

SUNDAY MORNING

27 FEBRUARY 2022

LIZ TRUSS

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SR: I'm joined now in the studio by the Foreign Secretary Liz Truss. Thank you very much for joining us today. What is the latest intelligence you have on the situation in Ukraine?

LT: Well, the latest intelligence we have is the Ukrainians are fighting very hard. They are resisting Russian advances. We haven't see any major changes overnight, but what we are seeing is just huge bravery on the part of the Ukrainians resisting this huge force from Russia, this unwarranted, prefabricated invasion.

SR: Do we know for sure that President Zelensky is safe?

LT: Well, the prime minister spoke to President Zelensky last night. I'm in regular touch with my Foreign Minister counterpart. And of course we want them to stay safe. What is so important, though, is that he is leading the resistance against this Russian invasion. The United Kingdom are doing all we can to support in terms of the supply of defensive weapons, the supply of humanitarian aid, the supply of economic support to Ukraine, because it is vitally important that we stop Putin in Ukraine. What we know is his ambitions go further and this is why we are working with our allies on a severe package of sanctions. Last night we brought in the prohibitions on the use of SWIFT. We're also, as I say, working with our allies to support the Ukrainian resistance on the ground.

SR: President Zelensky has asked for people from abroad to join an international force. Would you support that?

LT: I do support that. And of course that is something that people can make their own decisions about. They are fighting, the people of Ukraine are fighting for freedom and democracy, not just for Ukraine but for the whole of Europe, because that is what President

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Putin is challenging. And absolutely, if people want to support that struggle I would support them in doing that.

SR: So you support people from Britain going over to Ukraine to help them fight?

LT: Absolutely, if that's what they want to do. And we are doing all we can to support with defensive weapons. Last night we saw the Germans are contributing defensive weapons now for the first time. The UK led, we were the first European country to supply defensive weapons into Ukraine. But we are now seeing our allies doing that. The Defence Secretary held a DONA conference on Friday, we had 25 countries turning up. And we're seeing a huge united effort across the G7, across our allies, to challenge Vladimir Putin. Because this is Putin's war, this is prefabricated, preordained aggression to try and subvert a sovereign democracy and we simply cannot allow him to succeed.

SR: How far do you think President Putin will go? Do you think he is capable of using a chemical, even a nuclear attack?

LT: Well, I fear that this will be a bloody and long-running conflict. But senior Russian officials should be aware that if they do go into that arena they could well be tried for war crimes in the future. And this would be an extremely serious escalation of the situation.

SR: Is President Putin a war criminal?

LT: The International Criminal Court has already said they're looking at what is happening in Ukraine. And if I was a senior Russian official, or indeed the President, I would be very wary of taking further steps.

SR: Is there a red line in any of this, at which point the West has to intervene?

LT: Well, we are intervening in that we are supplying defensive weapons. We are supporting the Ukrainians in defence of their country. And I think Vladimir Putin is surprised by how hard the

Ukrainians are fighting and how much resistance there is. And also how severe the sanctions have been from the international system. These are far more severe than any sanctions in the past, targeting Aerflot, the use of air space over vast swathes of Europe, targeting the banking system. And what the aim is to do is to degrade the Russian economy, to stop the money that Vladimir Putin has been able to use to fund his war machine. And that will take time, those sanctions will take time, but it will have the effect of reducing Putin's room for manoeuvre.

SR: The impact of all this, we are seeing pictures of people, hundreds of thousands of people who are now leaving their homes, some of them there at the stations being put on board trains, one train going out a day. I mean, it is desperate isn't it? Will you waive visa requirements for Ukrainians coming to the UK?

LT: It is a desperate situation. We're working with the United Nations, we're working with the Red Cross to keep humanitarian corridors open. We've put support into the neighbouring countries like Slovakia and Poland to help with the refugee crisis. And of course Britain has always welcomed refugees fleeing from war and we're urgently looking at what more we can do to facilitate that. But ultimately what we need to make sure is that we protect Ukraine as a sovereign democracy. Ultimately the people of Ukraine want to live Ukraine, and that is why they are fighting for their future.

SR: But in the short term the situation for people there is desperate, as we know and just in terms of people who are leaving their homes, who are crossing the borders, and there are huge queues to get out - in terms of people who might want to come here, it's still very, very difficult isn't it? There are temporary concessions in place for some family members of British nationals, but if you're resident here that doesn't apply. It's very difficult, anyone who has no connection to the UK cannot get in. Are you going to look at changing that?

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LT: We are looking urgently at what we can do. We're working with European partners about how we support refugees who are leaving Ukraine. So yes, is the answer.

SR: So you are looking at loosening -

LT: We are looking at what we can do to make sure we are able to support refugees fleeing this appalling war, Putin's war.

SR: The Immigration Minister, as I'm sure your aware, Kevin Foster, tweeted last night, as you will be well aware, 'there are number of routes, not least our seasonal worker scheme, you will recall from your Shadow Defra days, which Ukrainians can qualify for alongside the family route for those with relatives here.' I mean, the message to the Ukrainians is that they can come here if they're willing to pick fruit?

LT: I believe that Tweet has been deleted. We are working on what more we can do to support refugees coming out of Ukraine, working with our European allies. But the number one thing we need to do is support the resistance effort in Ukraine. We need to stop Putins ambitions in Ukraine. There are dire consequences if we don't for freedom and democracy across Europe. That is why I'm so pleased that the Germans are now sending defensive weapons into Ukraine. That's why it's so important that we're doing all we can to degrade the Russian economy by targeting oligarchs, by targeting banks, by targeting oil and gas. We will continue - I've got another meeting with my G7 counterparts today, we will continue to tighten the ratchet on Vladimir Putin, to tighten the ratchet on the economy, we will continue to support the Ukrainians in all that they do.

SR: But for people who are desperate to get out, and we know there are an awful lot of people who are desperate to get out, how soon are we going to start taking refugees? How many are we going to accept?

LT: Well, as I've said, this is something we are urgently looking at. We are already providing support on the ground. We've sent

forward teams into Poland and Slovakia who are helping the Poles and Slovaks, other neighbouring countries with that effort. I will be travelling to the region this week and we will do all we can to support Ukrainians both in Ukraine and those who have had to flee because of this appalling war.

SR: It is shocking to see these scenes unfolding in Ukraine, something despite the build up, despite the warnings, so many people never thought would happen. Let me just play you a clip from the Prime Minister speaking in the Commons. This was back in November.

(clip)

PM: "The old concepts of fighting big tank battles on European land mass I think is what you're driving at, are over and there are other better things that we should be investing in, in the FCAS, in the Future Combat Air System, in Cyber. This is how warfare in the future is – is going to be – be fought."

SR: The concept of fighting big tank battles on European land mass is over, and yet we are looking at just that. Are we going to have to rethink defence, foreign policies, that we now know were wrong?

LT: I don't think any of us thought we would be here, and it is an appalling situation to see this war taking place on European soil. This completely unprovoked war, an attack on a sovereign democracy. And you know we are supplying technology like anti tank weapons which are being effective in the Ukraine, the so called Nlaws. We are supplying conventional weaponry, we are supplying equipment, but we are also supporting in the information war and this is what Russia has been doing for a number of years. After the Cold War they didn't get rid of their information units, they've been spreading disinformation and deceit trying to create false flags, trying to create puppet regimes, and we have re-established our information cell, we have been active in support of the Ukrainians. So this is a hybrid war. It's not just a war about conventional weaponry, although I completely agree it's appalling to see the

tanks rolling into Ukraine. It is also a war that's being fought in the information space, it's being fought in the court of international public opinion, and I think it was very significant at the UN Security Council, not a single country voted with Russia. They have become an international pariah, they're being cut out of the international system, so we need to be fighting on all fronts. But certainly, I agree with your point about conventional weaponry. We cannot ignore that as well.

SR: Because you look at our army, and it's not just the United Kingdom, obviously, it's western countries across the board, but you look at what is happening here, our army has now been reduced to its smallest size since 1714. We're cutting the number of tanks we have, we're reducing the number of planes, defence spending is falling by 0.4% over this parliament. Are we now living in a world where we actually do now need to rethink and spend more money on a bigger army?

A: We have increased our contributions to NATO. In fact what we need to see is we need to see others step up. And I think we're seeing a recognition of that across Europe. It's very significant that Germany has changed its position on supplying weaponry into Ukraine. I think everybody realises how serious this fight for freedom and democracy is. And we will need to do more. We will need to spend more and we will need to provide more support. We're already bolstering the eastern flank, so we've doubled our troop numbers into Estonia; we're providing more Naval support, we're supplying more air support. But the reality is that there has been, I'm afraid to say complacency, on the part of the west over the past 20 years on the threat that Russia poses. And in particular on the threat that Vladimir Putin poses. That is why you've seen such a strong change in position. That's why you've seen such huge western unity which I don't think Vladimir Putin expected and that is why the sanctions that we announced last night are not the end of it. There will be more sanctions, there will be tougher sanctions, we will keep tightening the ratchet on this regime.

SR: But how effective and how quickly are these sanctions going to take hold? The government sanctions against Russian oligarchs are being held up by London law firms. You said that in a briefing to MPs.

LT: What I've said is that we have a hit list of oligarchs that we are targeting, but we need to make sure that the legal case is right, so we are doing them one by one and every few weeks we will release more oligarchs from our hit list, we will sanction them and we will hit them. We've already targeted in the last week over a hundred companies and individuals. We're also freezing bank assets which is incredibly important.

SR: And are they being held up by London law firms? Are they making it more difficult?

LT: In any case when you sanction an individual you need to make sure there's a correct legal case in place. We have tripled the number of people working in our sanctions unit in the Foreign Office, we are working through all the cases. We need to make sure they're legally watertight. Next week we'll be introducing legislation on the Economic Crime Bill, we'll be introducing legislation to freeze bank assets. We are taking apart every bit of the Russian system. Whether it's the funding, whether it's the support for oil and gas, whether it's the technology that Vladimir Putin is using for his appalling war machine, we are targeting all of that and we are doing it as fast as we can.

SR: The problem is that this is all for a lot of people, too late and these sanctions will take a long time to kick in and the real problem is we've been warned about this. You've been warned about this for a very long time and you've known that President Putin is a threat and this is the first time that you have seriously tried to do anything about it.

LT: Well that is not true. In December last year we said, and this is the G7 –

SR: That's recent. I'm talking over years.

LT: Well, what I'm saying is since we saw the build up on the Ukrainian border and we had been warning about this for months, the G7 was very clear there would be severe costs in the event of an invasion. The minute that invasion has taken place, those severe costs have been put in place. Those are unprecedented sanctions. And what's very important is the G7 is united. For the first time ever Japan has put sanctions on Russia. For the first time ever we are cutting off access to the Swift system. We will be doing more. We will be working to reduce dependency on oil and gas and the G7 represents more than 50% of the global economy. We're using the full economic might of the G7 to target the Russian regime. And you're right, Sophie, not enough was done before. Not enough was done before. And that is why we are redoubling our efforts. We will not rest until we have stopped Putin. That is the very clear aim. Putin must fail, that is what we the United Kingdom say, and that is what our allies across the G7 are saying.

SR: Just be honest as well with people here, you need to be honest. The impact it will have. It is going to hit people hard here economically, isn't it? The cost of living is going to rise even more?

LT: That is correct. That is correct. But the pain that we will face in the United Kingdom is nothing like the pain that people in Ukraine are currently facing. They're having to take up arms in the face of an appalling dictator using untold weapons on their country. And that is what we have to remember. And we aren't just fighting for the people of Ukraine and the sovereignty of Ukraine, we're fighting for freedom and democracy and that has a very high cost for us. So it is right that we are prepared to take an economic hit because the alternative of allowing Putin to succeed will be far worse for peace and democracy across Europe.

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