

Alastair Crooke: Iran & Russia Give Up on Diplomacy & Go on the Offensive

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#Glenn

Welcome back. Alistair Crooke joins us today, a former British diplomat and expert on the Middle East. And I would highly recommend following his Substack, Conflicts Forum. And yeah, this is at least where I go for the best insights into what is happening in the Middle East. And I've left a link in the description. So thank you very much for coming back on. My pleasure.

#Alastair Crooke

Always a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

#Glenn

So you're very well known for doing back-channel diplomacy, negotiating local ceasefires, especially during the Second Intifada, and when you served as the security adviser to the EU's foreign policy chief. But unlike many of your colleagues, you recognize that there's a need to include rather than exclude the different Islamist movements, Hezbollah, Hamas, in order to get a sustainable peace. But yeah, I can assume that it's a good way of making enemies in powerful places, to want to include all the different actors. But what I see now, though, is with this war on Iran, it's really spreading across the region.

It's opening up tensions—well, conflicts, for example, between the Saudis and Yemen, which would exist quite independent from Iran. And it seems to put an end to this, you would require some complex diplomacy, not just between Washington and Tehran, but attempting to include the different stakeholders in this conflict. So I was just wondering, as this war continues to spread or widen, how are you assessing the problem, and which actors do you think have to be involved to put an end to all of this? I know that's a very wide question.

#Alastair Crooke

Okay, well, I'd like to take it piecemeal rather than do it all at once. I mean, you know, first of all, where are we? And I think it's pretty clear from Iran. We've seen, first of all, a new statement from the Supreme National Security Council, which is more or less a restatement of the first ten principles that were enunciated ahead of the Islamabad talks. But it differed in a number of points. I mean, the language of it was tougher, saying, you know, we're not going to put up with this sort of, you know, vulgar language and calling us names, so forget it. And at the same time, there was a change in the secretary of the council, the SNC. The outgoing one actually made that statement, which is quite important. It wasn't the new incoming Mohsen Rezaei that made the statement.

It was the outgoing one who had been nominated by Pezeshkian. Now, he loses his vote on the SNC, and Rezaei now has a vote as a representative of the Supreme Leader. And then there have been a number of military changes at the same time. What I think we're seeing is a very concerted consolidation around a leadership and around a vision. And the vision is one that is that Iran is not going to look for a solution with this president. They have almost said that outright, that perhaps we will have to keep the war on until '29. The Hormuz blockade will be until '29. I don't think that means that they are looking for an all-out war, more that as Trump pivots, or has pivoted, to sort of moving away from the war towards, as Bessent says, you know, economic pressure, we don't have to worry about it.

Economic pressure on Iran will be sufficient, and we can go on manipulating the price of oil so that people don't get too fussed. In this case, Iran, they said, we will go on attacking ships. And they seem to have got the measure of the game because on Monday, this last Monday, actually half an hour before market opening, instead of Axios with Barak Ravid saying, "Oh, a deal is about to come," they targeted a tanker just half an hour before markets to make a point. So they've understood how the manipulation of markets is being done and have responded in their own way.

So, I mean, I think we're going to go into a situation of extended sort of skirmishing between Iran and the United States. And they're going to put pressure on Trump. And I don't think they intend to negotiate. In fact, they do not intend to negotiate with Trump unless he wants to capitulate completely. So, a change there. Now, you wanted to sort of bring it into the region as a whole. I would say that this, again, there have been a succession of miscalculations. I mean, the first miscalculation by the United States was that they didn't check their weapons inventories properly before starting a war, which you'd think would be one of the most obvious things to do.

But then again, if you assume the war is only for four days, perhaps they thought it didn't matter. But that was a big mistake because they didn't check their inventories. I think the second big mistake was precisely this of pretending, saying, "Oh, you don't have to worry about oil or the other

elements passing either through the Red Sea or the Straits." No, because actually we think a lot more tankers and LNGs, it's understood, have been passing through, and we're managing to manipulate the oil price. And Bessent keeps reassuring Trump, "Don't worry about it."

The economic pressure is going to be on Iran, and they'll eventually capitulate, and we can manage the oil price, and we can manage the economy. I think this is another big mistake. I think it's a big mistake because, first of all, the manipulation of oil has actually become a sign of American weakness for the rest of the world. The very obvious management of these prices is not fooling anyone at all any longer. And it's not preparing people for what is coming because, you know, it's fine for Bessent and others to say, "Well, look, you know, the price we're managing, it's down to 87 at the moment," or whatever. The price means nothing. Forget it. You know those nice graphs that we had at university, demand and supply and equilibrium in the middle where they curve.

But actually what counts most of all is the supply curve, because that is about scarcity and about real, if you like, things. And demand is something that is ephemeral and can come and go automatically. But actually, real supplies. And we all know that the real supplies, particularly of the middle distillates that make diesel and kerosene, are largely absent. So then they've turned to the idea of using pressure on Iran by putting pressure on the region, putting pressure on Iran in Lebanon by promoting the scheme to disarm Hezbollah that they hatched up, which runs completely counter to the Memorandum of Understanding, the MOU. And they've been doing this by putting pressure on the Hashd, the PMU, the resistance, if you like, the militia in Iraq that they attacked in recent days.

Saudi Arabia and America attacked them during the Arbäeen period, when most Shi'a were going to Karbala on pilgrimage. And this too, I mean, it's been a succession of really egregious mistakes because I know—I've met the Hashd leaders, and I know a little what they're like. I met them in Karbala. And I mean, you know, we think of them in the West, or the West categorizes them: "Oh, they're just Iranian proxies. You know, we switch on, switch off proxies." They don't do what they're told. Couldn't be further from the truth. These people are really adamant Iraqi nationalists, hard nationalists, proud people, tough, but nationalists. And yes, they're Shi'a. And of course, Iran is the mothership of Shiism in many ways. But that doesn't mean that they just take orders from Iran.

I mean, there's coordination, but it doesn't mean that they are just sort of robots in the hands of Iran. And they promised reprisals for the attacks on Saudi Arabia. Why Saudi Arabia and America chose to attack them in the first place is a puzzle. Saudi Arabia said it was because they attacked an Aramco refinery, but the Hashd strongly deny it. And I've seen no evidence that they were involved with it. Maybe they decided to attack them because Saudi Arabia was anxious not to put the finger on the Houthis in Yemen, because that would mean they would have to escalate against the Houthis, and they are really reluctant to go to war with the Houthis, although now the war in Yemen is coming to Saudi Arabia, whether they like it or not.

It's there now, and the flames are getting higher almost every day. So I think this was an attempt, both in all of the areas, to try and put pressure on Iran, and actually what it's done is the opposite. It hasn't put pressure on Iran. Actually, it is putting pressure on all of the allies of the United States, like Saudi Arabia. All of these states are actually coming under pressure because the tensions are rising. The atmosphere in the region is getting hotter. I mean, actual flames are taking place in many parts and affecting everyone, including the West Bank. Particularly important is what's happening in the West Bank and in Gaza. That is, you know, the bedrock of a possible flare-up in the Middle East, which may come at any time. So in short, all of those things indicate major mistakes having taken place.

And so people are not prepared. So I don't think they're prepared for the economic consequences. I mean, it's uncanny, and it's not even mentioned in the Western press at the moment at all. Nothing is mentioned much about it. It's assumed that it's all being managed by Bessent with his manipulations of the price. So that's really where we are. Trump has pivoted away from Hegseth, blaming him at Camp David, saying, you know, you misled me about the munitions. I thought this had all been resolved. He's turned to Bessent, and Bessent is saying, look, you don't have to worry. Everything is fine. The Iranians will run out of oil very soon, and we just need to keep the blockade, and we will win the war. And I believe this is absolutely a mistake. Iran has positioned enough oil and tankers before the start of the war.

It's sold 80 million barrels since. It's continuing to sell and allow traffic to China, for which it will get paid. And so actually, if anything, it's probably slightly ahead of its budget. I don't think—yes, I mean, economic pressures at some point, but I don't think—I mean, we're not talking about anything imminent. We're talking about months, maybe next year, that we would see some pressures. But again, the misreading of Iran—because if Iran gets to a point where its situation becomes existential and they have a choice of capitulation or escalation to a bigger war, they will choose escalation to war, I believe. And that's pretty much confirmed if you look at the choice of the military leaders who've just been appointed by the Supreme Leader.

#Glenn

So what are the options of the United States here, though? Because, as you said, Iran appears to, if not be on the offensive, at least harden its position in terms of both rhetoric and actions. It doesn't have to wait for American attacks and try to mirror it. It takes the initiative itself. What can the United States do here? I mean, the options on the table, because it's very hard to read the United States at the moment. You have Trump making the speeches that, well, we already control the Strait of Hormuz and it's wide open. And then you have Scott Bessent arguing, well, the Strait of Hormuz is not really relevant at all.

We'll just reroute everything through underground pipes. And it's... yeah, it's a little bit like the market manipulation referred to. It sounds like they're only trying to make the whole thing go away

with empty talk, but it's not going away, and the situation won't really improve. So what is the goal here, or what are the possible options? Because if they can't win, if their military option is not convincing, there's no real path to peace which the U.S. can accept. I mean, I think when they signed the MOU, they didn't really have any intentions to unfreeze the Iranian assets and pay reparations and end this war. So what is left here? What can the United States do?

#Alastair Crooke

I think you hit the nail on the head exactly. I think that, you know, what they think that—and Trump has been quite good at it during his career—is to just say reality is not the reality that you see in front of you. This is the reality, and I'm managing it, and I'm conducting it. And quite often that reality, you know, that he proclaims bears no relation to what you know. Like when he says, "Oh, well, Hormuz is wide open. Hormuz is open. And we're running a wall of steel around Hormuz," when we know, in these days, nothing is moving through. And when you look at something like Saudi Arabia, which has now suffered both ends of its pipeline to Yanbu, the loading area in the Red Sea being destroyed.

And the Yemenis are putting a siege on the ports at Yanbu. And any Saudi vessels leaving are being threatened and either turning back or some are attacked. And even some commercial shipping of Saudi Arabia has been attacked recently as well, which is going to have a big impact on the Red Sea as a whole, because what that means is, as I understand it, that the insurance companies are now going to go up to war premiums for all shipping in the Red Sea. It's not just going to be one. It's going to have a wider effect. So Saudi production is down by 74%. They can't sell the oil.

They need, I mean, oil at \$100 to break even with their government budget, and selling the full amount, and they've just collapsed by 74%. At the same time, because of the crisis with Japan, Bessent has made it very clear no one's allowed to sell U.S. Treasuries. So what does Saudi do if it can't sell its oil and it can't sell its Treasuries? I mean, you know, the only thing that can happen is the United States has to bail it out by saying, okay, well, you know, give us your Treasuries and we'll give you the money, and we'll swap it back again in a repo attempt at a later date, like they're doing with Japan. The UAE, I do not think, has exported any oil. Liquefied gas is not passing through either.

Well, it wouldn't from the Red Sea, but it's not passing through Hormuz. So, I mean, Trump faces, you know, more than just one dilemma. It's not just you can sit there and wait to see it all, you know, that Iran gets under more and more pressure. And Iran has been under pressure for years. It knows how to manage. It's spent decades finding byways and backways and other ways of living, despite all of the sanctions on it. And as I say, if they're faced with that option. But equally, what we, I think, are going to see, unless we are very fortunate, is an escalation across the region. And I think the most dangerous part of it is going to be in Israel. It's going to be very dangerous in Israel because the elections have become really toxic.

And there is a big divide opening out between, if you like, the secular Ashkenazi Europeanized parties who came in search of sort of safety in Israel, and the other part, partly messianic, national religious. And they are much more Talmudic in their outlook and hardline. And the two are almost at the point of violence about the future. But what is really concerning is that the right-wing parties—the polling shows that Israelis as a whole are favouring the right, by a clear shift towards the Israeli right. But most of those right-wing parties, the Likud, the National Religious, and Ben-Gvir's party, Otzma Yehudit, they are not getting the seats. They're not getting seats. I don't know why, and it's not clear why they're not.

If the mood is going that way, why are they not in the polls sort of picking up a better position? And so what we hear increasingly from that element, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and others, is that what is needed is an intifada in the West Bank, or some action taken concerning Al-Aqsa, Temple Mount, Haram al-Sharif, because that is the way we can win the election. If the electoral balance is moving away from us, we are not going to concede power. And Netanyahu is making all the arrangements so that he doesn't have to concede if he loses the election. He's gerrymandering the system, putting in his places, saying we don't need to obey the Supreme Court and this or that. There's a very strong—we record it all on our Substack for people who are interested in following it, because it's very important.

#Glenn

And at the moment, the West Bank has already started.

#Alastair Crooke

Settlers are going in, attacking Palestinian villages. It's very clear that the army is about to go into the refugee camps in the West Bank, not in Gaza. They are already doing that in Gaza. But to go into the West Bank and to attack the Palestinians there, and to really get back to a sort of '48-type situation in the West Bank where Palestinians leave. And they believe this will mean that this is the path to winning the election. And the election is very fraught, and it's not clear that Netanyahu can win it. He's doing all sorts of manoeuvres, like inventing new parties, to sort of create—the strategic aim is to create circumstances in which no other government can be successful except his, because as you recall, if he is no longer prime minister, he may have to go to prison. So the whole region... And if you like, the war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is certainly heating up.

The Houthis have fired missiles at the Saudi-aligned forces in the south, sent them fleeing—many missiles, big attacks. The Houthis saw a buildup of forces amongst the Saudi-aligned forces in the south that they saw preparing the ground for an attack in the north, in Sana'a, on the Houthi-controlled territories. So they took action to destroy that buildup and that massing of forces. And as I say, you have the Hashd militia in Iraq promising retaliation against Saudi Arabia. On the borders of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia is moving troops to its borders. You have Iran making incursions into Iraq to smash the Kurds in Iraq, because there were reports that the Americans were still looking at

whether it would be possible to push the Kurds to try and invade into Iran and seize an area as a sort of sovereign state of Kurdistan.

We saw the same thing being done by Ukraine and Russia a little time ago, as you recall, as a pressure point. And so the Iranians have come in there, killed many of the leaders, assassinated some of the leaders, destroyed the munitions and the logistics for that. And the Iraqis have also told the Syrians, if they start, as Trump has been suggesting they do, that they should be involved in Lebanon and they should be involved in managing Lebanon. Trump has suggested it would be a good idea if Shara should be involved in managing the disarmament of Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Iraqis are on the Syrian border already, and they say, "You move against Lebanon, or we move into Syria." That's the equation there.

So all in all, you have a very messy, increasingly heated situation across the Middle East. And far from putting pressure on Iran, it's actually going to put pressure on all the allies, like Saudi Arabia, UAE. All the Gulf states will be very anxious about the sudden arousal of Iraqi militancy, of Houthi militancy, and across the region, with the Iranians continuing to threaten and perhaps act to destroy the infrastructure of the Gulf states if America tries to destroy the infrastructure of Iran. Netanyahu is pressing for the United States to, in these words, I'm quoting, "destroy the infrastructure such that the state is unable to provide services to its people."

I've described that as effectively a slow nuclear bomb rather than a fast one, because that's what it would mean, particularly in the middle of summer. To have no electricity, no water, no facilities—I mean, it would be difficult to maintain the situation at all. So it's a very tense situation, intense situation, and I think the thing to keep an eye on will be very much to keep an eye on what happens in the West Bank. If that explodes, it can set off explosions everywhere. And Hamas is due to be moved, according to Trump's peace plan, into their sort of concentration camps. They didn't call it concentration camps, but then to sort of secure areas and to try and disarm them as well.

So altogether, you know, very unsettled area. And it looked for a minute as if that was going to be sort of merged into the war between Ukraine and Russia, because Ukrainians fired on an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea. And the point here was that just days before it, the Americans attacked Iranian bases in the Caspian for the first time. And then there was the attack on the Iranian vessel in the Caspian. And it looked as if that was about to become a part of this conflict. However, it seems that the Ukrainians have now backed off and sort of apologized and backed away from it. I don't know. Are there people in Washington that are crazy enough to think merging the two wars is a good thing? Or do you think? I don't know.

#Glenn

I think the assumption that they would be able to control such a situation is very difficult, and I think that's part of the hubris. They sit and think they can twist some buttons and dials, and they can be able to essentially control how it escalates, where the conflict is fought, et cetera. I think we're very

close to this whole thing going off the rails, not just in Iran, but with the Russians as well. Exactly. Not even just accidentally. I mean, if I was sitting in Tehran or in Moscow, I would think that having—giving this escalation control to the Americans, allowing them to decide when the fighting begins, when it ends, where to escalate.

This is very dangerous because you saw the attacks on Jordan, for example. The Americans immediately said, "Oh, this was a surprise attack." But they're in the middle of a war. The assumption was the Iranians would only mirror the American actions. So the fact that they're not, I mean... you don't want to give that much control to your opponent. And I think the fact that they think they can merge these two wars into one and be in complete control, I think that hubris—it's also a mistake for Tehran and Moscow that they gave this to the United States, gave the illusion that they're able to control this. So maybe they should be a bit more unpredictable. Maybe they should go on the defensive.

#Alastair Crooke

I think the attack on the restaurant in Moscow recently is very much more serious than people have sort of seen. It comes against the backdrop of Ukraine firing missiles at Russians on the beach in the Black Sea. You've seen the videos probably, with everyone in the water swimming and enjoying the sea, and then a missile lands on people lying on their towels, sunning themselves, and there was another one on a resort hotel. But what I think is different with the, if you like, the bomb issue, it's one of the big, tall Seven Sisters buildings in Moscow, which you will know. And, you know, they're set back. They're not in a main thoroughfare or in a sort of populous area. They're sort of, you know, all on their own.

But at the base of one of those was this Italian restaurant, and two senior generals, as I understand it, Air Force generals, were taking part in a reception, wedding reception. So the restaurant was closed to the public. And then a woman came bearing a purported gift to the wedding party. And she was stopped by security at the door. And obviously, or at least it seems logical, the person who was controlling the operation from a safe distance, from a car or something, pressed the button and killed both of them and injured a lot of people because the package was filled with ball bearings besides explosives. So people on the terrace were damaged. Now, why do I say this is so important? I think it's very important because I do not know this in any way. I have no privileged information, but I would bet anything that the Russians will conclude that a Western intelligence service facilitated it.

This operation provided the intelligence or provided details about how to identify and how to know that these two generals were at this party. I don't know if it's true. It may not be true, but I would think it's a safe assumption, on the pattern that we've seen of increasing involvement in European and Western intelligence services in this field, in supporting actions against the civilian population and these assassinations, that they will be thinking. And I think it probably could serve as a tipping point. The Russians, I mean, they won't do anything, you know, hurriedly and off the top of the...

But they will regard us very seriously. And I think they will... You know, there will come a time. How long can the West, and particularly Europe, go on firing their missiles into civilian areas?

It used to be the refineries and things, but now it's on beaches and on clubs. There's now assassinations of wedding parties in Moscow. At what point does Russia say, enough, that's it? If you don't understand the language, if you haven't taken our warnings seriously enough that we will not put up with this, then we will take harsher action, which will make it clear to you that we will not accept this to continue. So I think it could be a serious inflection point. The mood in Moscow is quite different, much more, I think, anger at Western intelligence services. You know, they think that these missiles firing unsettle Russians, make them anxious, make them nervous, make them feel they wish the war was over, make them think that, you know, Putin is to blame and that he needs to go.

I think they have this 100% wrong. What it does is make Russians deeply angry and want this to be stopped. And I think we're seeing, you know, the shift in vibe very obviously in the sort of pounding, the pummeling that is taking place in Ukraine. But it may not stop at Ukraine if these actions continue. Is he going to bring about the ceasefire that Trump seems to think? I mean, Rubio just said that. I mean, a couple of days ago, he said very clearly, you know, these missile attacks are a good thing because it'll put pressure on Putin and he'll have to seriously come to the negotiating table.

And he didn't say it, but, and make a ceasefire, which Russia keeps ruling out. And at the same time, you know, senior Russian officials are saying very clearly, no, no, we're not going to talk to the Americans anymore. We're finished with those negotiations. Effectively, really, they have been saying, and the foreign minister has said—I'm paraphrasing it—but he was saying that actually the Alaska talks were a deceit, closer to the Minsk Accords, to give Ukraine more time; that they were a deceit, and they don't intend to continue these talks. Yes, channels of communication for administrative things will continue with Washington.

But no, we're not going to deal with them. They can't be trusted. So, I mean, this is where we are. Iran won't talk with the West. Russia is refusing to talk with the West. And when Rubio tried to tell Wang to stay out of Iran, the Chinese foreign minister told him, in quite clearly abrupt tones, to mind his own business. So, I mean, Europe is sort of in its bunker, seeing all the world as antagonistic, seeing it as evil and seeing it as hostile. And it sits there self-satisfied in its bunker, sort of thinking that it's, as you say, in the control panel, pulling the levers and pressing the buttons to bring about a change.

So, I think, you know, you were asking me about Iran, but I think you have to take the bigger picture. And I think that ultimately, the big picture about Iran is that this whole issue now hangs on the bond market, or the debt market and the bond market. Japan is a potential trigger for something much bigger because the prospects of keeping the Japanese yen afloat are not looking good. The rescue is going in. Bessent has spent, I think, \$90 billion today—not of his money. Some of it was he

sold off euros in order to buy yen, but large amounts. And the yen keeps devaluing. And as it devalues, interest rates go up, inflation goes up. All of the problems become much more exacerbated.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think in this regard, the war against Iran and Russia has already merged to some extent. The fact that they're taking lessons from each other. That is, the fact that the Russians now see what happened in Alaska as being a deceit. And yes, it was a deceit, but instead of seeing it as a one-off, or even in the context of the past 35 years since the end of the Soviet Union, I think they're also looking towards Iran, because all the deals being signed, they were never intended to be implemented. And all the negotiations seem fraudulent.

And so one has to ask, of course, when you have these terrorist attacks within Russia, such as this bomb at a restaurant, and you see this in combination with this 40-day campaign of deep strikes in Russia against civilian targets to put pressure on Russia so the civilian population would then want to remove Putin, I think they fail to see where the pressure goes because... I always ask, what is Russia? What are the options of Russia? Because it seems like in Europe, we have equated peace to Russian capitulation or defeat. But if Russia sees itself fighting an existential war, there's no either capitulation or escalation. There is only escalation. So I just feel, I saw the Rubio comment as well. This is good. It's going to make Russia more flexible.

Well, not really, though. This is proving what the Kremlin said all along, that Ukraine in the NATO orbit would make it a frontline state, a proxy for direct attacks on Russia. So I just see the Russian position hardening, a bit like what we see in Iran. I guess, yeah, just my last question: Why do you think, you know, we're both sitting in Europe, why is there not more reflection upon this? I mean, recently I've been using the example of this 40-day campaign against Russia. They did this knowing that the Russians could retaliate, that they could put a naval blockade, that they could shut down Odessa, that they can be much more ruthless against Kiev. They know that Kiev doesn't have many more air defense systems.

You can see the retaliation coming. We know that the Russians genuinely see this as an existential threat. Why? It's very hard to convince anyone that this was in our interest. Same as Trump moving away from the MOU. What is happening in the West? There's no discussion about these things. I guess that's the most frightening part. If we had debates, discussions—what is Russia's interest, what is ours, what are possible options—and we went with option A, fair enough. It was a horrible conclusion, but there's not even discussion anymore. I find this to be... As you said, it's just assumed we're good, they're bad. And if you don't support the good fighting the bad, then perhaps your sympathies are with the enemy. I don't see any discussion beyond this.

#Alastair Crooke

No, and no one says anything. I mean, with what's happening in Gaza or in the West Bank. I mean, you know, do you hear anything from Western diplomatic circles? A little bit from Spain, maybe, but almost nothing generally. Nothing. It's as if nothing is happening. The threats against the Iranian population, all of these things are just blanked out. I think that the only answer to that is that the elites are becoming increasingly— the establishment is becoming increasingly nervous and losing confidence in itself. They're becoming desperate, in other words. They're becoming desperate because they can see what's happening to Ukraine. Ukraine was, if you like— is still, you know— I mean, after the war on terror, you know, what was the purpose of NATO? What was the purpose? What was it, you know, about? So it had to be Russia. That was the only way to keep NATO alive.

If you like, the aim was to keep NATO and keep the Americans engaged, just as it's always been: to keep Germany out, to keep the Americans in, as the first Secretary General said of it. And then the European Union, I mean, deeply divided on financial issues and many things. The only thing was to wave the flag of Ukraine and war with Russia, and to use this as sort of the means by which to coerce conformity. And, you know, the language coming out of Brussels is all about, we have to be in line. We have to accept conformity. No one can say anything that is out of line, because if that happens, then everything falls apart. So I think that's the sort of crisis that they see themselves in. As soon as something happens, or a party is elected, or the AfD wins a major town in Germany in the election, then that's the beginning of everything falling apart. And so I think they're desperate to try and keep it together.

#Glenn

Now, the reports on Merz planning to strip German federal states of autonomy if they vote the wrong way. I mean, it shows the desperation, but it's a good point, though. I mean, if this is the new Europe, it's not a geoeconomic project anymore, where we pool our resources for collective bargaining power and try to translate that into political influence. If it's instead a geopolitical Europe dependent on common opposition to Russia, if peace breaks out, the whole project could begin to fragment and fall apart. Again, I would suggest the foundation of having a geopolitical EU was a mistake then, but no one's questioning this either, it seems. Yeah.

#Alastair Crooke

You're right. I mean, you will remember the EU talking about it as being, you know, they're now geopolitical actors. Well, it's become absolutely transparent that they're not geopolitical actors. No one is paying any attention. I mean, Russia or Iran, no one wants to talk to the Europeans at all. They've misplayed that very badly. And they haven't played the rest of it well either. They're at odds. They are completely at odds with Russia. They are at loggerheads with China. They are in bad relations with the United States. I mean, you know, this is the net result of their politics, is that they, you know, have no friends really at all. And they have no influence on events either.

#Glenn

I remember Romano Prodi, the Italian prime minister who was the president of the European Commission. He once, I think it was about 20 years ago, made a comment like the EU is a giant made of clay. That is, it's quite big and impressive, but if it tries to move, it can stumble and fall apart. And I thought, from my perspective, this analogy was a great example of why it can't be a geopolitical power, why the geoeconomic path was the true destiny if it wants to succeed. But again, they walked away from this as well without much of a discussion. So, yeah. Anyway, so any final thoughts before we wrap up?

#Alastair Crooke

I think the only real thought is, again, how unprepared we all are for what is clearly out there and risking to sort of be triggered at some point. And so I think it's going to be far worse because there has been no talking and no preparation, no psychological preparation of people. I think it's going to hit them as a big surprise when suddenly they find that they can't get diesel for their car, or it is rationed, or it is put under some form of prioritizing diesel for some people and not for others. I think they're going to find this quite a shock.

#Glenn

No, I agree. I think with this, we see both the Iranians and the Russians realizing diplomacy doesn't work. They're both taking a hard-line position. We're going to have, soon, a huge economic crisis, energy shortage. And I see in this country, the largest newspaper has articles—the front article is about where the good restaurants will be and what is popular food this summer. I mean, it's—I feel like there's a bunker mentality here. They don't like to see what's coming, and with all this narrative control, if there's nothing good to report, then just don't talk about it. I think that's where we are, pretty much. Again, not good for when you desperately need course correction, but here we are. Anyways, as always, thank you so much for your time. I always appreciate it.

#Alastair Crooke

Thank you.

#Alastair Crooke

Thank you for the invitation to your program.