



**John Mearsheimer—Leading International Relations Scholar—  
On US Power & the Darkness Ahead for Ukraine**

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**GG:** Good evening, it's Friday, June 30th, welcome to a new episode of System Update, our live Nightly show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. Eastern, exclusively here on Rumble, the free speech alternative to YouTube. Back in 2002 and 2003, the debate over whether to invade the war in Iraq was marked by all sorts of dissent, repression techniques. The marginalisation of critics was so extreme that even the corporate outlets responsible for them were forced to issue mea culpas. In 2004, The New York Times issued a now notorious editor's note apologising for their one sided coverage over the debate over whether to invade Iraq. Fuelled by an uncritical acceptance of unverified claims from the US intelligence community. Quote: "Looking back", said the paper of record, "we wish we'd been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged or failed to emerge."

Also, in 2004 the Washington Post, media critic Howard Kurtz published a scathing critique of his own paper's one sided coverage of Iraq and titled, quote, "The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story Prewar Articles Questioning Threat Often Didn't Make Front Page". Kurtz wrote, quote, "Days before the Iraq war began, veteran Washington Post reporter Walter Pincus put together a story questioning whether the Bush administration had proof that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction. But he ran into resistance from the paper's editors, and his piece ran only after assistant managing editor Bob Woodward, who was researching a book about the drive toward war, quote, 'helped sell the story', Pincus recalled. "Without him, it would have been a tough time getting into the paper". Even so, Kurtz said, the article was relegated to Page A17. Quote, "'We did our job but we didn't do enough, and I blame myself mightily for not pushing harder', Woodward said in an interview. 'We should have warned readers we had information that the basis for this was shakier' than widely believed. 'Those are exactly the kind of statements that should be published on the front page". But the repression surrounding dissent toward the US war in Ukraine now makes the debate over the Iraq war the balanced open and free.

When it comes to Ukraine, even the most accomplished scholars with the most impressive academic pedigrees have been almost entirely marginalised, excluded from corporate media outlets, where it rarely, if ever, allows any dissent to Biden's proxy war in the US to be aired. That includes, in fact, one of the leading examples is our guest tonight, John Mearsheimer, the longtime R. Wendell Harrison distinguished service professor of international relations at the University of Chicago, whom has been heralded for a long time by academic journals as one of the most influential scholars in his field. Sometimes this repression of dissent over Ukraine has taken the form of brute repression. Shortly after the invasion by Russia, the EU made it illegal, a crime, to provide a platform to any state media from Russia. Big tech has routinely censored those who express dissenting views about the prevailing Western narrative on the war. But as is the case for Professor Mearsheimer and so many others who have a divergent perspective on this war, they are simply ignored, denied access to major corporate outlets, except occasionally to be accused of being Russian agents because those corporate outlets opt instead to have a virtually dissent free discourse that pretends that everyone knowledgeable supports the war policy of Biden in the EU when that is far from the truth.

Independent media on platforms devoted to free speech such as Rumble is one of the few instruments we now have for undermining this dissent suppression. We are for that reason and so many others, genuinely delighted to show you this in-depth discussion of the war in Ukraine and the US role in the world more broadly, which we recorded with Professor Mearsheimer earlier today. He is clearly one of the most informed and articulate exponents of US foreign policy and the critique he offers of the US narrative about Ukraine and the US war policy itself is vital to be heard regardless of your views on the war. As a reminder, System Update is also available in podcast form. We are available on Spotify, Apple and every major podcasting platform where you can listen to the shows 12 hours after they first aired here live on Rumble. And if you write a review each episode, it helps spread the visibility of the program. As a programming note, we will be off on Monday and Tuesday night for the July 4th holiday, then back on Wednesday night of next week at our regular time at 7 p.m.. Here is our interview with Professor Mearsheimer, which we genuinely found very enlightening, and we hope you do as well.

**GG:** Professor Mearsheimer, thank you so much for making your debut appearance on System Update. It's been a long time I've been hoping to talk to you and we are really thrilled you were able to make the time to do it. Thanks so much.

**John Mearsheimer (JM):** My pleasure, Glenn.

**GG:** So before we get into the specifics of this new article that you wrote this week and posted on your Substack – it's really like an academic paper about the war in Ukraine, its history, where it's going – that's entitled: The Darkness Ahead: Where the Ukraine War is headed. And we're going to put the link up where people can read that and I hope they will. I want to ask you some specific questions about the substance. But before we get into that,

clearly the foreign policy priority of the United States, of the Pentagon, the CIA, I think the West generally, is this war in Ukraine. And as a result, to me, it seems like any prominent people who are standing it up and objecting to the policy or trying to in some way bring a perspective other than the prevailing narrative, are really the subject of lots of personal attacks, not just engagement on the merits, but accusations that you are a Kremlin sympathiser or a Kremlin agent. I've certainly seen that about myself. I've seen that about you. You've been involved in controversies before, like your book, *The Israel Lobby*, that also generated a great amount of controversy. And I'm wondering if you could talk about, especially comparatively, what the types of attacks are from bringing a different perspective as you're doing on this war versus other controversies in which you've been involved in the past.

**JM:** Well, if you were to compare the controversy surrounding the Israel lobby with the controversy surrounding the Ukraine war, there's a fundamental difference. And that is that in the case of the lobby, basically what happened is that we were attacked around the clock. It was just attack, attack, attack. In the case of Ukraine, there is definitely an element of attack. And we are, of course, people on our side accused of being Kremlin stooges and so forth and so on. But I think there's also a very important dimension to this involving them, ignoring us, freezing us out. In other words, I don't get to opine in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* or *The Wall Street Journal*. I don't get invited on National Public Radio and so forth and so on. So there's a very powerful tendency to attack for sure, but there's also a very powerful tendency to ignore us. And that was not the case with the lobby. With regard to the lobby, we were attacked 24/7.

**GG:** Yeah, I remember there was no sort of intention for that book. The last, let's say, major war that the United States and its Western allies fought and it wasn't nearly as unified – the West wasn't – but that was the war in Iraq. When I started writing about politics in 2005, it was largely a reaction to what I considered the repressive climate that existed around the war, around the war on terror generally and the idea that you could use independent media to bring a different perspective. I feel like even then, though, as kind of closed off and homogenised that the debate was, there was a fair amount of dissent about whether we should go into Iraq, about the neoconservatives who were leading the way in a way I feel like is not the case now. And I think you put your finger on it, that there's this tactic not necessarily even to attack so much as just to ignore, to exclude, to marginalise, to make sure that this perspective, even though it's advocated by a lot of people with a lot of impressive scholarly credentials like yourself, just doesn't get heard. How do you compare that kind of stranglehold around the narrative in the West or in the United States, at least regarding the invasion of Iraq versus this war in Ukraine?

**JM:** Well, I think I'm in a good position to answer that question, because Steve Walt and I were two of the most prominent opponents of the 2003 Iraq war. Along with Shibley Telhami we arranged for a big ad opposing the war to be put in *The New York Times* before the war

happened. And we were very active. So I know that case very well. And of course, I know the Ukraine case. I think your description is on the money and I think it was easier to have your voice heard during the run up to the Iraq war than it is now with the Ukraine war. Steven and I had an op ed in The New York Times, as I said, we had a piece in Foreign Policy and there were a number of places where we were invited to give thoughts on the subject. So you could get your voice heard. It was somewhat difficult for sure because the mainstream media was behind the war in Iraq, just as it's behind Ukraine in its war with Russia. But I've never seen anything quite like this. It's really, truly amazing the extent to which the discourse has been shut down.

**GG:** It is really amazing. Let me just ask one more question on this kind of general meta topic before we get into the details of your article and other issues about the war itself, which is: most people, according to polling data, even people who supported the war in Iraq initially have come to regard it as a gigantic mistake, if not something worse, as a moral atrocity, but certainly something that we were deceived into as a country. That's the consensus. Lots of prominent politicians like Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, have had to apologise for their initial support for that war, their vote to authorise military force. And yet what seems to be the case is that the people who are not marginalised, who have full access to all of those media outlets – you just described yourself being excluded from The New York Times, CNN, places like that – almost entirely when it comes to hearing about the war in Ukraine, we're hearing from those exact same people who are the advocates of the war in Iraq. It doesn't seem at all like having advocated for this war that most people regard as a huge mistake, if not worse, has dented their credibility any way. Quite the contrary. They seem to have become even more influential on the questions of war when it comes to Iraq and other wars as well. And I'm wondering how you react to that, what you make of that in terms of what it says about establishment discourse, that there seems to be no accountability for those kinds of generously errors of great magnitude?

**JM:** Yeah, I would agree completely. There is no accountability in the American system anymore, but I would contrast it with the Vietnam War. There have been three wars in my lifetime that I think were tragic mistakes, where there was much enthusiasm at the beginning for those wars. One was Vietnam, two was Iraq, Iraq 2003 and then the third one, of course, is Ukraine. And after Vietnam went south, the people who were in the driver's seat when we went into that war and big proponents of going into Vietnam in the media were all punished. There's no question about it, they paid a price. Because there was quite a bit of accountability in the American system back then. But over time, that accountability has disappeared. And you have a situation where many of the people who were dead wrong about Iraq before 2003 are now opining about Ukraine and people listen to them and indeed, they basically dominate the airwaves.

**GG:** And I just wanted to delve a little bit more into that for a second, which is, I mean, it doesn't strike me as a coincidence that you are against the war in Iraq, the invasion of Iraq

before we did it. As you say, Professor Walt and yourself are very vocal about that fact. The co-author with whom you also wrote *The Israel Lobby*, and now almost everybody who was in favour of that invasion of Iraq is also now behind the US proxy war in Ukraine completely supports President Biden's view; if anything, wants him to do even more. There's now reports we might send cluster bombs to Ukraine, even though all over the world there are conventions deeming them illegal and we often object to them as war crimes when used by others. Is there a connection between, on the one hand, your opposition to the invasion of Iraq and your view that at least the prevailing narrative in the case of Ukraine is misguided? And then on the other hand, the fact that so many people, almost everybody who supported the invasion of Iraq also, are very hawkish when it comes to the proxy war in Ukraine. Is there some connective tissue ideologically that explains those two positions aligning in the way they do?

**JM:** Well, to talk about the proponents of the Iraq war and the proponents of supporting Iraq, I think basically what you have here are a large group of people who are either liberal internationalists or neo conservatives who have great faith in the United States and things the United States has a responsibility, a strategic responsibility and a moral responsibility to basically run the world. And they're not shy about using military force to achieve their ends. I believe that there are real limits to what you can do with military force. I thought the idea that you could go into Iraq, conquer the country, and do major league social engineering was delusional. But these people think that, you know, military power really buys you lots of influence and you can do lots of social engineering. So they supported the war. And then when it came to the Ukraine crisis, people like me who were basically realists, argued that if you run a military alliance like NATO, that was a mortal foe of the Soviet Union during the Cold War up to Russia's borders, you're going to cause a great deal of trouble. The Russians are not going to tolerate that. From my perspective, that sort of balance of power politics, one o one, or realism one o one, but most of the proponents of supporting Ukraine and most of the proponents of pushing NATO to include countries like Ukraine and Georgia don't believe in balance of power or logic. They have a liberal worldview. They think that the United States is a benign hegemon. They think that everybody should understand that, and they think that the social engineering that we're doing in places like Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine, are all for the good and that the Russians should realise that.

I remember I once had a conversation with Mike McFaul about this, and McFaul told me that when he was ambassador to the Soviet Union, that he told Putin on a number of occasions that he had nothing to worry about when it came to NATO expansion because the United States was basically a benign hegemon. I told him that I was certain that that was not the way we would see it, and they would see NATO as a threat. And he, of course, told me that Putin didn't agree with his basic logic, but nevertheless, we pushed forward with NATO expansion. And the end result is this disaster that is now taking place in Ukraine and where there appears to be no end in sight. So I think what I'm seeing here, Glenn, is that I have a fundamentally different view of how the world works. I believe that nationalism is a remarkably powerful

force, and any country that gets in the business of social engineering is going to get into real trouble. And I also believe that realist logic or balance of power or logic explains a lot about how great powers behave. And I think when you're dealing with countries like Russia and China, you have to be really careful as to how far you push them because they will lash back at you if you overstep your bounds.

**GG:** What I find amazing about that debate is in a vacuum in the abstract, one may find it convincing that the United States is such a powerful military, that we're by far the strongest military in the history of the world, that we're so well intentioned because we're a democracy at home and we give everybody rights. And we are a country that has been a constitutional republic for so long. And so the combination of our strength and our benign intentions or benevolent intentions means that that vision could be fulfilled. That might be appealing in the abstract. The problem is, for that view, we have so many examples from Vietnam, Iraq, Syria and Libya and Afghanistan, where we spent 20 years only to watch the Taliban just waltz right back in like we were never there in the first place that the futility that you're describing is very real. That we don't actually have the power to fix or change very complicated countries that we don't understand while on the other side of the world. Why do you think those examples that most people have lived through, we're not talking about 70 years ago or 40 years ago, but in the last 20 years that series of wars all just about in the same rationale, have ended up as abject failures? And yet somehow the argument gets to continuously be sold to people willing to accept that. Why is that?

**JM:** Look, there are two things going on here. First of all, I think in the United States today and certainly inside the foreign policy establishment, people don't recognise that other countries have their own views on what is the best political system. Other countries believe in the concept of sovereignty. They believe in the concept of self-determination. And they recoil at the idea of the United States coming into their country and telling them what kind of political system they should have, what kind of values that they should have, right? You remember how the United States recoiled at the idea that the Russians may be interfering in our election. Of course, this was all a hoax, but many Americans thought it was true and they recoiled at the idea that the Russians were interfering in their politics, that the Russians were violating our sovereignty. Well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, and other countries don't want us telling them what kind of political system they should have. The Russians and the Chinese don't want a colour revolution in Moscow and Beijing, respectively, and most American elites find it difficult to comprehend that others don't appreciate the fact that we have found the approved solution and that they should get along with the program. So that's problem number one.

Problem number two has to do with the limits of military force. Most of the people who are in the American elite have never been in the military in their lifetime. And the end result is they don't have a healthy appreciation of what a blunt instrument it is and what the limits are of what it can do, especially if it gets into the business of social engineering. And therefore,

they push forward these schemes that involve the US military trying to do magical things. Well, the US military is not suited to do the magical things that they want it to do. The idea that you can go into a country like Vietnam or you can go into a country like Iraq and you can do nation building with American G.I.s is a laughable argument. There are just real limits to what you can do with military power. And this is a lesson that I don't think has been learned by the foreign policy establishment. And the end result is that we go from one escapade to another and we leave behind a long trail of failed policy initiatives.

**GG:** We I want to talk about the cost of this war to Americans, to the United States, because one obvious difference, and I think nontrivial difference between the Vietnam War and the Iraq war, on the one hand, in the war in Ukraine, at least so far, is that 60,000 American lives were lost in the Vietnam War. Thousands of American lives were lost in the war in Iraq as well as in Afghanistan. At least so far, there are no combat troops on the ground in Ukraine. There probably are boots on the ground, but just not combat boots. But there don't seem to be many, if any, American casualties in the Russia Ukraine war thus far, despite how involved we are there. And that creates a perception, I think, that the cost is not really significant. Yes, we're spending \$100 billion or so and counting on what's been authorised, but I want to ask you about the cost beyond just the financial cost, in particular the reaction of the rest of the world to the American and what it's doing to the American standing.

I don't know if you saw that there was a speech, I think about ten days ago by Fiona Hill, who's a long time national security adviser and D.C. insider, a super hawk on Russia and China. She was aligned with John Bolton and the Trump administration, and she gave a speech warning Western elites that even though she doesn't agree with it, that the rest of the world, what we used to call the rest of the world, that is now basically the world is uniting against this idea that the United States can just go everywhere and try and dictate wars with its superior national force, and in particular the uniting in a lot of ways behind China. Here in Brazil, for example, that has a history of very harmful US interference that people to this day resent, President Lula – Brazil is the sixth largest country in the world – talks often about how he dreams of Dollarisation. He is clearly trying to bring Brazil closer to China and away from the US. China was able to march into the region we used to dominate in the Middle East while we're focussed on Ukraine and forge this peace deal between the Saudis and the Iranians without us. All throughout Africa, the same thing. So can you talk about what you were saying, you're describing this resentment that other people in the world have. For a long time that resentment couldn't express itself because we were so dominant that it really didn't matter how much they resented us. What is now the effect on US standing and what are the other costs to Americans from this proxy war that we're seemingly engaged in without end?

**JM:** Well, let me just tell you first, Glenn, what I think is happening here. I think two things are happening. One is that there has been a major shift in the global balance of power. As you said, for a long time we were just so powerful we could think that we could run around the world dictating the way people should behave. That world has gone away. The unipolar

moment has given way to multipolarity. And we now have three great powers in the system, not only the United States, but also China and Russia. So the fact that the global balance of power has shifted diminishes their influence.

But the second thing is, when you talk about soft power, our ability to use our ideology to influence people in positive ways to try and sell liberal democracy in subtle ways to portray the United States as a benign force in the world, we used to be very good at that, and we've lost that skill [inaudible] ways. And the end result is that we look very heavy handed. People all over the planet think that the United States behaves like a thug most of the time. So you have these two factors at work here. One is that in terms of hard power, the balance has shifted against us. And two, in terms of soft power, we don't look very good at all. So this has caused us all sorts of problems. And one of the consequences you ask for the United States, the consequences are quite serious here. If you look at what's happening in the Middle East, all sorts of countries are now cosying up to the Chinese and to the Russians. And they're basically giving the United States the finger when it asks for assistance. The Saudis have basically rejected a number of important pleas that President Biden has made to them regarding oil production. And the Saudis are cosying up to the Chinese. We're beginning to lose influence in all sorts of places at a time where we really need influence. So there are real costs associated with the fact that we behave in such a heavy handed way. There are real costs associated with the fact that the United States had sanctions on well over 50% of the countries in the world. Eventually, this is going to come back to bite in the hiney, and that's what's happening here.

**GG:** So let me ask you about your article and some of the specific claims of it. It's entitled, *The Darkness Ahead: Where the Ukraine War is Headed*. And that title very vividly signifies the kind of pessimism that pervades your article, although I hope everybody will read it despite that kind of grim picture that you painted. And one of the principal arguments you make is that you say: "First, is a meaningful peace agreement possible? My answer is no." Now, obviously, when a war like this, it's now almost a full year and a half that is ongoing, not counting what happened before 2022 in February when the Russians invaded, when there was still kind of this lower level conflict since at least 2014 between these separatists of eastern Ukraine and the central Kiev government backed by east and west. But in terms of just this war itself, we're now almost a year and a half into it. And usually people will start wondering, especially when it seems to be some kind of a stalemate or like there's no military victory for a long time into the future, they start asking about diplomacy. And there hasn't seemed to be any efforts toward that meaningfully. And you're here to say a meaningful peace agreement is now not possible. Why isn't it?

**JM:** Well, there are two sets of reasons. First of all, at a very general level, it's important to understand that Russia views what's going on in Ukraine and what the United States is doing as an existential threat. On the other hand, the Ukrainians and the United States both view what Russia is doing in Ukraine as an existential threat. And when you have a situation where



the two rival sides, the Russians on one side and the Ukrainians and the United States on the other, view the rival as an existential threat and are committed to defeating that rival it's very hard to see how you can work out a deal short of one side defeating the other side. So that's point number one. Point number two is that there are two issues that are of immense importance that you are not going to be able to get agreement on, in my opinion. The first is territory. And the second is the issue of Ukrainian neutrality. First, on territory, the Russians have now conquered about 23% of Ukraine as it existed before the crisis started in 2014. So the Russians have taken about 23% of Ukraine and they're intending to take more territory. The Russians are not going to give back that territory. They have made that very clear. And in fact, they have annexed the 23% that they have now taken. They have made it part of Russia and said it's not going back to Ukraine. Ukraine says we want that territory back and we won't stop fighting until the territory is returned to us. You can certainly understand the Ukrainian position, but you can understand the Russian position as well. So the question is, how do you square that circle? And the answer is you don't.

Then the next big issue is the issue of neutrality. Really, what this war is all about is that the Russians did not want Ukraine to be a Western bulwark on Russia's border. Most importantly, the Russians did not want Ukraine in NATO. They wanted Ukraine to be neutral. Well, Ukraine doesn't want to be neutral. Ukraine wants to be in NATO. And at this point in time and for the foreseeable future, Ukraine is joined at the hip with the West. So it's got no interest whatsoever in neutrality. And from the Russian perspective, neutrality is essential. The Russians will not accept Ukraine in NATO. So when you take these two particular issues, the territory issue and the neutrality issue and you marry them together with the fact that you have two rivals here that both view the other side as an existential threat that has to be defeated, I think it's almost impossible to imagine how you're going to get some sort of diplomatic deal.

**GG:** Here's what I genuinely don't understand, and I'd like to hear your insight into this, which is your views for a long time, where kind of the prevailing views in Washington with regard to the question of Ukraine and Russia. There's that memo that we've now all seen written by the current CIA director, Bill Burns, in 2008, when the Bush administration was talking about the possibility of expanding NATO up to the Russian border, including Ukraine. That was something Condoleezza Rice was talking about. And he wrote a memo, I believe, to Condoleezza Rice, in which he said, Look, I've spent a lot of time in Moscow, and it isn't just Putin and his loyalists, but even anti-Putin liberals for every single person in Russian politics, regardless of where they fall on the spectrum, NATO membership for Ukraine is a red line. That is something that if we even think about doing, we will absolutely provoke the Russians into a military conflict. And it's insane for us to do because we have no sufficient interest in Ukraine to justify that kind of a risk of confrontation with Russia directly or indirectly.

President Obama, every time he was pressed by neocons, including on the way out in 2016 when he was interviewed by Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor in chief of The Atlantic, who

complained that he didn't do more to confront the Kremlin in places like Syria and even in Ukraine, where he didn't want to flood Ukraine with lethal weapons, President Obama's argument was, We don't have any vital interest in Ukraine, certainly not sufficient to go to war with Russia or risk a conflict with Russia over who governs eastern Ukraine. All of that is gone. There's just no more restraint at all about the idea about having Ukraine be a Western puppet, about flooding Ukraine with weapons. That's obviously something that we're doing. And now the people who have that view like you are considered so marginalised that you're basically a traitor. What changed in Washington so quickly that caused the United States to start seeing this conflict in a much different way that at least a lot of members of the foreign policy establishment used to see it for a long time.

**JM:** Just to embellish your point a bit, Glenn. If you go back to the 1990 when the big debate about whether to have any NATO expansion was conducted, there were a large number of people in the foreign policy establishment, including President Clinton's Secretary of Defence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, who were adamantly opposed to NATO expansion because they said it would lead to disaster. That it would lead to a situation like the one we're facing in Ukraine. So it's not like my view is such an unusual view; that many people argument.

And one more case or one more example, I like this and this is my favourite example is that the decision to bring Ukraine into NATO was made in April 2008 at the Bucharest NATO summit. And at that summit, both Angela Merkel, who was the German chancellor at the time and the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, were opposed to bringing Ukraine into NATO. And Angela Merkel has since said that the reason that she was opposed to bringing Ukraine into NATO is that she believed that Putin would interpret it as a declaration of war. Just think about that. Angela Merkel said she thought that NATO expansion into Ukraine would be interpreted by Putin as a declaration of war, which of course, is what happened. But what Angela Merkel was saying and what all of those individuals who opposed NATO expansion in the 1990s were saying, is the same thing I've been saying since 2014. But as your question points out, something has happened to change things. And what's happened is that we're now in this war.

And the big question on the table that will be the big question moving forward is who has blood on their hands? In other words, the question is who is responsible for this disaster? And my view is and I believe this is Angela Merkel's view and I believe this is the view of the people in the 1990s who were saying it would lead to disaster, our view is that it's the foreign policy establishment that pushed NATO expansion to include Ukraine that is responsible for this disaster that has blood on its hands. They don't want to hear that argument; they, meaning people in the foreign policy establishment. And of course, they view me as a mortal enemy because I am, in effect, saying they are responsible for this disaster. But the fact is that, in my opinion, as time goes by, more and more people will recognise that the foreign policy establishment of the United States, to include virtually every administration since the Clinton

administration, is responsible for producing what's going on in Ukraine today.

**GG:** Yeah, I mean, it's the same history with all of these conflicts where they begin and they get 70% of Americans and the establishment wings of all parties on board. And what then? However long, two years, five years, ten years, people come to regard it as, oh, it's a huge mistake. We shouldn't have done it. And then it's on to the next war. And that, I agree, will be the trajectory here. I just want to push a little bit more on the reason for this change in perspective. Like I said, it was President Obama as late as 2016 saying we have no vital interests in Russia. It's insane to go to risk war with Russia over things like who governs the Donbass. Something has changed.

My hypothesis and I'm interested in your view, is that one of the major reasons is that you alluded to Russiagate earlier, and one of the reasons I was so concerned about it and opposed to Russiagate from the beginning wasn't just because it was a baseless hoax that came from the CIA against the Trump administration that they regarded as enemy. My much bigger concern was the geopolitical implications that it was creating this atmosphere in Washington where no one could even speak to Russian officials without being suspected of some kind of disloyalty or treason. Michael Flynn almost went to prison because he picked up the phone before he became the national security advisor and called the Russian ambassador. And it created this climate where Americans were feeding on this anti-Russian hatred over the fact that they were told that the reason Hillary Clinton lost and Donald Trump won was because of Putin in the Kremlin. Now, maybe it's a chicken and egg thing. Maybe the reason the intelligence community disseminated Russiagate was because they wanted to become more adversarial to Russia, and it was a way of getting public opinion on their side. Maybe Russiagate just caused this and caused a lot of Democrats to start seeing the Kremlin in a much different light. But I'm wondering A) if you think that's part of it and B) what is the cause of why just the entire foreign policy community has given up on these long standing principles that for a long time you were kind of on board, you are still on board with, but it's now nowhere to be found among them.

**JM:** I think there's no question that the whole Russiagate business and the ensuing Russophobia does matter here. And I think there's no question about that. I think that explains a good deal of the support for Ukraine. The Ukrainians are fighting against the evil Russians. And it's not only Russophobia, it's the antagonism towards Putin. I mean, I sometimes referred to it as the Hitlerization of Vladimir Putin. It's really quite remarkable the extent to which he is sort of personified as the devil incarnate. You don't have to like Vladimir Putin. You can be highly critical of him. But the idea that he's the second coming of Adolf Hitler is not a serious argument that many people make that argument. And I think that just going back to the 2016 election, I think many people believe that, especially in the Democratic Party, that there is no way that Donald Trump could have beaten Hillary Clinton without outside interference. Just impossible. Hillary Clinton was clearly [inaudible] in their mind and she sure won, period. And the fact she did not is due to outside interference and in particular to

Russian interference. And I don't think, Glenn, there is any amount of evidence that you can bring to bear to convince a lot of people who have that worldview that it just doesn't hold water, that it's wrong. And they therefore continue to loathe the Russians because they blame the Russians and Vladimir Putin in particular for Donald Trump. Even though there is no evidence to support that. Trump beat Clinton because Trump was the better candidate, whether you're like it or not. But there are lots of people who just don't accept that, and a lot of those people are fervently behind the war in Ukraine. I think the polls show that Democrats are more hawkish on Ukraine than Republicans are. You can see some cracks in the Republican edifice. You don't see hardly any cracks in the Democratic edifice. And I think that gets back to the general point that you're making about Russiagate in the 2016 election.

**GG:** Yeah. You know, one thing that's amazing is if you look back over the last 20 years, there are almost a countless number of foreign leaders that Washington decided didn't want to go to war with or otherwise undermined who had been compared to Hitler or even called worse than Hitler. That was something Michael McFaul tried not to apologise for when he was trying to say, Putin was not only as bad as Hitler, but even worse, because at least Hitler didn't kill ethnic Germans. You know, you have Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad and Moammar Gadhafi, all of whom have been accused in mainstream venues of being the new Hitler, because obviously that's a very powerful way to get Americans to support a war. I wanted to ask you about what seemed to me like it was a potential source of diplomatic resolution at the beginning.

And I don't know, it seems like it could be now, although you laid out why it may not be, but the primary dispute seemed to be over the question of whether the people of eastern Ukraine, particularly the Russian speaking ethnic Russians, were being treated in a way that their safety was being protected, their rights were being respected. And so following, say, the example of the independence of Kosovo that the United States justified on the grounds that the people of Kosovo no longer wanted to be ruled by Belgrade, they wanted to be separate from Serbia, supported the independence of Kosovo on the grounds that the majority people clearly wanted that. Why couldn't you do a referendum of a kind that everybody agrees is secure, that the UN oversees, that the US approves of in terms of the process. Find out whether the people of Crimea and these regions of eastern Donbass want to be ruled by Kiev, want to be part of Moscow, want to be semi-autonomous as an independent region, and then honour their autonomy. The way it was done for Kosovo. Why wouldn't that be a viable means of resolving the conflict?

**JM:** Well, because we now have a war that has a momentum of its own. And to go back to where we were at the beginning of the war, when it looked like there was a chance that we could strike a deal along the lines you describe, those days have passed. We're now in a situation where the Russians have annexed a huge chunk of territory in eastern Ukraine, and they have no intention of giving that up. Because their great fear is that if they give that

territory up, at some point, NATO will move into Ukraine and as a result, that territory will fall back into the hands of Ukraine and the Russians will be back to square one. The Russians don't want that to happen. The Russians want to take this territory. They want to eliminate once and for all the possibility of another civil war in the Donbass by controlling the Donbass themselves. And they also want to make sure that Ukraine ends up as a dysfunctional rump state. That's their goal now. Their goal is to wreck Ukraine so that Ukraine can't join NATO and be a meaningful threat to them.

Now, you may say, let's work out a deal. The Russians would say you can't work out a deal with the West because you can't trust the West. The West goes back on its word. We have lots of evidence of that. The only thing that the West understands is the male fist. So what we're going to do is we're going to take a big chunk of territory from Ukraine and we're going to turn Ukraine into a dysfunctional rump state. The Ukrainians, for their part, don't want to cut a deal either, because the Ukrainians, unsurprisingly, view the Russians as the devil incarnate. They don't want the Russians to have any territory, whether it's via a referendum or Russian conquest. They want all their territory back. And furthermore, they want a future security guarantee so that the Russians can't pay a return visit. And the only country or countries that can give them a viable security guarantee are the United States and NATO. And again, from a Russian point of view, that's unacceptable. So it's hard to see how you get a deal where the Ukrainians are happy and the Russians are happy at the same time. It's just too late for that. There is a possibility for that kind of deal immediately after the invasion took place. The invasion, remember, was February 24th, 2022, and shortly afterwards, the Russians and the Ukrainians were involved in diplomatic negotiations in Istanbul, and they were talking about a deal along the lines that you, Glenn, laid out. But the Americans and the British moved in and told the Ukrainians to scotch this set of negotiations, which they did, and the war went on. And we are where we are now. And my argument is it's just hard to see how you can get a diplomatic solution at this point.

**GG:** Yeah, that's why that article is pretty grim. You've referenced a few times, not just a few times, but a few times, even in this conversation, many times since, including your article that the Russians regard, you know, expansion into Ukraine or significant Western influence into Ukraine as some grave threat to their security as basically an existential threat. And you also talked about how the Russians believe the West can't be trusted. One of the big agreements that is often cited by people like yourself, even leftist scholars like Noam Chomsky, as well as, is the fact that when Germany reunified, which is obviously a huge threat to Russia, they agreed to accept that, provided that NATO don't ever move one inch east beyond Germany. And of course, NATO has repeatedly moved well east closer and closer to the Russian border. But the argument is we did do that, we did move east, NATO did move east toward the Russian border. Russia never went to war over that. What is so uniquely threatening about Ukraine from the Russian perspective that they consider this particular kind of expansion to be an existential threat?

**JM:** Well, it's right on their border and it's a huge piece of real estate. The first tranche of NATO expansion, the first major tranche, took place in 1999, and it involved Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Now, it's important to understand that the Russians scream bloody murder about that expansion, that first tranche, but they couldn't do anything about it. They were too weak in 1999. This is before Putin even becomes president. Yeltsin was the president at the time. So the Russians were too weak to do anything about it. But furthermore, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are quite a distance away from the Russian border. The second big tranche takes place in 2004, and this is when the Baltic states come in. This is when Romania comes in, Slovenia and a few other countries. The Russians again scream bloody murder, and there's not much they can do about this one either, because they're still too weak. This is 2004. Putin has been in power for four years. The Russians are coming back from the dead, but they're not all the way there yet. And furthermore, although the Baltic states are close to the Russian border, they're really not a meaningful threat in any way. Then the next big expansion is going to be Ukraine and Georgia. That's the third big trudge. And the Russians put down their foot and they say that this is not going to happen. And just to focus on Ukraine, you want to remember, Ukraine is a big piece of territory right on Russia's border. And the idea that that's going to be a NATO member and that the Americans may be able to put missiles that can hit Russia on Ukrainian territory is unacceptable. Furthermore, there's a very important naval base in Ukraine, in Sevastopol, which is located on the Crimean peninsula. And from a Russian point of view, the idea that the Crimean peninsula is going to become part of NATO and Sevastopol may become a naval base is just unthinkable. This again, is why Bill Burns, who's now the head of the CIA, said in 2008 that Ukraine was the brightest of red lights. It really was or is of major strategic importance to the Russians. It's just very different from the Baltic states. It is very different from Finland, Poland and so forth and so on. So the Russians are deeply committed to making sure that Ukraine never becomes a member of NATO, or if it does become a member, it's a dysfunctional state and basically useless for NATO.

**GG:** So the argument of people who see the world through the NATO and EU and US perspective is twofold about that argument. One is that no one was really talking about putting Ukraine in NATO. Secretary Blinken, when the Russians objected, defended this principle, this open door principle, that we're never going to close the door on anybody, that everyone has the right to join NATO if we want them to. We're not going to tell Ukraine they're forever out, but that there was no real movement to put Ukraine into NATO.

And that secondly, even if Ukraine did become a NATO state, NATO was purely a defensive alliance. It doesn't have a history of attacking anybody. All that it would do is extend its defensive umbrella over Ukraine at the Russian's feet. The Russian fear over NATO on the other side of the border was basically illusory because NATO isn't the kind of military alliance that historically has gone and invaded other countries or conquered them. What do you make of those two claims?

**JM:** Which was the first one again?

**GG:** That no one was talking about NATO expansion into Ukraine in reality.

**JM:** This is simply not true. After the Biden administration moved in the White House in January of 2021, on a number of occasions over the course of 2021 and early 2022, they made it unequivocally clear that the commitment or pledge that was made in April of 2008 in Bucharest was alive and well. They said it in a statement that was made at the Brussels summit, the Brussels NATO summit in June of 2021. They said it in a very important strategic document that was issued in November 2021. And when the Russians wrote a letter on December 17th of 2021 asking President Biden to put it in writing that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO, Tony Blinken made it clear to the Russians that we rejected that request and that Ukraine would become a part of NATO. That's part one of the story. Part two of the story is that Ukraine was effectively a de facto member of NATO by early 2022. The Russians made it clear that they appreciated this fact. We were arming the Ukrainians. We were training the Ukrainians. We were recruiting, including them in military exercises that we ran, that NATO ran. We were obsessed with interoperability between Ukraine and NATO fighting forces. So Ukraine was well on its way to developing the military capability to be a NATO member. This idea that there was no chance that Ukraine would ever become part of NATO is a fiction that proponents of the war have invented to defend themselves. It makes no sense at all. Now, with regard to your second point that NATO is a defensive alliance, it is very important.

**GG:** To be clear, that's not my point. That's the point of people who would be arguing against you. But go ahead.

**JM:** Yes, I know. Sorry.

**GG:** Go ahead.

**JM:** The second point is the argument that NATO is a defensive alliance. It's not an offense of alliance. There's a very important concept in international relations literature. It's called the security dilemma. And the security dilemma says that it's virtually impossible to distinguish between defence and offence. Whether you're talking about weapons or military strategy or military plans. So you can have an alliance that you think is defensive in nature. But if you're standing on the other side of the line, it does not look defensive in nature. It looks offensive in nature. Just let's go back to the Cold War. NATO had what I believe was a defensive strategy. But that defensive strategy involved lots of German and American and British armoured divisions and mechanised infantry divisions. And in a crisis, what we planned to do was take all those NATO's mechanised divisions and armoured divisions and move them up to the inter-German border, close to where the Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces were. Well, if you're a Warsaw Pact general or a Soviet general sitting on the other side of the inter-German

border, and all of a sudden you see German armoured divisions and American armoured divisions marching towards the border, are you going to say to yourself those are defensive divisions? I don't think so. Are you going to be able to distinguish whether they're defensive or offensive divisions? I don't think so.

The end result is what we have with regard to NATO expansion into Ukraine is a situation where on the western side we think this is a defensive move, whereas on the Russian side they think that it is an offensive move. Whereas we think we are containing the Russians, the Russians think we are encircling them. This is the security dilemma and people who make arguments about particular weapons or particular strategies or particular alliances being defensive in nature are whistling in the wind. It's a meaningless argument to make because you can't distinguish between defence and offence.

**GG:** Let me ask you about the change of government in 2014. We all have heard the secret tape recording that's no longer secret, where Victoria Nuland was speaking to the US Ambassador to Ukraine at the time, and she expressed her very strong views about who ought to be the new president now that the democratically elected leader was removed from office prior to the constitutional termination of his term. Obviously, with a lot of US aid. US senators marched to Kiev and made no secret of the fact that they were aiding this effort. And we have this little scandal that gets talked about is a domestic scandal where Hunter Biden, Joe Biden's son, was on the board of Burisma for \$50,000 a month because they wanted his help in dealing with some of their potential legal problems. And instead of paying a son of a Ukrainian official, they paid the son of an American official in recognition of that is who wielded real power in Ukraine, especially after the change in this government. How did that look, this change of government in 2014 and the subsequent influence of the United States in Ukraine to Moscow?

**JM:** Well, I think that what happened in 2014 with regard to Victoria Nuland behaviour was seen by the Russians as a mortal threat. It's important to emphasise here that the Russians are deeply concerned about NATO expansion into Ukraine for sure, but they're also concerned about EU expansion into Ukraine and they are also deeply concerned about a potential colour revolution in Ukraine. This is where Ukraine becomes a liberal democracy that's allied with the West. So if you actually think about the West strategy vis a vis Ukraine, it has three prongs to it, right? First is NATO expansion. Second is the EU expansion and three is a colour revolution. And the Russians worry about all three. And what happened with Victoria Nuland and the events in February of 2023 [2022] is that the Russians were spooked not by NATO expansion per se at the time, but by a potential colour revolution and also by EU expansion. Those were the two big issues on the table at the time, and the Russians clearly view this as a mortal threat and that's why they took Crimea. And that's why the war in effect, or the conflict in effect started back then. So those events in 2014 where the United States was involved, exactly how much involvement we had is unclear at this point in time. There's no question we were involved. But the level of involvement remains to be determined. But



the Russians saw that as a threat, and that's what precipitated the crisis in February of 2014. With regard to Joe Biden's son, I don't know enough about that to have a strong opinion. I don't know enough about what Hunter Biden did, what Joe Biden did or how the Russians view it. So I have to plead ignorance on that particular issue.

**GG:** But regardless of the specifics of that case, it is true, isn't it, that after that 24 hour change of government, the United States played a much bigger role in the internal affairs of Ukraine?

**JM:** Oh, absolutely. There's just no question about that. We're joined at the hip with the Ukrainians. Just to go back, you were talking about Barack Obama before being smart enough not to arm the Ukrainians. And you're absolutely correct. It was Donald Trump in December 2017 who decided to arm the Ukrainians. But Obama agreed to train the Ukrainians. Obama wanted to put limits on our involvement, for sure. He was a cautious man. And I think deep down inside, Obama understood that this whole situation was a potential disaster. But you don't want to underestimate the extent to which Obama moved the United States and Ukraine closer together after 2014. And again, Victoria Nuland worked for President Obama. And by the way, it was now President then Vice President Biden who handled the Ukraine portfolio in the Obama administration. I don't think most people realise that. But Obama delegated the Ukraine portfolio to Joe Biden, and Joe Biden worked closely with Victoria Nuland in 2014 and afterwards. And this is why when Joe Biden moves into the White House in January 2021, he really turns the pressure up on the Russians over Ukraine. 2021 is the year when the really big trouble starts and it's Joe Biden who is in the White House starting in January of 2021.

**GG:** There is this recent event that became very dramatic for about 14 hours or so where this Wagner group was marching on Russia after Prigozhin, its leader, had essentially vowed to wage war against the Ministry of Defence. And lots of people in the West suddenly became big fans of the Wagner group. They were insisting that this meant that there was a civil war coming to Russia, that Putin was fleeing on private jets, a lot of disinformation that got disseminated, as always. And then it was kind of crushed when Prigozhin was sent to Belarus and apologised and kind of retreated. The argument now, though, is this shows that this has severely weakened Vladimir Putin's hold on power, that he is now exposed as someone who's very vulnerable, that if you want to be a dictator, you cannot have people who stand up to you and threaten you in that way and don't pay a price. What do you make of that whole situation with the Wagner group and Prigozhin and this argument in the West that this means that Putin is now significantly weakened in terms of his hold on power in Russia.

**JM:** Well, let me preface my comments by saying we don't have a whole heck of a lot of information on what happened. And one has to be cautious not to be too categorical in making statements about what's going on here, because new evidence may come out that changes the way we think about this. But based on the evidence I see, I find it hard to believe

that this is going to weaken Putin. First of all, it appears to be the case that Prigozhin was the only senior person who was involved in this coup. There's no evidence that I see that anyone else went along with him or intended to go along with him and just did not have an opportunity to do so. He looks pretty much like a lone wolf. He was a very powerful person in the Russian context, and given all the military power he had behind him, he was in a position to cause a lot of trouble. And he did cause a lot of trouble, but he did it pretty much by himself. This is not to say he didn't have some of his own troops behind him, but it appears that he did not have any officers from the Wagner group who supported him. And there do not appear to be any other key figures in the Russian policy elite who were with him. So he's not that great a threat by himself. That's point one.

Point two is the end result of this is that the Wagner group is going to be neutralised and Prigozhin is going to be neutralised. He's no longer going to be a force. And the Wagner group is no longer going to be an independent variable in the Russian context. It's going to be brought under control of the Ministry of Defence, and this will work to Putin's advantage. Just to put this in more general terms, Glenn. When countries go to war, they usually find in the beginning that there are lots of kinks in the system because basically what you're doing is you're taking a peacetime military that is designed in part for operating in peacetime, not so much in wartime, and you're sending it off to battle. And that military is invariably going to have some big problems at first. And eventually those problems will be worked out, at least in most cases, those problems will be worked out. The system will be rationalised and the military will be more effective a year or two after the war than it was initially going into the war. I mean, if you look at the Red Army when it was attacked on June 22nd, 1941, and then you compare it to the Red Army in June of 1943, over the course of those two years that Red Army was rationalised, it was a much more effective fighting force. Same thing is true, by the way, with the American military going into World War Two. After Pearl Harbour, large numbers of general officers and senior officers were canned because they proved to be incompetent in wartime, even though they had been quite successful in peacetime.

So anyway, all of this is a way of saying that over the course of this war, since February 22nd, 1941, the Russians have made a number of major adjustments that have increased their fighting power. They've increased the size of the army. They've fundamentally altered their tactics on the battlefield. And you saw this in the battle for Bakhmut, but they performed much better in Bakhmut than they did early in the war. So I think what's going to happen here is that the chain of command in the Russian military is going to be rationalised. I think that the end result will be that it will be a more highly efficient fighting force and it's less likely in the future that Putin will run into a problem. Or to put it in slightly different terms, the Ministry of Defence will run into a problem with a character like Prigozhin. It's not impossible, but I think it's much less likely now. So my bottom line is that I think based on the available evidence, that Putin is likely to come out of this strength and not weakened.

**GG:** So one of the focal points of your article, and I have a few more questions only, is that

you devote a lot of the article to trying to explain to presumably Western and American readers what the Russian perspective is and therefore what the Russian goal is and why they're engaged in this war. And we already went over one part of it, which is that they don't want Ukraine being used as a battering ram right on the other side of the border by a NATO presence or by a Western presence that they regard militarily threatening.

You also talk about this other goal that they look at the people of Crimea, they look at the people of the Donbass region as people that they feel are being treated increasingly in a repressive way. There, even before the war were attempts by the Ukrainian government with regard to Russian speaking people, their churches, their television stations, their political parties, and since the war, there's martial law, the crackdown has become even greater. What is the Russian goal in terms of protecting the people of Crimea in Donbass as they see it?

**JM:** Yeah. I mean, just for background purposes, it's important to understand that Ukraine is a country that has a lot of ethnic Ukrainians and it also has a lot of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. In a way there has been a bitter divide in that country for many years. And what happened after the crisis broke out in 2014 is that you got a civil war in the Donbass area, this area in eastern Ukraine that involved Russian speakers and ethnic Russians on one side and the Ukrainian government, which was dominated by ethnic Ukrainians on the other side. And it was really a bitter civil war. And the Russians were deeply interested in shutting down that civil war because they were deeply committed to protecting the Russian speakers in the ethnic Russians in the Donbass. They refer to these kinds of people as the near abroad. So the Russian government had a commitment to them and it was interested in shutting that civil war down. And this is what the Minsk agreement, the famous Minsk agreement, was all about. It was an attempt to try and shut down this civil war. Of course, it failed. The end result is we now have this war. And what the Russians want to do is they want to eliminate this problem for good.

This, by the way, Glenn, is one of the reasons the Russians are not going to give back that 23% of Ukraine that they've now annexed because they want to put an end to the civil war problem and they want to get as many Russian speakers and ethnic Russians in Ukraine underneath the Russian umbrella as possible. So that's one side of it. The other side of it is, I believe, that the Russians will not try to conquer all of Ukraine. Certainly the western half of Ukraine, I think they'll stay far away from that in large part because it's filled with ethnic Ukrainians who hate the Russians. So I think the end result to all this is that the Russians will end up controlling almost all of the areas that are dominated by ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, and they will stay out of the areas that are dominated by ethnic Ukrainians. And those areas will form the basis of the rump state that will be Ukraine in the future. And I think in the process, and I'm sad to say this, there will be a great deal of ethnic cleansing. Lots of ethnic Ukrainians will move out of the Russian dominated areas into the Ukraine rump state and a lot of Russian speakers and ethnic Russians who are in that Ukrainian rump state will move in the other direction. But this is the end result of the fact that you have a state that does

not have a very straightforward national identity. And not only that, you have a major war taking place in this state which just exacerbates that conflict over identity that was there even before the war started in February of 2022.

**GG:** When the Iraq war became this kind of protracted stalemate or worse, from the American perspective, we were kind of gifted this new theory, this new way of looking at the war that was called the surge. There was this very brilliant new General Petraeus who was going to implement these very intellectual counterinsurgency programs that we were told would reverse the tide of the war. And we're hearing something very similar now when it comes to the promise of this Ukrainian counteroffensive that we're told are going to break through the front lines of the Russians and take back this territory that you've been talking about, the Russians occupying. To me, when I look at the map, I see a very dug-in Russian army across a huge front that seems very entrenched from a defensive perspective. What do you make of the potential for this counteroffensive that we're being told is so promising to actually succeed?

**JM:** Look, this counteroffensive was suicidal and the Ukrainian forces that launched the offensive starting on June 4th, the main units that NATO trained up, we're clobbered. And in fact, other units were clobbered as well. The Ukrainians didn't stand a chance. I think it was remarkably irresponsible of the West, especially the United States, to push the Ukrainians to launch this offensive.

Let me say a bit more about the imbalance between the Ukrainian military on one side and the Russian military on the other. It's not only the fact that the Russians had all these prepared defences. The fact is that the Ukrainians have a significant disadvantage in terms of artillery, which is the most important weapon on the battlefield. The Russians probably have a five to one, seven to one, maybe even ten to one advantage in artillery, which is the king of battle. Furthermore, the Russians control the air. The Russians are allowed to bring air power to bear on the Ukrainian side of the battlefield. So not only are the Russians pounding the Ukrainians with artillery, they're pounding the Ukrainians from the air with all sorts of smart bombs and doing egregious damage to the attacking forces. Furthermore, the Ukrainian forces are not well trained. You can't take a bunch of Ukrainians and train them for a couple of months in Germany or Britain and expect them to launch a blitzkrieg like the Germans did in May of 1940. It takes years to produce an army that can do that. The Ukrainian army doesn't have that kind of training. And furthermore, NATO only trained up nine brigades, only nine brigades. The Ukrainian army is comprised of about 60 brigades. Only nine of them were trained up by NATO. And those brigades, not surprisingly, were cut up badly in the initial attacks in early June.

So I think there is no chance that the Ukrainians are going to punch through the Russian defences and score a victory of any significance. And instead, what's going to happen here is the Ukrainians are going to suffer enormous casualties and in fact, they're going to suffer

much greater casualties than the Russians are because the Russians are dug in and they're dug into formidable positions. If I were the commander in chief in Ukraine and the Americans told me that it made sense to launch an offensive, I would have said you've got this one completely wrong. Given the disadvantages that I face as the commander of Ukrainian forces on the battlefield, it makes eminently good sense for me to stay on the defensive and allow the Russians to go on the offensive, allow the Russians to come out in the open and attack me and let me treat those Russian forces from fixed defensive positions. The last thing you want to do from a Ukrainian perspective, I would tell the Americans is go on the offensive. But the Americans insisted that the Ukrainians go on the offensive and they've done that. And the end result is they've been clobbered.

**GG:** So but when these neo liberal, these liberal interventionists and these neocons hear arguments like that, namely that the Russians have this massive artillery advantage on the battlefield and that the Ukrainians don't have the equipment they need to really do damage to the Russian front lines, their argument is precisely that's all the more reason why we need to do even more to give the Ukrainians more sophisticated weapons. That's why these cluster bombs are probably coming. That's why those F-16 fighter jets are on their way. That's what led to the tanks being sent. All things that the US promised would never happen because of how escalatory they are.

In August of last year, Michael McFaul, who was former President Obama's former ambassador to Russia and has become one of the most fanatical hawks when it comes to this war, wrote an op ed in The Washington Post. The title of it was, Realist Have It Wrong. Putin, not Zelensky, is the one who can end this war. And he didn't mention you. But obviously when people talk about realists, you're one of the leading examples of this. And his essential argument was: Recommendations for peace that instruct only Zelensky to capitulate are not only repulsive, but highly unrealistic". And so his basic argument to you is that you're exactly right, the Russians want to leave Ukraine is this rump state that's barely functional and it's precisely because of that that we have a moral obligation to protect Ukraine and not let the Russians succeed. What's your answer to that?

**JM:** Well, the problem is we can't help the Ukrainians win. The idea that F-16s are a magical weapon, it's not a serious argument. We're not going to give them that many F-16s anyway. The F-16s that we're going to give them are second tier F-16s. Furthermore, they don't have pilot experience. Experienced at flying an F-16 you have to train them and send them into battle quickly. And most importantly, from my view, the Russians, by almost [inaudible] have the most sophisticated ground based air defense of the world. The Russians will have [inaudible] shutting down those handful of F-16s that we give to the Ukrainians. The idea that F-16s or even ATACMS, these missiles we're talking about given to the Ukrainians are going to turn the tide is not a serious argument. If you're really interested in trying to turn the tide, what you have to do is you have to give them an enormous amount of artillery and you have to give them an enormous amount of tanks and other weapons that are useful on the ground.

And the fact is, we do not have the manufacturing capability to produce enough artillery to redress the existing imbalance in artillery between the Russians and the Ukrainians. The Russians, in contrast, have a significant manufacturing capability when it comes to weaponry, and they're pumping out artillery rounds at a remarkably rapid pace. We can't do that. We don't have the manufacturing capability. And it's going to take us a year or two, maybe even three, to spin up that capability. And in the meantime, the Ukrainians are in deep trouble. We don't have that many tanks or artillery pieces that we can give to the Ukrainians. The West is basically out of equipment that it can give to the Ukrainians, purposes of fighting a ground war. So it's not like there is this big reservoir of equipment that we're not giving to the Ukrainians, that if we do give them, is going to turn the tide. I mean, I think this is a fallacious argument.

And finally, I would point out to you, it's not only equipment that matters, Glenn, what also matters is the manpower balance. The question is, how many soldiers are you going to have on one side and how many soldiers you're going to have on the other side. If you look at the existing population figures for Ukraine and for Russia, there are now five Russians for every one Ukrainian. That means that in terms of available young males and maybe even middle age males put in the military to fight these battles, the Russians are going to have an advantage that is around five to one. So not only do the Russians have a major league advantage in artillery, in tanks, for that matter, but they also have a major league advantage in population size, which means the number of potential soldiers. Furthermore, they control the skies. They have a tremendous advantage in air power and the F-16 is not going to rectify that. So I don't see how it's possible for Ukraine to win this war. I think they're doomed. I think the Ukrainians have foolishly picked a fight with a country that has much more military capability and will therefore win in the end.

**GG:** I want to ask you about as one of the last questions the German role in all of this, because a linchpin of post-World War two peace and stability to the extent we had, was that the German government was demilitarised. They weren't participants in wars. Now you see this incredibly fanatical foreign policy elite, largely from the Green Party and from the left in the German government that's routinely giving these speeches about the glories of war and the necessity of fighting the Russians until the very end. You have German tanks going again to the Russian border through Ukraine or on the other side of the Russian border in Ukraine. I interviewed a left wing politician, one of the very few who is against German involvement, Sahra Wagenknecht, and she talked about how traumatic it is for the Russians to hear German leaders talking about the glories of war with Russia, sending German weapons and even praising sometimes people like Stepan Bandera and these kind of leaders who were collaborators with the Nazis. How alarming do you find the German role and how alarming do the Russians find it?

**JM:** Well, I think the Germans have not been as enthusiastic as you make them out to be. I think at certain points the Germans have dragged their feet. I think the problem that the

Germans face is every time they're hesitant to do something everybody else and NATO gangs up on them and portrays them as weak and not seriously committed to defending Ukraine. And as a result, the Germans tend to fall in line. There's no question that when you look at the comments of the German foreign minister and even the German chancellor, that those comments are oftentimes very hawkish. And there's no question the Germans are now talking about stationing German troops in Lithuania, which is really quite shocking. So the Germans are on board, but they're not in the vanguard. The Americans are in the vanguard. And the Americans and Germany's European allies have played a key role in pushing them to be more hardline than they were actually interested in being. The Germans have long been very reticent about talking in hawkish ways and taking military moves of an independent nature. They prefer to sit back and let the Americans lead and follow where necessary. And I think you see a lot of that going on now.

I think the really interesting question is where this all leads. I mean, if you accept my argument in the article that I wrote, this war has a long way to go. And how it plays itself out is a very tricky issue. And what that means for Germany is a very tricky issue. I think, in terms of the Germans, but what's also very important to focus on is the economic damage that has been done to Germany as a result of this war. The German economy has been hurt badly and most people I talk to believe that the situation only gets worse over time. So you want to ask yourself, how does that play itself out politically in Germany? How does that influence German thinking about the war in Ukraine? Very hard to say, but it's not clear to me that there won't be big fissures in Germany. Big fissures in Europe and big fissures in the transatlantic alliance moving forward because of the negative effects of this war, both at the economic level and at the military level. So I wouldn't just focus on the military dimension with regard to Germany is what I would say.

**GG:** I got that. All right. Last question. I think this war was sold to people, including a lot of people of good faith and good intentions in the United States on the grounds that the Ukrainians are the victims of this act of aggression. We need to go and protect Ukraine, protect Ukrainians. And a lot of people find that appealing. And yet you have a section in your article that's entitled Destruction of Ukraine, where you talk about, obviously the country paying by far the biggest price for this conflict is not the United States or Russia, at least not thus far, but Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Talk about what that means, the destruction of Ukraine. How is it that they paid enormous prices and how do you see those prices getting higher as this conflict goes on?

**JM:** Well, you know, before the war started on February 24th of 2022, my argument was that NATO expansion was going to lead to the destruction of Ukraine, that this would be a total disaster for Ukraine. And a number of people challenged me on that. And their argument was that Ukraine is a sovereign state and it has a right to become a member of NATO if it wants to join. And furthermore, the alliance has a right to invite Ukraine into NATO if it sees fit. And you, John, don't take Ukraine's agency into account. My response to that is that I fully

understand that Ukraine wants to join NATO and I can understand why. But it's very important to understand that Ukraine lives next door to a great power. And Ukraine has to be extremely careful in fashioning its foreign policy so that it does not antagonise that great power.

And the reason is that if you antagonise or you scare a great power, what's going to happen in all likelihood is that great power will behave in a remarkably ruthless way toward you. Great powers are not to be underestimated in terms of how easy it is to frighten them and how ruthless they often are when they are frightened. So my view is, from Ukraine's point of view, it makes eminently good sense not to frighten the Russians and to do as much as possible to accommodate the Russians. Why? Because you want to avoid having your country destroyed. But people on the other side would say, I don't buy that argument. Ukraine is a sovereign state. It has a right to join NATO. Well, it exercised that right or it tried to exercise that right and the West went along with it. And the end result is, as I said would happen, the Russians have moved in and they're in the process of destroying Ukraine. What they're doing is they're cleaving off territory. They've already taken 23%. And as I said in the article, I think they'll ultimately try to take about 43% of the territory of Ukraine that existed before the crisis started in 2014. And they'll turn Ukraine itself into a dysfunctional rump state. Or to put it slightly differently, they'll try to turn what's left of Ukraine into a dysfunctional rump state. This is an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine.

It makes me sick to my stomach to see what's happening, and it makes me sick to my stomach to think that this could have been easily avoided had we just left Ukraine alone. Had NATO not decided in April 2008 to bring Ukraine into the alliance. And it's just a mistake of gigantic proportions. And the Russians are now in a situation where they are so paranoid about their security, so worried about their security, that they're going to go to great lengths to make sure that Ukraine is thoroughly wrecked. And NATO, for its part, is doubling down. That's the American and West European or European position at this point in time. It's to double down at every turn, make it clear to the Ukrainians that they will become part of NATO at some point. That we will protect them. The end result of this is just to give the Russians an added incentive to do even more damage to Ukraine. And of course, to go back to a point you made a long time ago in this conversation, we're not doing the fighting. Michael McFaul is not doing the fighting in Ukraine. He's living comfortably in Palo Alto. It's the Ukrainians who are watching their country be destroyed by a very powerful adversary. Another great power, another meaning besides the United States. Right. Ukraine. It's not a great power. This is a disaster and it should have been avoided. Okay. Ukraine has the right to do this or the right to do that. That may be true, but it's largely irrelevant when you weigh that right against the consequences of provoking the Russians to invade Ukraine and destroy their country.

**GG:** Yeah, it seems like it always comes down to this. Adam Smith warned in *Wealth of Nations* almost 300 years ago about the dangers of people being very willing to cheer military



conquest as long as it happens very far away from their nations capitals or the places where they live. And it does seem very easy to keep encouraging Ukraine to continue to pursue this war with Russia because it's Ukraine that's being destroyed and not Washington, D.C. or Northern Virginia or suburban Maryland or Palo Alto or places like that. And we've seen that mentality over and over, unfortunately, with the United States very willing to see other countries destroyed, Iraq or Yemen or Syria. Now, Ukraine, because of our foreign policy, because we don't end up paying the price. So let me encourage everybody one more time to read your article. It's a very detailed article. We covered a lot of it, but not all of it. And it is the case that your point of view is typically excluded. There you see on the screen, The Darkness Ahead: Where The Ukraine War Is Headed. It's for free, it's on Substack.

And it is amazing, Professor Mearsheimer, that, you know, you are somebody who has enormous credentials and has long had respect within the field of international relations. And yet you simply not only don't hear from you, but your view in many of the major media outlets, the theory of the campaign of Bobby Kennedy is that you no longer need that, that you can use forums like this and independent media to get messages to be heard. I think that's true. I think I have some optimism about that. But it's nonetheless striking how effective this kind of marginalisation is. The silencing is where most Americans haven't even been exposed to your view, let alone been able to hear it on par with the other view. And for that reason, I'm really glad you took the time to talk to us. And this is your debut appearance, but I hope it's not your last one. We're going to be here asking you to come back soon.

**JM:** Thank you, Glenn. I thoroughly enjoyed the conversation.

**GG:** So did I. So did I. Thanks so much for doing it.

**GG:** So concludes our show for tonight. As always, as a reminder, we are available, System Update is in podcast form as well. You can follow us on Spotify, on Apple and every other major podcasting platform where you can listen to our show 12 hours after they first are streamed live here on Rumble. And you can rate reviews of each episode, which helps spread the visibility of the program. Every Tuesday and Thursday night, we move to locals for our live interactive aftershow to have access to that, simply join our local community, which also helps support the independent journalism that we do. We hope to see you back on Monday night and every night at 7 p.m. Eastern. And have a great evening, everybody.

**END**