

Interview with Debra Cagan in Ukraine Magazine Apostrophe published September 1st 2021

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In the first day of autumn in Washington, DC Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky will meet at the White Houses with host Joe Biden. What proposals should Ukraine make to President Biden. Why should or should not Zelensky push the subject of NATO membership for Ukraine. What should be discussed about Biden's relations with Russia, and also about what investment projects in Ukraine can interest the United States. We are asking this of the former diplomat who has worked for many US Presidents from President Reagan to Trump, Debra Cagan.

Question: On the eve of Zelensky's visit to the United States, experts voiced opinions that the Biden administration is not really ready for the Ukrainian delegation due to the crisis in Afghanistan ...

Answer: Biden must take quick steps to prove that the catastrophe in Afghanistan was an anomaly. He needs to take certain steps to prove that his policy is not weak. Unfortunately, this is not Biden's first failure in foreign policy, but it is the most obvious and dangerous. Every time unsuccessful ill-considered decisions cost lives, that is a clear danger. The Biden administration must send a loud and clear signal that the course needs to be adjusted.

Nord Stream 2 was a bad decision. Turning American ships around instead of defending freedom of navigation in the Black Sea was a bad decision. A bad decision was to extend the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (START-3) for another 5 years, which is exactly what Putin wanted. Therefore, even before the catastrophe in Afghanistan, the Biden administration made a number of bad decisions. But Afghanistan and failure of a successful withdrawal could lead the Biden administration to show that it is a reliable ally and friend and this could make them rethink their approach to Russia and how it affects Ukraine.

I think this will be an advantage for Ukraine. But President Zelensky must find the right approach at the meeting - or it will be a lost opportunity for Ukraine.

Question: "What can Biden offer to improve his image?"

Answer: Many people now say that the events in Afghanistan are even worse than what happened in Vietnam. After Vietnam, there were a number of American politicians who did a lot to prove that Vietnam was not an indicator of how the United States was going to practice foreign policy and show that it was still a global leader. The military operation after the capture of the American ship "Mayaguez" by the "Khmer Rouge" (hostage release in 1975 - "Apostrophe"), aid to Britain in the Falkland Islands, North Korea, Libya - all this was done to prove that the United States is still a powerful superpower and Vietnam should not be seen as an indicator of policy going forward.

As such I believe that the Biden administration must do something for Ukraine to show Russia that the United States is not weak, not weak as seen by Moscow, Beijing or Tehran.

As for Zelensky, he should raise what Ukraine did in terms of rescuing people from Afghanistan but his focus should really be on what Ukraine expects and wants from the United States.

Question: Some American experts advise Zelensky to bypass the issue of the NATO Membership Action Plan.

Answer: I do not think that the Biden administration would like to start any new formal processes of rapprochement between Ukraine and NATO. This administration has neither the desire nor the political equity at this juncture to support the processes that will lead to Ukraine's possible membership in NATO. I suspect that Biden's team will express support, but will hide behind the reluctance of Germany, France and others to participate in any new NATO programs for Ukraine. In short, I agree that Zelensky should raise but not dwell on the NATO Membership Action Plan. He can simply say that this is Ukraine's desire. But

Zelensky really needs to show that he is a realist, and clearly state a number of things on which the United States should support Ukraine.

Question: The American press wrote that the presidents could announce the establishment of a bilateral commission on reform. Will it be effective?

Answer: The Bilateral Reform Commission and in fact many such commissions often do not accomplish much but are instead a way to show that there are meetings but that do not yield noticeable results. I would advise avoiding bilateral commissions that do not have specific, detailed goals, written and signed by both leaders. Unless such details are agreed, bilateral commissions can just be a sort of trap to say we agreed on something.

Question: What are your recommendations of what Ukraine should pursue?

Answer: I believe that it is much more important for Ukraine to sign an agreement on resolving the issue of ships of third countries entering illegally occupied Crimean ports. This document should be made public, and it is desirable that it be printed on the official website of the White House. For example, the agreement should stipulate that ships that enter the Crimea and their countries of origin will be fined by the United States and the European Union and will lose international insurance.

In addition, I suggest that Ukraine receive such a signed and promulgated agreement that Russia cannot sell or trade any resources, such as coal, from the illegally occupied territory of Donbass or resources from Crimea, and any country that buys these resources, is subject to fines and sanctions. In addition, the Biden administration must agree to work on this with Germany and other European countries to ensure that these agreements are legal in other countries.

Such an agreement must be announced publicly. I want to be completely honest with you - I think that if they don't announce it publicly, the Biden administration can have a different interpretation than Ukraine of what was agreed upon. This must be transparent.

Question: You mentioned Nord Stream 2 and said that allowing it to be built was a mistake by the Biden administration. Since Washington allows this, Ukraine needs security guarantees, including energy security.

Answer: It should be understood that Nord Stream 2 has never been just about Ukraine. This is a precious stone in the crown of Russian gas pipelines. Unfortunately, precisely because it was talked about only in the context of Ukraine, this allowed the Biden administration to make a terrible decision.

The truth is that Nord Stream 2 will give Russia a lot of money. 35-40% of Russia's GDP are earnings from fossil fuel sales and by-products. With the construction of Nord Stream 2 and Turk Stream, 70% of all Russia's fossil fuel sales will go to the European market. And this will allow Russia to receive up to 25% of its GDP from Europe.

And in my opinion, it was a criminal mistake to allow the Russian budget to be underwritten by the EU in this way. This makes it possible to occupy more countries, to try to carry out more contract killings. Therefore, it was a terrible mistake to allow Russia to earn such substantial earnings - because it will spend it on operations in Ukraine, Transnistria, Georgia, but also in Syria, Iraq and around the world. Russia will be able to behave badly because it will have the money to do so.

As for Ukraine, in my opinion, it should stop repeating "oh, we need energy security." I believe that thanks to what Poland and Lithuania have done - for example, the liquefied gas terminal in Swinoujscie or Klaipeda - Ukraine will be taken care of. She will get as much gas as she needs.

And let me tell you honestly, I do not think that Russia will adhere to the agreement on gas transit for another five years, it will try to get out of it. But I think that Ukraine will get as much energy for domestic use as it needs.

But I would advise the Biden administration, together with Germany, to invest in "green" energy in Ukraine. I am in favor of Germany investing, say, 10 billion euros just to start on green projects to help Ukraine fight climate change. And there are those who say this will take a long time, but green technologies are moving at a very rapid pace and today's investment can yield real change in a few short years.

Ukraine also mines rare earth minerals. They could establish joint ventures of Ukrainian-American mining companies.

Question: There are still lithium deposits in Ukraine ...

Answer: Lithium is essential for almost every aspect of our modern technology be it medical devices, mobile phone and batteries for electric vehicles. Developing this could be a profitable venture for Ukraine. Now countries like Japan understand that they cannot be completely dependent on China. And Tokyo, for example, has moved almost 70% of its resources and production from China to other countries in the Far East. To offer oneself as an alternative to China would be a very powerful statement for Ukraine.

If Ukraine becomes a country where rare minerals are extracted and can produce batteries, it will lead to an unusual "boom" in the development of the Ukrainian economy and will bring more than negotiations on any other investment.

In general, I would advise not to talk about 100 things in the White House, but to choose 4-5 critical points and discuss them with the Biden administration. The best thing to do is to tell Americans: we have natural resources, and we invite American companies to set up joint ventures so that you do not depend on supply chains from unreliable partners. And Zelensky must make sure that this is a completely legal, non-corrupt process that does not involve the oligarchs. Let them be ordinary owners who act in accordance with the rule of law.

Question: The Washington Post compared the role of Ukraine to the role of West Germany during the Cold War. Ukraine's victory could help strengthen American positions around the world. Do you agree?

Answer: I have always said - from the very beginning of NATO enlargement - that Ukraine will be Europe's cordon sanitaire. In other words, Ukraine is a protective barrier between Europe and Russia. There are clearly similarities with West Germany during the Cold War, but there are also significant differences.

The post-World War II situation was largely dictated by Germany's surrender also in accordance with many Soviet demands. Of course, we hope that Ukraine today

understands that negotiations with Russia on the fundamental rights of Ukrainians and Ukrainian territory and capitulation to Russia will never take place.

But it is no coincidence that Germany is trying to push Ukraine to compromise in Minsk, because that is how Berlin does business with Russia. If anyone else needs proof, look at Merkel, who is going to meet Putin during her farewell tour.

I think the Biden administration should stop playing games with Ukraine, which are in Russia's favor. And I think it should happen immediately. The quickest and most effective way for the United States to regain its credibility after the catastrophe in Afghanistan is to show that it will not bow to Putin.

But again. It is better for Zelensky to simply say - "NATO membership is our goal" - and stop. Therefore, it is worth talking, as I already mentioned, about the Crimean ports, energy programs, etc. It is better to have Zelensky achieve substantive and tangible agreement and not wish lists.

Question: Former British Prime Minister Theresa May recently said that Britain should now come to Afghanistan and bring order there. Do you think that the weakening of the US position will help to restructure the world picture? Or, conversely, is it worth strengthening its influence for the United States now - and will Ukraine come in handy here?

Answer: Although many US foreign policy experts believe that Brexit was a disaster, I do not agree. Britain's exit from the EU was largely perceived economically, but security aspects were usually not taken into account. Meanwhile, London has begun to significantly increase spending on defense and security, Britain is persistently defending Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and, unlike the United States, is conducting exercises to respect freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, which irritates Russians. Britain, along with several other NATO countries, set its own course for Ukraine, and that was good for Ukraine and bad for Russia. This is a perfect result.

I would like to hope that the Biden administration will begin to understand that this is how superpowers should act - not to retreat every time Putin makes threats. We all know that Russia is ruled by hooligans, people for whom threats are a way of life.

The time has come for Biden to realize that Russia is not keeping its promises. And so, on the part of Ukraine, it would be wise to push Biden on this idea.

Question: They say Zelensky should invite Biden to Ukraine. They say that Biden's visit to Ukraine will emphasize America's commitment to turning Ukraine into a free and prosperous state. Do you agree with that?

Answer: Yes, I believe that Biden should go to Ukraine to say that, despite all the terrible decisions of the administration for the first 7 months, he understands the importance of confrontation with Russia, which perceives international law as nothing more than an optional recommendation. If Biden does not visit Ukraine, it will send a signal to Putin that Biden is afraid of Russia.

Question: Zelensky announced a discussion of US participation "in a peaceful settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict." It seems to me that now this thesis is a loser, because Washington will not join the process in Donbass. What do you think?

Answer: The Biden administration's approach to Ukraine is wrong. The strategy is almost entirely based on a misconception about relations with Russia. I don't think the Biden administration is going to do much for Ukraine right now. They just want to put a marker down that a meeting was held and provide some new assistance for Ukraine so they can say they did something.

If Zelensky does what I and others suggest, he will get certain agreements, not just a meeting. He must also publicly invite Biden to come to Ukraine. Russia now believes that Biden is afraid of them, and if he does not agree to come to Ukraine, the Kremlin will receive confirmation that this is the case.

It is important to understand that for Biden and his team, relations with Russia are much more important than what is happening with Ukraine. That needs to change, but I don't think it's going to happen now. We know historically that concessions to Russia never end well - and Biden will be no exception. One meeting will not change

the course of the White House. Nevertheless, I believe that Zelensky should raise this directly with Biden, as well as with members of Congress.

The worst thing that could happen is that nothing changes after the meeting. If the Ukrainians believe that they will hold a meeting and all - that will be enough, then no. This is not enough. Meetings means very little. What Zelensky should do is reach certain agreements and persuade the United States to do what they would not do without this meeting.