FOREF: The Real Humanitarian

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INTERVIEW: The Portrait of a Real Humanitarian: Why Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Landmark Interview Is Required Viewing

In a recent, widely publicized meeting in Moscow, Steve Witkoff made the extraordinary claim that Vladimir Putin—a dictator whose regime has overseen decades of merciless conquest—is a "humanitarian." To anyone anchored in reality, the statement is beyond absurd. Putin's record is defined by bloody, indiscriminate wars across Chechnya, Syria, Georgia, and now Ukraine. It is a record marked by the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, hospitals, and playgrounds, alongside the forced deportation and kidnapping of thousands of Ukrainian children. To brand a dictator who inflicts unspeakable suffering on defenseless humans, elderly citizens, and sick children a "humanitarian"—simply because he released a single American prisoner for geopolitical leverage—is a grotesque distortion of basic human morality.

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If you want to see what a *real* humanitarian looks like, look no further than President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's recent, landmark sit-down on *The Diary Of A CEO* with Steven Bartlett.

This conversation stands, without exaggeration, as the single best, most compelling, and most personal interview ever given by an acting head of state. It provides a rare, unvarnished window into the soul of a leader enduring an unthinkable weight. Throughout the nearly two-hour discussion, Zelenskyy speaks in English that is nearly excellent—a tremendous, inspiring improvement over recent years that underscores his relentless work ethic and determination to connect directly with the democratic world. You simply never hear an interview like this from a sitting president: deeply personal, devastatingly

honest, and filled with vulnerable candor. With this essay, the goal is to draw ultimate attention to this historic moment and make one thing undeniably clear: Zelenskyy is the real humanitarian standing on the frontlines of history.

The Weight of Leadership: "I Don't Sleep"

From the opening moments, Bartlett establishes an intimate, grounded tone, asking Zelenskyy how he is truly doing on a deeply personal level. Zelenskyy does not hide behind canned political soundbites. His response is immediate, raw, and visible in his eyes:

> ***"Well, it's hard... I'll be honest. I uh don't sleep. It's a huge, terrifying pain that I wouldn't wish on anyone."***



The face of leadership transformed by war: Volodymyr Zelenskyy in formal attire prior to the full-scale invasion (left), contrasted with his visible grief and resolve during a visit to the liberated, war-torn streets of Bucha (right)...

When pressed on the human toll of guiding a nation through almost five years of full-scale war, Zelenskyy reveals that eight hours of continuous sleep has become a distant, alien concept. Every single night, using modern technology, he stays up messaging and coordinating with air defense operators, constantly making real-time decisions to pull defense systems from one region to another as Russian drones and missiles rain down on sleeping families.

Yet, when asked about his emotional state, Zelenskyy steadfastly refuses to adopt the stoic, unfeeling facade expected of autocratic warlords. Instead, he openly shares the exact moment that breaks his heart completely—presenting the Hero of Ukraine honor posthumously to grieving parents who have lost their sons and daughters in battle:

> ***"Imagine you give an award to a father whose very strong hand you can feel... and he just quietly says to you, 'Can we hug?'... I cease to exist in that moment... it's not pain, it's something terrible... I'm a human being. I'm not ashamed to be who I am. I'm not the strongest man in the world. I try to set an example, but I'm definitely not a perfect person."***

This raw emotional vulnerability is the very definition of true humanitarianism. A real humanitarian is not someone who feels no pain, but someone who embraces their shared humanity, refuses to hide their tears, and feels the crushing weight of every single lost life.

Family, Love, and Grounding Amidst Chaos

Amidst the devastation of war, Bartlett asks what keeps the Ukrainian president grounded and moving forward. Zelenskyy speaks with striking warmth about his children, explaining that he strives to set a living example of courage, strength, and authenticity for them every single day. He emphasizes that while one must be brave, one should never pretend to be immune to pain, as genuine emotional depth is where true human strength lies.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy and First Lady Olena Zelenska holding hands in Kyiv. In his sit-down with Steven Bartlett, Zelenskyy spoke candidly about his simple dream to end the war and reclaim a normal life with his wife and children.
He also touches movingly on his wife, Olena, and their life together. Speaking of his family, he shares that his simple, overarching dream is to finally end the war so he can re-learn how to live a normal life alongside his wife and children:

> ***"You realize that you want to be with your kids, with your wife. Generally, you just want to end the war and get a little bit of a life."***

In another deeply tender moment, Zelenskyy chuckles as he speaks about his mother, who still calls him every single day without fail, worrying about his safety like any mother would:

> ***"Every single day... Her first question is, 'Did you actually pick up?'... I look, God, 12 missed calls. 'Mom, I'm working,' I tell her... She'll call you all day long until I pick up... She asks, 'How are you feeling... When is Putin going to end the war?' And I say, 'Mom, we're doing everything we can.'"***

These quiet, intimate revelations showcase a leader whose actions are fundamentally anchored in love, family, and duty—a stark contrast to the insulated, paranoid isolation of the autocrat sitting in the Kremlin.



A playful pre-war moment with the Zelenskyy family. "My kids keep me grounded very much... I want to set an example. I want them to be proud of me," Zelenskyy shared during the interview.

The Horror of Bucha and the Price of Compromise

One of the most intense and harrowing excerpts of the interview occurs when Zelenskyy recounts visiting Bucha immediately after Ukrainian forces liberated the town. He describes how his entire worldview shifted permanently upon witnessing hundreds of civilians—tortured, hands tied behind their backs, executed, and dumped into mass graves:

> ***"Bucha... that was a terrible day because I stood there. I had never seen people's bodies just scattered on the street in my entire life... An elderly man who survived the occupation of Bucha during World War II said the fascists never treated people like that... You want revenge... Evil like that, a devil like that, came in and butchered people like chopped meat."***

Zelenskyy forcefully explains that when international figures casually call on Ukraine to make sweeping territorial concessions or simply "forgive and move on," they fundamentally fail to understand the horrific human trauma inflicted on the population. A ceasefire, he points out, is already a monumental compromise for millions of citizens whose children and parents were tortured and murdered. For peace to be durable and real, there must be a path to genuine justice.

Dismantling Imperial Myths

Zelenskyy also delivers a masterclass in historical clarity, completely dismantling Kremlin propaganda regarding "fascism" in Ukraine. Sharing his own family history, he notes that his grandfather fought the Nazis from start to finish in World War II, losing several brothers to Nazi atrocities. For Russia to accuse a nation whose entire territory was occupied and ravaged during World War II—and whose elected president is Jewish—of "fascism" is as bizarre as it is despicable.

He clearly outlines Putin's real driver: a deep-seated Soviet nostalgia and an imperial ambition to rebuild a fallen empire by erasing Ukrainian statehood. Empires, Zelenskyy observes, survive solely on autocracy, tyranny, and information vacuums, while free nations thrive on self-determination, culture, and open connection to the world.

The Real Humanitarian vs. The Autocrat

When we compare Steve Witkoff's absurd praising of Putin with the actual reality on the ground, the contrast could not be starker:

- **Vladimir Putin** wages war on defenseless populations, targets civilian power grids in freezing winters, kidnaps thousands of children, and views human beings as disposable fuel for imperial conquest.
- **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** remains with his people under active bombardment, famously rejecting evacuation with the iconic words *"I need ammunition, not a ride,"* grieves openly alongside his citizens, draws strength from his family, and works tirelessly to protect innocent lives.

This interview on *The Diary Of A CEO* is far more than a media appearance; it is a vital historic document of human resilience, moral clarity, and leadership under fire. Zelenskyy's incredible command of English allows his raw emotion, quick wit, and profound empathy to speak directly to the hearts of millions worldwide.

If you watch only one interview this year, make it this one. It will remind you what true humanitarianism looks like—and why the defense of human dignity remains the most urgent fight of our time.

Primary Source & Interview

- **The Diary Of A CEO (Steven Bartlett):** Watch / Listen on YouTube – *President Zelenskyy: It's Time To Tell You The Truth About This War!*

Official Statements & Profiles

- **Official Website of the President of Ukraine:** president.gov.ua – Official communications, speeches, and updates from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
- **Olena Zelenska Foundation:** zelenska-foundation.org – Information on humanitarian initiatives, healthcare, education, and child support led by First Lady Olena Zelenska.

Background & Context

- **United Nations Human Rights Council (OHCHR):** ohchr.org/en/countries/ukraine – Reports on civilian casualties, human rights violations, and investigations into atrocities in places like Bucha and Mariupol.
- **International Criminal Court (ICC):** icc-cpi.int – Updates regarding arrest warrants and international law investigations related to the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine.

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Addressing Current Misconceptions About Family Federation by Reviewing Lessons from the Past

Tuesday, October 27, 2026: 2:00-3:30 PM EDT



Dr. Thomas Ward

Professor of Peace and Development Studies: HJI Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership



Peter Zoehrer

Co-Founder, FOREF Europe, Global IMAP Coordinator



Peter Ross

Attorney



Ray Lipowcan

Moderator: Executive Director, UPF, Western Pennsylvania

Our October webinar will explore the public's misconceptions of the Family Federation that have often been affected by media misrepresentation. The panelists will discuss what has worked in the past in educating the media and consider whether or not those approaches remain valid today.

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