

NATO's Terrible Mistake: Proxy-War Turns Against Europe | Anatol Lieven

NATO's European Forever War is now turning decisively against the EU. The elites that have been cheering the carnage on for the longest time are starting to catch up with the actual battle field reality. Anatol Lieven, director of the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute, discusses why Ukraine's NATO question and territorial deadlock make a lasting settlement hard. He examines US weapons limits, the Iran war, changes in US and Israeli politics, Morocco's role in the Ceuta migration crisis, and why China is avoiding a move on Taiwan. He also argues that Western foreign-policy institutions repeatedly fail to learn from past wars. Links: Anatol Lieven at Responsible Statecraft:

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#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, with an update by the wonderful Anatol Lieven, the Director of the Eurasia Program and Andrew Bacevich Chair in American Diplomatic History at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Anatol, welcome back.

#Anatol Lieven

Hello, very nice to be back.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for coming online again. I really wanted to pick your brain about the current situation, how you are viewing maybe first Russia and Ukraine, where this one is going, and then in a second stage also about Iran. But, I mean, you've been writing about Russia and Ukraine for a long, long time, and I will never forget the essay that you wrote back in April 2022 about Ukraine's coming neutrality, which then didn't come because it was made impossible. But you were one of many people who said, look, this Ukrainian neutrality would solve the whole problem. And that solution never emerged. Where do we stand today, four and a half years later?

#Anatol Lieven

Well, I mean, on the neutrality issue, you know, the former and the most successful Ukrainian commander-in-chief, General Zaluzhny, who was pushed out by Zelensky and sent to London into exile as ambassador, he this week came out with a statement saying, look, Ukraine is never going to get into NATO. They're never going to let us in. They're never going to fight for us. Therefore, you know, we have to make alternative arrangements. Well, you know, at their meeting in London, Germany, France, Britain and Zelensky announced that Ukraine had to still have the right to join any military alliance.

Well, the Russians have set that as one of their red lines, you know, because given that they went to war largely to prevent that happening, if they accepted it, it would mean them accepting essentially defeat. So, I mean, why the European countries continue to insist on this? Look, I mean, if it's a bargaining counter and you offer to give it up in return, say, for the Russians giving up the demand for the rest of the Donbas, that's one thing. But to do that, you would have to actually open negotiations with Russia, which previously they completely rejected. Now they are sort of edging towards, but of course there's a great problem here with the Europeans.

I mean, Trump, it seems, is quite willing to—well, he has in fact accepted this as a point—but the Europeans have to come on board as well because otherwise, the Russians fear, with good reason, the Democrats win in 2028 and they tear up any agreement that Trump has made. So, you know, this has to be a comprehensive deal. The Europeans are also, of course, calling for a preliminary ceasefire, an unconditional ceasefire, which is ridiculous. A, the Russians won't accept it. B, it would mean, you know, a situation like between 2014 and 2022. It would be extremely unstable. It would be repeatedly violated, and very likely it would lead to a new war.

So, yeah, the underlying causes of this war, including Russia's fear of NATO expansion and essentially being surrounded by NATO territory, have to be dealt with. But with the Europeans, of course, an additional and critical problem is: at what level do you conduct these negotiations? At the level of the European Union, it's completely impossible. The Baltics and the Poles will block anything, and the idea of a European, you know, intermediary reporting to Kaja Kallas is absolutely ridiculous, of course. So it has to be the Germans, the French, and the British. And I think they are beginning to edge towards that, but very, very hesitantly. Meanwhile, within Europe...

#Pascal

What makes you believe that they're inching toward it? I mean, there have been talks for a while: oh, maybe we should appoint a special representative, blah, blah, blah, but then they never did. And recently Keir Starmer in the UK left, but his successor doesn't seem any more willing to host talks at all. So is it a hope, or are there indications that the Europeans are actually seeing that this is not going anywhere? Yeah.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, it's been reported in the New York Times this week that last month the representatives of Germany, France, and Britain did meet with the Russians in Vienna. So, I mean, very much in private, of course, but talks, some kind of talks, have begun, which is, you know, a positive sign in itself. But they're proceeding very slowly, partly because in recent months—so I think this is fading now again—but because of the Ukrainian attacks on the Russian energy sector and supply routes to Crimea, there's been all this stuff happening from people who, I mean, it's difficult to say whether they can really believe this, these so-called military experts, or whether they've so committed themselves to Ukraine that they will now basically say anything.

But it's led to all this talk in the Western media. And you always have to remember that, you know, so many Western politicians, they get their information either from the media or, of course, from intelligence sources who are also, I mean, their intelligence services are also often unconditionally now committed to Ukraine. And so you've had all this talk of Ukraine now achieving momentum, and the tide has turned, and Ukraine can force Russia to some kind of surrender. Well, of course, this has proved completely empty. I mean, yes, the Ukrainians have done some damage, but they only knocked out about 13% of Russian refining capacity.

And, of course, the Russians have retaliated by doing very much greater damage to Ukraine. You know, they've closed the port of Odessa, closed Ukrainian seaborne exports and imports, destroyed hundreds of gas stations across Ukraine. And in any case, you know, this doesn't necessarily bring the Russians any closer to victory on the ground. On the ground so far, the war still seems completely bogged down. Russia has been advancing, but, you know, still very, very slowly. Now, I mean, I think, you know, I mean, for the future, if things continue as of now, the war will go on and on. Hundreds of thousands more people will die. And eventually there will be some kind of unstable peace of exhaustion. But obviously we have to go on hoping and working for something, you know, more stable than that.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. So what do you think the strategy will be? I mean, if now Mr. Zaluzhny actually said that, look, I mean, NATO has been dangled in front of our eyes like a carrot in order to make us jump through hoops. I mean, if such an appreciation actually starts to spread in Ukraine and it's clear NATO will neither fight for us nor save us, there needs to be some form of arrangement. What would you think is the most reasonable approach in order to negotiate anything? Because maybe this is where we can draw now parallels to Iran.

Iran is very adamant about if there's any peace agreement, not just the MOU. The MOU was just the road to the peace agreement, right? But if there is something, it must go through the Security Council, and it must be a Security Council resolution, which would actually solve the kind of

quagmire of how to bring it through the U.S. House and through Congress. But what do you think would be a diplomatic approach that would even have reasonable chances not only of succeeding, but then also of holding? Because if I was Russian, my greatest question would be, how would I ever trust that these people live up to their promises? Because they've made so many, including Minsk, and then were proud of saying, like, "Ha, ha, ha, we never meant it."

#Anatol Lieven

Yeah. Well, I mean, you're quite right. The failure of the United Nations has been one of the great tragedies of this war. I mean, I've talked to UN officials, and they basically say that the President—Secretary General—and his staff are completely just broken. You know, the United States has, over the years, reduced them to total impotence. And because you're absolutely right, I mean, the UN is the obvious institution through which to achieve and ratify and stabilize a peace agreement.

And of course, to produce peacekeepers on the ground, you know, to monitor it—the peace agreement. But of course, I mean, above all under Trump, but, I mean, in effect actually under Democratic administrations as well, you know, the UN has been totally sidelined and, of course, it's terrified of losing all its remaining money from the US, you know, at which point several very well-paid jobs would disappear in New York and Geneva. I mean, for that to happen, the British and French, who are, of course, permanent members of the Security Council, would have to take an initiative themselves, together to introduce it, for example with the Chinese. But I haven't met anyone in positions of influence or authority in London or Paris who say that that is remotely likely to happen.

Of course, I mean, down the line, but we are, what, how many months—seven months, eight months away still? I mean, if Le Pen wins the French presidential elections, then things could change because she will have different priorities. She has never been enthusiastic about this war. And she also, of course, very much does see herself as the heiress of de Gaulle. And also, of course, it just desperately needs to save money, including money that's going to Ukraine. But also, I think, would want, you know, to try and play a leading part on the world stage. So perhaps, perhaps, you know, without talking about Le Pen's domestic policies or anything else, but possibly on Ukraine, then things might change. But of course, she may well not win.

And in any case, we have to get through, you know, all the way until next spring. I mean, perhaps when, I mean, if the Iran war can be brought to an end, the Trump administration will then, you know, actually re-engage with this peace process from which it's been, of course, totally absent ever since they attacked Iran. But, I mean, one should say, I mean, there is also a key problem on the Russian side. I mean, many of Russia's demands I find entirely reasonable. But they're also calling for Ukraine to withdraw from the last, I mean, it's a very small area, it's only 2,000 square miles, but the last bit of the Donbas that Ukraine still holds. Every Ukrainian I've talked to has said to me that this is just politically completely impossible for any Ukrainian government.

You know, they have accepted now that they have to accept de facto Ukrainian, you know, Russian possession of the territory that Russia now holds, that they're not going to get that back. I mean, it's interesting, Ukrainians on that score are much more sensible than any of their, you know, Western cheerleaders. But when it comes to actually ordering the army to withdraw from territory it holds and is, of course, heavily fortified, but has also lost, you know, God knows how many men to defend, well, of course, that is, you know, impossibly hard. And, you know, Putin seems to have been informed by the generals that Russia can capture this territory. They're said to be saying still by the end of this year, but they've been saying this for three years now and it hasn't happened. Right.

#Pascal

But they seem to believe that it's possible. And at least for now, the gains that Russia is making on the battlefield—I mean, there are gains. And yes, they were small and incremental until now. But the belief that if they continue this just the way that they have so far, then they will get it—hence, why stop now? That also does make logical military sense. On the other hand, for Ukraine, it's like, okay, the longer this continues, the more land will be de facto gone. But I also see how no Ukrainian leader can actually politically survive by giving a withdrawal order. That also makes sense. So structurally, we are locked into the current carnage, for better or for worse, because for all sides, this is actually still preferable to the alternatives, right? So hence, no change to be expected.

#Anatol Lieven

Yeah, you're absolutely right. I mean, the only way of solving this in the short term is obviously to offer Russia enough in other areas that Putin can declare victory, and also, you know, Russian key vital interests are addressed, and see if Russia will then give up, or at least heavily qualify the demand for Ukrainian withdrawal. I honestly don't know. I think it would be worth trying. I mean, on the battlefield, it's so difficult to say because, you know, if you go by the rate of advance over the past year, you know, it will take them. I mean, if it goes on and on, I think they will capture the whole of the Donbas. But, you know, it would be two more years, perhaps more.

Then again, of course, there is always a chance, you know, as on the Western Front in the First World War, that the Ukrainian side will crack. You know, they will simply run out of men. Or, of course, that—well, the latest news, you know, that America simply cannot provide them with more Patriots, you know, and missile interceptors. I mean, that does mean, I mean, you know, really serious danger for Ukraine. Now, whether it will transform the position on the battlefield, we just don't know. But, I mean, certainly, as everyone is now predicting, including the same people who a few weeks ago were predicting Ukrainian victory, are saying, you know, Ukraine is going to have a really terrible winter as a result of Russia's destruction of electricity generation. So...

#Pascal

Actually, I would like to ask you about this because, you know, we are now in 2026, at this very, I think, in a new environment where for the first time it seems that the United States and NATO with that is running out of implements of war. And they are running out of this in the theater in West Asia with Iran. And they're running out in Ukraine. And that doesn't mean that they have no more means to do things. But the big, kind of the very damaging missiles and also the defensive ones, they seem to be running out. And the U.S. is for the first time ever running at the limit, or beyond the limit, of its military-industrial capacity.

We all thought the military-industrial complex was limitless. You throw enough money at it, it throws enough weapons back, and now it's like that's not the case anymore. Do you think that this reality will start changing some of the calculus, especially in the minds of the neocons? I mean, so far it doesn't seem like it, but they still talk as if there was infinite supply. But now it's getting very popular to actually talk about that. It's in the newspapers. At some point, they cannot ignore that anymore.

#Anatol Lieven

I mean, look, maybe cumulatively this will have an effect on the neocons, but Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya had no effect. They just constantly crop up again. And, of course, when it comes to the Middle East, they also have the support of the Israel lobby. But, I mean, I think more is the fact that the Pentagon will have to start thinking differently. I mean, you know, some of the generals who saluted and went along with this war, in the old Japanese system, would have killed themselves out of shame. You know, because they knew, they actually did know the danger and how the Iranians were likely to react. And yet, you know, nothing, of course, would persuade them to resign in order to prevent this.

But yes, you know, in a war with a—well, I mean, of course, a very strategically placed but, militarily speaking, third-order power, Iran, America has been fought to a standstill and has run, you know, as you say, has run out of its critical munitions. Well, I mean, they can't give more to Ukraine now. But whether that will lead them actually really to make a push for peace or just, you know, say, "It's not our business, it's the Europeans' business," and leave them to it, I don't know. As long as they're so tied up with Iran and as long as, of course, I mean, grotesquely, the U.S. negotiating team for Ukraine was then switched to Iran—I mean, ridiculous. I mean, what serious government operates in this way? But of course, the other thing in the longer term is they bloody well better think, you know, seriously about any prospect of going head to head with the Chinese in the Far East. They'd lose. They would lose. Yeah.

#Pascal

That's why it's so hard right now to see any kind of reasonable strategy. And there are people, you know, in the commentariat on YouTube and wherever, that say, like, no, this is all a part of the grand strategy: cut off China from the oil in the Middle East, and make sure that you destroy as much of the energy infrastructure of Russia, because it will also starve China out of oil, while at the

same time the U.S. took over Venezuela and, you know, it's consolidating this. So it's all part of a grand plan. I think that's horribly overreading the situation. But absolutely, there are even people on the pro-war side who would argue, well, I—

#Anatol Lieven

Actually, things are going fine for us.

#Pascal

Europe is 100% dependent on us. Their Nord Stream will never, ever be a topic again. We bled out the Russians without a single U.S. serviceman dying. Iran, we do this three or four more times. At some point, they will break. And then China's next on the menu. I mean, there are people who think like that. But from your experience in Washington, what would you say? Is that a way of thinking that's still popular?

#Anatol Lieven

Well, I mean, you know, this is—I think you're right—this is basically a rationalization of actions by Trump that were taken, you know, for really other reasons. And I mean, it's pretty clear that in the case of Iran, none of this was thought through. I mean, he was carried away by success in Venezuela and then persuaded and lied to by Netanyahu that this was going to be a pushover. I don't see any serious strategy behind this at all. And by the way, Chinese oil reserves have not merely, you know, continued successfully to support the Chinese economy. They're supporting the economies of half of Asia. So, I mean, if that was the strategy, it hasn't worked. Of course, I mean, if the war goes on and on and on and on, no doubt there will be serious damage to the Chinese economy.

There will also be extremely serious damage to the world economy and European economies, and eventually the economy of the United States. I mean, the other thing, of course, is we have to see what happens in the U.S. midterms. This war is extremely unpopular, you know, and partly because it's being linked to inflation, especially, of course, gas prices. Now, that's—I mean, the Democrats are so utterly hopeless and divided. I mean, maybe they are still capable, essentially, of defeating themselves. But of course, if the Republicans suffer a really serious defeat in the midterms, and this is, you know, widely attributed to the war in Iran, then perhaps, perhaps, you know, at least people in the Republican Party will think, you know, maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

#Pascal

I mean, we know by now that there are people who supported Donald Trump quite heavily who are now publicly breaking with him. We just had this very famous picture and statements by Tucker Carlson, Ro Khanna, what's her name? Marjorie Taylor Greene, Joe Kent, who all assembled at

Tucker's house, took a picture, and said, like, well, this is the start of a movement. They're not speaking of a party, but of a movement. So it seems that they are now the restrainer MAGA, let's call them that. The restrainer MAGAs are kind of breaking away from the rest, or on the verge of it.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, in the long term, I think this could be very important. Although, you know, we said this after the Iraq debacle and after the Afghanistan debacle. And, you know, Trump has achieved such an iron grip over the Republican Party, you know, and together with AIPAC has destroyed so many people who have tried to oppose him and, you know, oppose Israel that, for the moment, this is going very, very slowly. But I think for the future, very likely, it will be important. And of course, this is closely associated with the growing unpopularity of Israel. I mean, above all among the Democrats, where it's extremely striking, of course, in the younger generation, but to a lesser extent among the Republicans as well. And of course, you know, Israel has been a critical factor behind the whole neoconservative movement.

#Pascal

That is very true. And Israel too now has a political turmoil that it needs to deal with, or that's going to come up. Actually, you know, I asked Mohammad Marandi why Iran is currently not striking at Israel, right? They strike at all the Gulf states but not at Israel. Why not do that? And his answer is, well, they are having so many problems right now, we'd rather not disturb them because it causes them more problems than if we unite them against us right now. So let this play out, because it's very possible that the Netanyahu government might actually fall, although I don't know how realistic it is right now, but it is on the cards. How do you see that developing?

#Anatol Lieven

Well, I think, I mean, Netanyahu is, of course, now, yes, extremely vulnerable. But something that I worry about is, within the Democratic Party, and to some extent within the Republicans as well, this tendency to blame everything that Israel has done, and Israel's policy, on Netanyahu. This is a way that people, you know, in the Democratic Party, like Josh Shapiro, can pretend, you know, to have changed their policies, their attitudes towards Israel, their support for Israel, when in fact only attacking Netanyahu, which really suggests that, you know, when Netanyahu goes, they will attempt to use this basically to go back to, you know, the previous approach. I don't think that will work, but that's certainly their attempt because, of course, Netanyahu going, well, you know, very welcome, no doubt. But if you look at the Israeli political scene and the configuration of the Knesset and the overwhelming attitudes, it must be said, of a majority of the Israeli population, there's no sign that him going will lead to a fundamental change in Israeli policies.

#Pascal

Yes, I mean, only a break of the United States with Israel could potentially lead to a serious political reconfiguration out of necessity. But that too, at least for the moment—and we are speaking today, what is it? It's the 7th of August, 2026—is not likely to happen overnight, right? Even if there were mass protests inside the U.S. against this unholy alliance with Israel.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, yes, but I mean, I do think a future Democratic administration, you know, with a much more powerful now left-wing movement within the party, and with the Democratic base, you know, now running almost 75% against Israel, that will change the Democrats. I mean, the Democratic establishment will go down, you know, will hang on and hang on and hang on and do, as we see, you know, in the primaries, its damndest to maintain its existing positions. But the momentum does seem in favor of change. But it will take time, yeah.

#Pascal

And of course, it depends on whether the Democrats win.

#Anatol Lieven

And as I say, given their, I mean, quite extraordinary ability to defeat themselves, you know, nothing is guaranteed.

#Pascal

And what is your reading of what just happened this week in Ceuta, in Spain, like this new migrant crisis? Do you think that will have a significant impact on the EU or on Europe? There were quite a lot of pictures in the newspapers, right? So it seems it has stirred up a lot of people.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, yes. I mean, you know, it can very well contribute. Next month, you know, we have elections in eastern Germany. AfD is predicted to do extremely well, perhaps in at least one state, to make it impossible to govern without their support. And, of course, the chances of Rassemblement National winning in France have been strengthened by this. I don't think there's any question whatsoever. And, of course, part of the blame, obviously, it's being said by the right, but other European governments as well, is being attributed to the Spanish socialist government's amnesty or legitimization of large numbers of illegal immigrants in Spain, which does seem to have provided a pull factor.

And then the decision of the Spanish court that you couldn't send asylum seekers back to Morocco. But, I mean, it is also being very widely reported that Morocco, probably on the urging of Israel and

the United States, did this deliberately in order to precisely weaken Sanchez, because Sanchez has been the, well, in some ways, the only really courageous European government in opposing the Iran war and opposing Israel's actions in Gaza. So I think this was also really a deliberately planned operation on the Moroccan side.

#Pascal

Yeah, I had a discussion about this yesterday, and it does look like it. I mean, it's difficult to direct 60,000 people without actually planning it. That's even beyond the capacities of these human traffickers and so on, and actually not in their interest because it would be bad business.

#Anatol Lieven

Yeah, exactly. No, I mean, there's ample evidence of the Moroccan hand in this. What we don't know, but I think we can legitimately suspect, is the hand of Trump and Israel behind it too.

#Pascal

And so overall, would you say that there are—it's kind of bizarre because it seems that—oh, sorry.

#Anatol Lieven

Can I just add something on that? You may remember that when the Spanish were withdrawing from Western Sahara, the way that the Moroccan government basically forced the Spanish to allow Morocco to take it over was by sending this huge mass of Moroccan civilians to overwhelm the border. And of course, the Spanish were not going to open fire to stop them. And this led to the forced incorporation of Western Sahara in Morocco. And of course, the Moroccans, not without reason, claim that Ceuta and Melilla, these Spanish enclaves in Morocco, are historically Moroccan territory, and the Spanish shouldn't be there.

So I think that they basically tried to use the same playbook again and hoped that this kind of thing would eventually force the Spanish out of Ceuta because, obviously, you know, the Spanish can put up barriers, but the Spanish cannot machine-gun thousands of Moroccans trying to get in. And so I think this was a very—so not just Israel and America, but I think it was a very, very carefully and even cleverly planned operation on the part of the Moroccan state.

#Pascal

This has a huge potential. I mean, if that strategy actually went somewhere with Spain, I mean, wouldn't that be the best kind of incentive for the Spanish government to say, like, wait a minute, can we maybe use that in Gibraltar? You know, get out of Ceuta, but then chase the Brits out of Gibraltar. I mean, this could have a spiraling effect.

#Anatol Lieven

It could, I suppose. Yeah. I mean, I'm not sure that the Sanchez government, particularly with the Labour government in Britain, would want to cause that kind of split within the European Union. But frankly, I mean, the sooner we all get out of these ridiculous, you know, post-colonial hangovers, the better.

#Pascal

And we are back. There was some background noise, but Anatole moved to another room. So Anatole, just in order to kind of wrap up and maybe give some final thoughts about where we are in this August of 2026, because the whole discussion we had just seems to indicate that we're stuck at every single front: stuck in West Asia, stuck in Ukraine, stuck with parties that cannot move either left or right, and stuck in Europe. So it seems that everything at the moment, there's just, like, inertia, even though there's wars all around us. But the inertia seems to be quite catastrophic, actually, right?

#Anatol Lieven

Well, certainly for the West. But, you know, a saving grace is that the Chinese are behaving, thank God, very, very prudently. And let's hope that they continue to do so. Because, of course, for a more reckless government in Beijing, this situation would give enormous opportunities. But, well, I think it's also because the Chinese now feel very strongly that in the long run, time is on their side, you know, that the West is falling into a state of greater and greater dysfunction, and therefore that, you know, there is no need for China to do anything risky at this stage. But, you know, it is nonetheless striking, the fact that the Chinese have not tried to exploit American difficulties.

#Pascal

You're, of course, referring to this fear that was uttered in the United States many times that, oh, if we look weak, then the Chinese are going to take Taiwan. And just right now it shows you're at the weakest that you've ever been. And China just has no interest in doing that because, again, it would just be...

#Anatol Lieven

Yes. And obviously, I mean, they know the risks. A war over Taiwan, even if they won it, would ruin the world economy. It would, of course, risk escalating towards a cataclysmic nuclear exchange. And they are basically prudent and careful people, unlike their American equivalents. But, you know, the capacity of many Western security analysts and institutions simply to make things up. You had this piece by Thomas Wright, you may have seen, because, you know, clearly the old line that Russia, China, and Iran are allies has proved so. You know, Chinese have said to me, "Of course we're not

allies." As one of them said to me, "Look, if we'd been allies, several American warships would be at the bottom of the Indian Ocean by now." They haven't supported the Iranians in any serious way.

So now, but still, of course, the security complex in Washington needs the Chinese, and not just the Chinese, but this global combination, essentially, as the excuse for American military intervention and American military domination, of course, in order to resist this supposed, you know, alliance of authoritarians. So now you have some Thomas Wright and others writing, well, yes, of course, it's not a formal alliance, but it is something even more dangerous because it's, I don't know, surreptitious, or because it's not an alliance, that means we're not afraid enough of it. And, you know, the most utterly dishonest. And I mean, look, I mean, maybe people like him believe it because they have to believe it, you know, to justify their own positions. But it does really raise the question of whether the United States and some other Western democracies are actually capable of learning.

#Pascal

I would answer this with no. No, it's not. The whole system is made in a way that learning is prevented. There's a beautiful piece right now in the New York Times saying, like, you know, the difficulties of the Trump administration to read Iran. You know, at the end of the day, it's a big misunderstanding. Had we had more intelligence, then everything would have been avoided. It's, you know, a big misunderstanding. It's just liberal whitewashing of the violence of the empire. And that keeps going on.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, yes. And I mean, even if you took this New York Times piece, you know, at face value, how can it be that, you know, as Daniel Ellsberg said, when they intervened in Vietnam, there wasn't one American official who could have passed a freshman exam in Vietnamese history or culture? They, you know, and that has become a cliché, that they knew nothing about the country they were intervening in. And same thing with Iraq, same thing with Afghanistan, same thing with Libya.

And they knew nothing about the areas that they were attacking, all the populations, all the attitudes. And now they've done it again in Iran. I mean, the only difference—and, you know, that does show a system which is incapable of learning from its mistakes, right? I mean, the only difference with Iran, of course, was that in this case, they also relied on Israeli intelligence. And I think the Israelis do actually have a better understanding of Iran. But of course, they direct it towards goals which are completely different from those in the United States.

#Pascal

You know, this is one of the problems of, like, when you can't lose wars, because, like, some people say, like, the United States lost the Vietnam War. But I think that's inherently untrue. South Vietnam

lost the Vietnam War. They disappeared. The United States simply didn't win. So they walked away, and the people responsible for doing that, they had a cozy retirement, you know. It's like they get their pensions and whatnot. So the people who do not win these wars are not even eliminated from the political process. On the contrary, they're then, like, later on celebrated as, you know, older statesmen who do paintings, like George Bush Jr., right? A cute, quirky guy. So, I mean, the system at the moment is just not geared toward any form of learning.

#Anatol Lieven

Yes. And I mean, of course, the opposition to Vietnam was so much to do with the fact that American conscripts were fighting this war. I mean, now, you know, the soldiers who die—and of course, also with all this reliance on, you know, on long-range bombardment—you know, not many soldiers do die. And so, yes, they think they can endlessly get away with this. And as you say, the American system does not merely not punish them, it rewards them. So, you know, from a personal point of view, why should they change? There was, you know, an interview by Peter Beinart, actually, with Thomas Wright, actually. Surely, given the professed beliefs of the Democratic Party, it cannot be right that Biden administration officials who went along with what happened in Gaza should ever be reemployed by a Democratic administration. And he basically said, well, that's up to the president. The president makes the choice. Moral responsibility doesn't exist.

#Pascal

Yeah, but it's actually a pretty rational thing to say, for all of the inhumanity it is. So that's just why I think right now, as we speak, there's just no good reason to believe. There's nothing on the horizon that would make me believe that any form of serious change is actually coming, because it seems stable, actually, for as horrible as it is. Yeah.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, you know, to get European countries to change, and even then, to some extent, only for a while, you know, took the catastrophes of the First and Second World Wars. And of course, America hasn't suffered anything like that. I mean, mind you, now you have—I mean, you know—lunatics. This is a piece by Natalie Tocci in The Economist saying we have to send European troops to Ukraine so that they will die, and then this will revive the martial spirit of European populations and their willingness, you know, to fight and die. I saw nowhere in that piece any indication that she was volunteering, of course, to go and die in Ukraine. Okay.

#Pascal

No, and when you're on Twitter, when you then tell them you should go yourself, then they accuse you of hate speech. It's absolutely fantastic. Well, I mean, that's the sad reality we're in. The warmongers never monger themselves. They send others to go. But Anatole, thank you very much

for giving us an overview of, well, the stuck reality at the moment. People who want to read more from you, I think they should go first and foremost to Responsible Statecraft or any other place where they should find you.

#Anatol Lieven

Well, I'm going to... I really should set up my own website, which... which I will give you the details of when it's set up.

#Pascal

Wonderful. Please do so. A Substack is, by the way, always a very nice way of distributing things, but I will certainly distribute it once everything is here. Anatole Lieven, thank you so much for your time today.

#Anatol Lieven

Thanks a lot. Bye-bye.