms of NATO, NATO membership for Ukraine, the answer to that is yes and no. On the one hand, becoming a member of NATO is a cumbersome, long procedure. Poroshenko and Zelensky would very much like to accelerate it and technically it's possible. But the real problem is that for Ukraine to become a member state, every single current member state would have to say yes. And there's always one holdout, at least, if not more. And the traditional troublemakers have always been, at least in recent memory, have been Hungary—Hungary kind of more or less supports Putin. At best it's neutral, at worst it's pro-Putin. It certainly isn't pro-Ukrainian and in that sense even if one could even accelerate the process, it's conceivable or possible that Hungary would again, would say no and that would be the end of that. On the other hand, so this is the bad news, the good-ish news for Ukraine is that effectively, Ukraine is already a member of NATO. I mean effectively, not in reality, obviously. It's receiving massive assistance from NATO countries. NATO supports Ukraine, and it was always said in the past, before February, before the outbreak of the war that if Ukraine becomes a member, then Russia will start a war. Well, Russia has already started a war. So what's to stop Brussels from making Ukraine a member? I mean what are the Russians going to do, start a war? Right? So in a manner of speaking Ukraine is actually closer to membership now than it was, say, half a year ago. But there are still these obstacles, sort of the bureaucratic process, and of course Hungary and possibly some other country might decide, "we're going to say no," to stick it to the Germans or the French. This is not unusual.

18:42 KK: I have to ask you, it was very interesting to me that Putin called the recent explosion of the Crimea bridge a terrorist attack. (AM: Laughter) I thought, is he joking? In your view, who is responsible for that attack?

19:05 AM: There are two versions and both are pretty plausible. All right, so let me give you both and then basically you're on your own. One is that it was the Ukrainians. And that makes a lot of sense,

right? The bridge is a lifeline for Crimea, it's a lifeline for the Russian forces in South Ukraine, that's how they transport forces, that's how they transport military hardware, food, logistics and so on. It's also a lifeline for the population of Crimea, so if you really want to harm the Russian war effort this would be a way of doing it. And it's also something that the Ukrainians have said, eventually at some point they will. So they publicly declared that at some point they might do this. It makes a whole bunch of strategic sense. It's also a slap in Putin's face because this was his key project, right? And suddenly the project is attacked and is shown to be far more vulnerable than he had always insisted. So the Ukrainians had every reason to do this. What's unclear is, did they have the capacity to do this? The Russians insisted it was a truck. Almost all the experts agree that it wasn't a truck. It couldn't have been a truck because the explosion went up and if it had been a truck the explosion would have gone down. And then there's a whole bunch of other inconsistencies which I could talk about if you want me to, but in any case the truck business seems not to fit. Some say it would have been blown up from beneath by some kind of boat but that just begs the question of how would the Ukrainians have gotten a boat into the most highly guarded part of the Sea of Asov and the Black Sea? I mean they're pretty good military but that good, I don't know. And then the remaining theory is that it could have been a precision rocket. The problem is that the rockets that the Ukrainians currently have don't have that distance. They can't be fired from such a distance. So if it wasn't a truck bomb, if it wasn't a boat, and if it couldn't have been a rocket then that would seem to suggest that either the Ukrainians are really incredibly clever, you know, possibly or else they may have had a reason to do it or maybe they didn't.

21:50 KK: Then who would have done it?

21:53 AM: And this is the second part. It's been suggested that actually Putin may have been behind it. (KK: Oh, my goodness!) All right? Or people affiliated with him. And the reason for that would be as follows: The missile strikes that the Russians engaged in two days after the Kerch explosions, right, have been presented as retaliations for the explosions. In reality, the Russians started planning those attacks in early October. So they've been in the works, they've been planning this for two weeks. And I'm told by military experts that if you're going to fire a hundred rockets you don't just do that on the spur of the moment, you've gotta plan this thing in advance, which makes perfect sense. So why would Putin attack his own bridge? Well, in order to create this pretext of Ukrainian terrorists attacking the bridge and thereby necessitating and justifying a retaliatory strike. And of course the retaliatory strike wasn't really retaliatory because it was already being planned all this time. And then sort of supporting evidence of this is that the damage done to the bridge is actually quite minimal. There's a

four lane highway and it was built in these huge sections, like 60 feet long. One part of the highway, two lanes, in other words, and three or four sections, collapsed, right? Then there was a train with oil tankers--not oil tankers, oil wagons or whatever they're called—right? Which went on fire. But the tracks weren't damaged and the Russians were able to resume train traffic and at least some degree of car traffic as well. So now they've got two lanes as opposed to four. And you've got to figure, if this had been the Ukrainians, who were determined to destroy the bridge, why just knock out two lanes and slightly damage the rail tracks...

24:24 VC: Yeah, so why not just knock out the whole bridge?

24:28 AM: Yeah, why not just really knock it out? Rather than firing just one rocket, if they had these rockets, why not just fire ten?

24:37 KK: I thought that if Ukraine did do it they would be happy to admit it.

24:42 AM: And then they might be happy to admit it as well, right? And that's the other point, right? They did it and it's this magnificent military operation. Why pretend that you didn't do it? So anyway, all this gets extremely convoluted as you can see but basically those are the two competing theories and you take whatever you think sounds better at this point.

25:05 KK: Well, I think the Putin theory sounds better. That's an amazing story. I've not heard this.

25:21 VC: If the Putin theory is in fact true, I have also seen... basically it would be a case of Putin shooting himself in the foot because I heard that there are like all these big huge trucks with supplies for the Russian soldiers, they're all lined up waiting to cross the river on ferries, so this is holding things up.

26:00 AM: What you're referring to is the Dnipro River (VC: Ah.). That's a very good point and I'm glad you raised it. I'm glad you made this point. There's a province in Ukraine, roughly two thirds of which are occupied by the Russians in the southeast, not far from Odessa and it's called Kherson and it's divided roughly in half by the Dnipro River. And the Russians are on the western bank and on the eastern bank. But the ones on the western bank, they have been supplied by trucks and by barges that cross the river. Until a few weeks ago, when the Ukrainians knocked out all the bridges, which meant that they were no longer able to be supplied from the east bank, and of course that would have

meant that stuff coming in over the Crimean bridge, up Crimea and into the Kherson province. And this is that part of the province which has been cut off pretty much completely. The Russians have built these makeshift pontoon bridges and they're also using barges. But there's nothing like a real bridge to transport heavy machinery and logistics. I mean barges aren't quite the same thing. So the soldiers are having problems with logistics and supplies and at the same time Ukrainians are trying to squeeze them from the south and from the north, thus far fairly successfully. If they manage to squeeze them—notice, by the way, the Russians have no place to run because the bridges are down. So if they decide to retreat some of them will be able to get on barges, others might be able to walk across the pontoon bridges, but this could be a major military defeat for Putin. Especially as—there's a key city on the western bank of the river called Kherson and if the Ukrainians manage to capture that, that would be an enormous slap in Putin's face, right, because that would be the first really big city that the Ukrainians would have liberated because thus far it's been a lot of small cities, towns, villages. But this would be a major city, several hundred thousand population.

28:53 VC: Let's move on to the situation with energy with the gas exports. So it's been reported that Putin is trying to reassert his hold on the European energy markets by offering to export gas through Turkey. So could you talk about the relationship between Russia and Turkey which I gather is a bit complicated.

29:28 AM: It's one of these love-hate relationships, or perhaps "I like you but I hate you," I'm not sure if either xxx would qualify as love, but on the one hand, right, Turkey has supported Ukraine in the war. It has not supported Russia, at least politically, rhetorically, it has traditionally supported the Crimean peninsula, the Crimean Tatar population, which is a kind of offshoot of Turks, and it supported their right to self-determination, it's been opposed to the Russian occupation of the territory. Turkey has been supplying Ukraine with the Bayraktar TB2 drones, which are very effective drones, and they've been doing this since day one of the war, and of course these drones are being fired at Russian troops. So on the one hand you figure that the Turks are on the Ukrainian side. Oh, and they've also closed off the Black Sea, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara to Russian military ships. Right, so that seems to suggest that they're on the Ukrainian side. At the same time, they're more than happy to cut a deal with the Russians if it happens to be advantageous to the Turkish economy. So they serve as middlemen for the export of Ukrainian grain, but a lot of that grain then goes to Turkey which then proceeds to sell it (laughter). Russia has acknowledged this and I'm sure Russia is getting some kind of kickbacks in the process. Then there's the gas deal that you just referred to. There's a pipeline that goes through Turkey. It extends into the Balkans and conceivably

Russia could use that to export its gas as opposed to the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2. I'm sure that the Turks would have no problem with that. I'm not sure that the Europeans would accept it unless it's on their terms. But in any case, it's clear that the Turks are doing what they've historically done, they're masters at kind of maneuvering and doing whatever happens to be the greatest advantage to them at any particular time. That's not to say that they have no principal strategy but it is to say that it's a very kind of loose strategy. If it's convenient to side with the Russians, so be it. If tomorrow it would be more convenient for the Turks to side with the Ukrainians, I'm sure the Turks will be Ukraine's greatest allies.

32: 26 VC: Is Turkey in NATO?

32:29: AM Yes, Turkey is in NATO and it's been trying to get into the European Union for decades, so far unsuccessfully. But yes it is in NATO and that too is paradoxical because on the one hand NATO is supposedly opposed to Russia but on the other hand the Turks are kinda sorta opposed to Russia and kinda sorta supporting Russia which technically they're not supposed to be doing.

32:59 KK: It's amazing, they're definitely playing two ends against the middle, aren't they?

33:04: AM: Absolutely. And there's a long historical tradition in Turkish as well as Ottoman history for behaving that way. The bad news is they haven't made up their minds, but the good news is that they haven't made up their minds in support of Russia. So from the Ukrainian point of view, whatever support you get, even if it's lukewarm, is good support.

33:32 KK: Alex, we know you do not have a crystal ball, but what is your opinion on how this horrible conflict will end?

33:44 AM: It'll end only if Putin leaves power. So yes, the Ukrainians need to keep on winning and yes, the sanctions have to remain in place and yes, the Ukrainians need to be able to protect their airspace with some equivalent of the iron dome. All that is obviously true. And yes, the Russians have to keep on resisting the draft, perhaps demonstrating on the streets, again, that goes without saying. But as long as Putin is in power he will remain committed to some form of war. I'm absolutely certain of that. If he were really, really smart, he would end the thing immediately, claim victory, withdraw his troops, and enjoy the high life in Moscow. But Putin is so committed to the war he so identifies himself with the war and with these grandiose plans, it's virtually impossible for him both as a leader and a

sociopath to simply end the war and say, OK, whatever, let's just go back to living as we did before. So everything hinges on Putin. If he is deposed or leaves the throne in some other fashion. That doesn't necessarily mean that his successor or successors will end the war, but it does mean that at least there is a window of opportunity because some of them will want to continue the war, some will want to end it and some will simply say, "I don't know. Let's just figure something out." So given that kind of certainty, or uncertainty, and given the certainty of a power struggle that means that suddenly things that seemed impossible become possible. Remember what Gorbachev did when he came to power. He withdrew Russian troops from Afghanistan. He realized it was a smart move for him politically and it was a way of promoting Perestroika, blah blah blah. So assume the semi-good guys come to power, or the semi-bad guys as opposed to the crazy, crazy guys, they might figure, "who needs this? The country's a mess, the economy is in the tubes, 65, 70, 80, 90, 100 thousand Russian soldiers have lost their lives, we really can't continue this. Why not just put a stop to this madness and start anew?" Build bridges with the Ukrainians, the Americans, the Europeans, the rest of the world. But again, does this have to happen? No. But if Putin leaves it could happen. One is grateful for whatever one can get in this terrible war.

36:53 VC: Exactly. And as you said, at least it's a window of opportunity. There is a possibility that things could change. (AM: Exactly). So now winter is approaching. So how do you think that will impact the war?

37:16: AM: Well, the Ukrainians are going to be very cold. They have fewer energy stations and they have been conserving energy and electricity but it'll be a tough winter, as they all say and everybody's stocking up on warm underwear, portable... generators, things like that, so they'll manage. They'll manage because they have no alternative. They simply need to manage and they will. People have survived worse climactic conditions in Ukraine than that, they've experienced enormous hardships. They're not going to like it but they'll manage. And they'll manage, as I said, partly because they need to and partly because they want to stick it to Putin. And by managing they will have stuck it to Putin. Russians will have, they'll be warmer but on the other hand the Russian economy is slated to go into deep dive. Originally people thought it would be June but now the consensus among serious economists is that it will be in the next few months. So given the deep dive in the economy – they may be warm but they're likely to be increasingly unemployed, facing shortages of goods, possibly higher inflation. And then of course there are the Europeans who are likely to have a colder winter too. I don't think they'll be freezing because they have a very efficient energy network, they've already adopted a bunch of energy resources, they filled up their gas tanks—

I believe they are something like 90% full. The United States will obviously kick in and try to help as much as it can. Saudi Arabia will presumably help, and who knows, maybe even the Turks. So it'll be a cold winter and people will be taxed. In terms of the battlefield the Ukrainians are likely to fare significantly better because they already have winter clothing, winter uniforms and they're fighting on their own terrain. So if worse comes to worse, the inhabitants in the local village will put you up, feed you and let you warm yourself at the hearth. The Russians have had enormous difficulties with logistics. Back in February they came with insufficient supplies of uniforms. So chances are they are not going to have the requisite uniforms logistics and they're likely to be very cold, very undernourished and possibly very ill. Just two days ago in the Kherson region that we were just talking about, 60 Russian recently mobilized soldiers surrendered to the Ukrainian authorities. Sixty. This is big. (KK, VC: Yes, wow). The vast majority of them were ill. (KK: Oh, really?) And again, it's not yet that cold. Ukraine can get very cold in the dead of winter. It's just getting cool.

40:51 VC: What did they have?

40:53 AM: They were outfitted in summer outfits and summer uniforms. They were undernourished, underfed, they weren't used to living in trenches. Most of these were guys who had been drafted literally six days ago. So you're drafted six days ago, you're walking along some Russian town, the police come, they shanghai you and they tell you, "Hey buddy, you're going to the front!" And a few days later you're at the front. And possibly never held a gun in your hand. That's why standing knee deep in mud... it's cold. The Ukrainians are trained, they've been doing this for the last seven months and you're supposed to fight a war? That's just crazy. The Ukrainians, when the mobilization order was set in, the Ukrainians set up a special website for Russian soldiers. It's called "I Want to Live," and it provided the Russians with very specific instructions on how they should surrender. What they should do, how to surrender, where to go, what to say, and so on. And until now there were something like five or six cases Sixty is so far the biggest number. And I'm sure that'll continue because the guys who have been left back will have noticed that their comrades are now safe which is yet another reason to try it again, try it on your own.

42:28 KK: What you're saying sounds like this is the way the war is going to end.

42:34 AM: It's very possible. You can easily imagine that the number of Russians deserting or surrendering will increase, will continue to increase. The logistics will continue to be poor, the command structure of the Russians will continue to be abysmal, the Ukrainians will continue to get

top notch weaponry from the West, their soldiers will continue to enjoy high morale as well as good command and control (?) of people so you put that together and it looks like a recipe for Russian military disaster.

43:11 VC: Speaking of Russians surrendering, I've seen reports that some Russian nationals are going to Alaska to ask for asylum. So your thoughts on that?

43:27 AM: Well, I'm assuming these were not Muscovites who made the several thousand mile trip but you never know. Chances are these are people who live in the general area of the far east of Russia but when you consider that some 1.2 million Russians have already left—Kazakhstan alone has received several hundred thousand. There have been several hundred thousand who have fled to Mongolia, likewise I believe 100,000 or two to Georgia and other places so I wouldn't be surprised. Again, it doesn't surprise me that some of them have made it to Alaska. Again, I'm not sure how to—clearly there is no bridge so you can't take your car so I'm assuming they took a ferry, rented a boat, who knows what but the Aleutian Islands aren't all that far away. You can easily pay off some fisherman who might be willing to take you for a significant amount of change. So again, I'm not expecting a major wave of Russian emigres coming to Alaska. On the other hand, you never know. We've been surprised by so many things. And the US, if you're going to be leaving everything and looking for a new home and your choice is Kazakhstan, Mongolia or Alaska, there's something to be said for Alaska.

45:07 KK: And you can't have a war without an army.

45:12 AM: Precisely. Nor can you have a war with an army that is deserting all the time, right, I mean (VC: exactly). There was another report, again, just on a related topic, several weeks ago the Russians started drafting criminals from prisons (KK: I heard that. VC Wow) and just a few days ago there was a report that these elite units in the eastern front, Russian elite units, who had been given these criminals, they actually shot and killed 40 of them because these guys were unwilling to take part in the frontal assault. (KK: Oh, my, VC Wow) And another five or six were kneecapped, that is to say they weren't killed, they were simply shot in the knees. This is no way to run an army. And I'm not a military guy and even I know this is no way to run an army (Laughter).

46:11 VC: Certainly not. So Alex, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't covered?

46:24 AM: Well, the only thing I would add is that Zelensky remains immensely popular and there was just a poll done, I'm not sure who did it, asking who are the most influential and important Ukrainians in their history and first place went to this Ukrainian national poet by the name of Shevchenco who lived in the 19th century and second place went to you know who. (KK: It's amazing). It's amazing. He still retains his popularity, he's still doing XXXX on the international arena. He has been able to persuade people, he's good with the bully pulpit. He's a good speaker, he knows how to modulate his voice. He's an actor so that obviously makes a difference. I think the Zelensky factor is very, very important in Ukraine's ability to get weapons and to fight. So he will go down in history. What will happen to him after the war ends you never know because sometimes war heroes do well. Sometimes, like Churchill, they lose office but it doesn't matter. Whatever happens to him, he will go down in history. He is a remarkable individual who stood up and saved his country.

47:48 VC: Indeed. He'll get them through this war if, as you say, if nothing else, he'll get them through it.

47:58 AM: He'll get them through it. Absolutely.

48:01 VC: So Alex, this has been excellent, thank you so much for providing these updates.

48:09 KK: It's an incredible education when we speak to you. We are learning so much and I hope the people who listen to this will agree. It's amazing.

48:20 AM: No no, it's all thanks to you. You ask good questions and you force me to come up with good answers. That's why this works.

48:29 KK: We'll take that, right, Vanessa?

48:30 VC: We'll take it, absolutely.

48:35 AM: Well it's true. It happens to be true

48:40 VC/KK: Thank you, thank you thank you again.

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