

New Red Scare Destroys NATO, US Turns Against Europe | Pietro Shakarian

NATO is being demilitarized by its own Proxy-War. Historian and American University of Armenia lecturer Pietro Shakarian joins Pascal to discuss America's "third Red Scare," the Iran war and the Strait of Hormuz, the proposed Mecca Pact, Ukraine's future, Caucasus transit plans, and why he sees Europe's elites as tied to US power during a shift toward multipolarity. Links: Pietro Shakarian at The Nation: <https://www.thenation.com/authors/pietro-shakarian/> Anastas Mikoyan: An Armenian Reformer in Khrushchev's Kremlin: <https://iupress.org/9780253073556/anastas-mikoyan/> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00 Introduction and America's Third Red Scare 04:06 Trump, empire decline, and the Iran war 07:36 War of aggression and US public opinion 15:39 Reform, neoliberalism, and AI data centers 20:31 Iran's strategy and the Mecca Pact 31:15 US overstretch and Caucasus corridors 39:03 Ukraine, Russia, and Europe's war strategy 49:15 Why European elites follow US power 57:15 US limits and the shift to multipolarity

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, for an update with Pietro Shakarian, a historian and lecturer at the American University of Armenia in Yerevan. Pietro, welcome back.

#Pietro Shakarian

Pascal, it's great to be here, as always, and I'm looking forward to discussing many, many interesting topics of international significance with you.

#Pascal

Oh, we will, we will. And, oh yeah, start with your most recent article, "America's Third Red Scare." You published this one in The Nation, and you're basically making the argument that Trump is reviving the Red Scare at the moment, right? And can you tell us what your take on this kind of new insane idea of Donald Trump's is?

#Pietro Shakarian

Well, the whole idea is really, Pascal, to crush dissent. Not only—first of all, I mean, first of all, it's aimed, as everybody can see, against the DSA and Mamdani and all that. I mean, that's kind of, you know, starting off the bat, that's the main target. But another very significant target of Trump's wrath is to try and crush and silence dissent on foreign policy. And that's the other main point I

raised in this. I highlighted the example of Max Blumenthal, right, and how his reporting from Iran, from the funeral of Ali Khamenei, you know, basically that got him in hot water with Trump's MAGA base. I mean, you know, the looniest of them all, Laura Looney—or, I mean, Loomer.

At the end of the day, she was writing that Max Blumenthal was, like, the leading communist in the United States and that, you know, he should be silenced, right? You know, First Amendment be damned, that he should be just, you know, shut up. And his phone—as a consequence, I mean, he had two smartphones that were confiscated. They were held by U.S. Border Protection. And Max Blumenthal, together with the Arab Anti-Discrimination League, right, they basically kind of pushed back against this. And within 24 hours, the phones were returned. But still, there are big questions about what do they actually do with those phones?

What do they, you know, look, what do they, like, see inside those phones? What do they, you know, maybe access? What information was there? And so it's also a big issue not only in terms of, like, First Amendment rights, but also Fourth Amendment rights, right? And the chilling effect of this on dissent in foreign policy, it's not only felt in the Max Blumenthal case, as I highlight, but also with Marco Rubio—I mean, what he's doing with Cuba—creating a report basically saying that, you know, there is kind of this effort by Cuba to promote kind of radical left terrorism in the United States, right? This is kind of his point of view. Even he's trying to say Ben and Jerry's ice cream is a subversive organization in the United States.

I mean, it's that ridiculous. But this is all part and parcel of the effort by the Trump administration. First of all, because they know that they're in trouble with the midterms. Second of all, they know that they're in trouble with, I guess you could say, this war in Iran, this situation with the Strait of Hormuz. The implications of that on the global economy are tremendous. And what more can you say? It's a way to control the narrative. I mean, even going back to the original—the second Red Scare of Joe McCarthy—that was also an effort, really, to control the narrative, really to kind of silence those who wanted to say that, you know, we should not even be in a Cold War, right? I mean, and that's what we're dealing with here.

#Pascal

But I mean, it's so interesting. I had right before this one a discussion with a Malaysian scholar, Dr. Oi. And he actually at one point in the discussion said, like, you know, luckily we have Trump now. And what he meant with that was to say that he just makes this so obvious: the neocolonialism, the bullshittery from the West, this entire duplicitous game, the kind of everybody has to pay us back. You know, we are the biggest provider of global goods, therefore everybody has to give us money because we're so good and you're so backward. And he says, like, you know, this actually makes it much easier to communicate in large parts of the world about the lunacy of the West that is going through. And this one Red Scare that they're trying to do at the moment, I mean, it's so blatantly, obviously dumb and a tool of trying to just crack down on society that it seems just too clear to actually then be able to work. Or what's your take?

#Pietro Shakarian

Well, my take is, I mean, that this is what happens when empires begin to fall, Pascal. I mean, they begin to, like, lash out and do crazy things that, you know, make them seem even more irrational than they ever have been, right? I mean, we look at Trump, for example. I mean, every day it's something new. One day he wants to bomb Oman. The next day he wants to annex the Strait of Hormuz to the United States. It gets increasingly, increasingly silly and ridiculous and nonsensical. And that's what I mean, that this is, again, a symptom of a declining empire. But again, it's no longer dressed. And actually, I agree with the gentleman. It's no longer dressed in this idea of, oh yes, human rights and democracy and European values, whatever they are.

And that, you know what, we're going to, you know, come in and everything is going to be hunky-dory. And, oh yes, the rules-based order, all those talking points are gone. Now we just see the raw face of the American empire, right? And it's also a face that is even insensitive to, to even, you know, those serving overseas. You know, I mean, look at what's happening with the USS Abraham Lincoln. My God. I mean, that's just, that's just utterly atrocious. And that's like, you know, they always would say during the Iraq War. I mean, as soon as I could say this when I was growing up in the States as a teenager and we were talking about the Iraq War, that as soon as we got really critical of the Iraq War or, you know, this whole American imperial project, you know, the New American Century or whatever.

The way to silence that was basically to say, you know, well, we, you know, support the troops, right? You know, that was kind of like a way for them to say, you know, support the war. But by putting the troops out there as the face of that and kind of deflecting the criticism of the larger picture, larger context of the war, of course, who would not support the troops who are out there in harm's way? Of course. But it was a way to deflect from the real issue, which is their culpability in putting those troops in harm's way and, you know, creating this, you know, atrocity of a war in Iraq. And the same thing Trump is doing again. This is, again, another atrocity in the Middle East when we see what we see going on now with Iran. It's absolutely... It's a...

#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. Because it's so blatantly dumb that it's becoming clear now, luckily. Because, like, you know, the fact 20 years ago, it was kind of—I think a lot of people also bought into the idea that these evil dictators, Hussein and others, and Iran, they threaten our troops, right?

Our innocent troops that have to be there in order to be the policemen of the world, right? And they are threatened. Therefore, we need to do something. And by now, it is just so blatant that this is a

war of aggression against Iran that everybody goes like, why are our people there in the first place? I always tell the story that, you know, Switzerland has been very good at protecting its troops over 200 years. We haven't had a single casualty in the Middle East or in West Asia in 200 years. You know how we did that? We didn't send troops there.

#Pietro Shakarian

Absolutely. Well, they have that great meme, if you remember a few years ago on the internet, which was that, you know, how dare these countries put themselves so close to our bases?

#Pascal

Yeah. You know, how dare Iraq put itself so close to our bases?

#Pietro Shakarian

You know, oh my God. You know, yeah.

#Pascal

That's becoming quite clear now. You were recently in the States. Did you get a feeling for how the general mood is over there with this war? This war hasn't been popular from the very beginning, right? It's even going down now.

#Pietro Shakarian

There was a post on Substack a while ago by Trita Parsi, where he said that this was a historically unpopular war. And he was citing, of course, poll data on that. And I can completely verify that in the United States, that is the case, that this is a historically unpopular war. And you know where I was, Pascal? I was visiting family in Cleveland, Ohio. So I was in one of the so-called swing states in the Great Lakes, in the Midwest.

#Pascal

And

#Pietro Shakarian

I can tell you there, you know, that it could very well be that the Senate would be flipped in favor of the Democrats, right? Not that, I mean, the Democrats, of course, they have their own problems. I'm not going to say that, oh, you know, they're perfect or whatnot. But you know what? It's not looking very good for Trump in November. I can tell you that much. And not only in Ohio, in Michigan. I mean, you see what's happened. I think, you know, even though there's this kind of, you

know, controversy about, or there's this talking point that, you know, El-Sayed is unelectable, in truth, I think he is electable, and I think there is a very good possibility that Michigan will go Democrat.

I mean, that's what we're going to see. And it's because this war is so catastrophic, right? And he's really, I mean, you could say El-Sayed is on message, absolutely. I mean, he actually probably is one of the—he's probably, I would say, you know, one of the better, you know, politicians, political figures who has emerged from the Democratic Party in recent years. He's very promising. Graduate of the University of Michigan, which I also am a graduate of. You know, go Wolverines, even though I'm from Ohio. It's a complicated situation. But you get the idea that I think it's going to go blue. I mean, and you know what? Trump himself is to blame for that.

What I also don't understand, Pascal, for the life of me, is how he, when he needs to get out of a conflict, you know, he jumps right in when there is an out, right? I mean, he was threatening Iran going all the way back to February. Remember all that buildup, all that, you know, people were on the edge of their seats. Iran gave Trump a better deal than they gave Obama with the Oman negotiations. Trump could have taken that, walked away, said, "Look, I'm a peace president. It's so wonderful. I can get the Nobel Peace Prize now," and all that. But no, what did he do? He went and jumped. He used the negotiations, Pascal, as a cover to attack Iran.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Pietro Shakarian

And not once. But, I mean, we have to also think this through three times, because there was the June thing that was done in June 2025, then this February, and then most recently with the MoU. So the record doesn't look very good. And then there was that one time, you might remember, and I think I mentioned it even on this podcast, where Pezeshkian even apologized at one point to these GCC states. Yeah. And that was an off-ramp for Trump. And what did Trump do? He doubled down. He insulted Iran. He insulted Pezeshkian. And did that change anything? No. No. But his threats are really alarming. I mean, it's stuff like, again, we go back when he's talking about destroying Iran's civilization. I mean, what does he want to do, use a nuke? I mean, he's unhinged.

#Pascal

They're discussing that right now, right? Lowering the threshold of first use, because the United States is one of the only nuclear powers, I think the only nuclear power, that has no first-use policy, and the others—Russia, I think, gave it up as well—but at least they used to have a no-first-use policy. But they are now in the U.S. discussing reducing the threshold when it can be used, tactical nuclear weapons, which is absolutely horrible to start with. Marjorie Taylor Greene actually also

tweeted about this. And then secondly, just let me throw that in there because you already mentioned Oman. I mean, he now has the great idea that we're going to bomb Oman in order to get Iran, right? Because Oman is close to some sort of agreement with Iran for the management of the Strait of Hormuz. So Trump is like, "Oh, you know what, Oman? We're going to bomb you." Officially, he used a very strong word, "bomb them to the Stone Age" or something like that again.

#Pietro Shakarian

Yeah, something like that. I mean, actually, you know what's incredible to me is, again, how it turns on its head the whole narrative of the supposedly barbaric Middle East, you know, and an uncivilized Middle East. Well, first of all, Iran as a civilization has been around for thousands of years. Okay, so that's number one. I mean, also look at the literature we produced, right? We talk about, you know, the Shahnameh or, I don't know, the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and all that. I mean, to just, you know, to say the things he says, he is the real barbarian. That's the point. I mean, look at what he's saying about Oman, what he's saying about Iran, what he's saying about Palestine, what he's saying about everything. He is the real barbarian, not the people in the Middle East. He is the barbarian, right? So he should look in the mirror. He should consult that in order to get a reality check.

#Pascal

They can't do that because that would imply that they have some kind of conception of, you know, introspection. I mean, something is wrong also with us. And these kinds of people especially, I mean, Donald Trump as a man, right, with his own psychology, who's clearly a narcissist and suffering from very, very strong neurosis and whatnot, they lack this ability. But even the United States as a system, I wonder if it has that capacity because, you know, the Soviet Union had Gorbachev come in and say, "Guys, we need to change things."

Glasnost, Perestroika, you know, we are not doing well at home. But I haven't heard any such tones from responsible people inside the United States. There are, of course, thinkers and so on. There is the podcast scene and so on that do criticize the inside a lot. But it's not fundamental critique, usually. It's more like, oh, we should do a little bit more of X or a little bit more of Y, but not, we have to change the system kind of thing. I don't know if there's a question in what I just said, but... No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

#Pietro Shakarian

I mean, I think that one thing I just wanted to say is that you bring up a great point in talking about the need for reform, the need for an American Glasnost and Perestroika, right? A lot of Americans, Pascal, I'll tell you this, were hopeful that that could be brought by Obama in 2008, and that was not the case. And in fact, actually, what we saw was a doubling down on the same old, same old failed policies, which really, a lot of this goes back really to 1991, because once the American elites declared that we won the Cold War, which was not even true. But when they said, "We won," quote

unquote, "the Cold War, we defeated the Soviet Union," as if they had gone into Russia somehow, or the Soviet Union, and had broken up the country into itty-bitty parts and 15 independent republics and all this.

Of course, that was not the case. Mr. Yeltsin, the Russian president, was actually leading the charge on that. But in any case, they adopted this idea that we broke up the Soviet Union, that even some narratives, Ronald Reagan himself broke up the Soviet Union. And look how great we are. And we're so great. America doesn't even need to reform. It doesn't even need to change. Democracy doesn't need to continuously evolve and develop and be fine-tuned in our situation because everything is perfect here, don't you know? It's the end of history, as Mr. Fukuyama would say. And as a matter of fact, we actually see that history keeps on going on and on and on and on and on. And that's actually the reality. The idea that somehow we could be above history is the pinnacle of arrogance.

#Pascal

By history, Fukuyama, of course, means the development of social models, right? He's like, no, liberalism as the ultimate social model is the one to stay for a long time. But what we're seeing is that, oh no, not at all. I mean, there are even other civilizational social models that are viable projects. And by the way, what the Chinese just pulled off with, like, pulling 800 million people out of poverty and putting them into the middle class is the largest civilizational success in poverty reduction in human history. And that was not achieved by the Western kind of model, right? By Fukuyama's liberals and so on, right?

#Pietro Shakarian

You could even say neoliberal is what he's working with. Because, I mean, really, I mean, we're talking about kind of like this laissez-faire economic approach and all that. And even within the United States, this kind of idea has been challenged because now you see people like Mr. Mamdani or El-Sayed coming up, you know, now criticizing this and saying we need, like, democratic socialism, or Bernie Sanders and whatever. Now, even that model within the U.S. is being challenged. We even see how this neoliberalism is overtly exploiting the American people, particularly now when you have this new controversy with AI data centers. In states like Kentucky or Michigan or Ohio, you have communities who are protesting against, you know, big tech bringing in these AI data centers, which use up a ton of energy.

It takes one—just to give you a sense, Pascal—one entire bottle of drinking water is what it would take for an AI to generate a single message to you. That's how much water they use. And they're noisy. I mean, they're extraordinarily noisy, as you can imagine. I mean, beyond belief. And the pollution that they cause with all this is just insane. So these communities—and it's not a matter of red versus blue—it's just that people don't want these in their backyard, despite all the promises that, oh, it will generate economic revenue and it's going to be a boost for the economy and all that, which is... And actually, by the way, the Armenians got suckered into that under Pashinyan.

Pashinyan wants to—he's into this idea of having this AI data center in Armenia. But that's not going to bring positive dividends for the Armenians, especially because, you know, Armenia is a country that they need the water resources for agriculture, for sustaining— you know, for sustaining living in the more arid parts of the country in Armenia, particularly like in the Ararat Valley, places like this. And this data center is not going to help. And it's the same internationally, right? I mean, so that's kind of my two cents there.

#Pascal

I wonder why people are not fans of the idea that fully automated data centers will lead to more jobs. I mean, you need at least one or two night guards, right? I mean, that will be... Yeah. All of this is now happening. And at the same time, we have these horrible conflicts that keep going on. I mean, the Iran war is anything but over, right? We all understand that. We're in the middle of it. Iran seems to have figured out a strategy to confront that. I don't think that they will negotiate very much with the United States anymore. Not that they say. I don't think they expect anything from it.

#Pietro Shakarian

No, they checked out already at this point, Pascal. I mean, they're not—I mean, they already declared this administration... They're not going to even... They're done negotiating with this administration in particular. So they've basically checked out. Now, Trump claims he's negotiating with Iranians. I don't know which Iranians he's talking to or talking about, but they're maybe invisible Iranians.

#Pascal

Or the son of the Shah, what's his name? Reza Pahlavi?

#Pietro Shakarian

Reza Pahlavi. Well, you know, I mean, not exactly the most stellar representative of the Iranian people, but still, nevertheless, maybe he's talking to him. Could be an echo chamber, something like that, you know. But I think, yeah, the Iranians will not. Iranians will not. They're done. They're done. They're done with this guy. They're finished. It's not going to happen. He thinks—and also, the thing is that he had his chance more than once. Iran showed great faith. And I say great because they were under sanctions. They were under enormous pressure. They even negotiated, even as Trump used negotiations as cover, as I said, you know, in order to lull them into a false sense of security so then, you know, he could bomb them. So I think that they're not buying this anymore, and they may well, you know, hit an American ship in the region. That's what it's coming down to. I mean, they're going to show that they mean business. They're going to show their teeth, I think, to send a signal to Trump.

#Pascal

Correct me if I'm wrong or if you see it differently, but in my interpretation of this half year of war that we've seen between Iran and the US, and Iran and Israel, so far the Iranian strategy has been to reestablish reciprocity. It's like there's nothing you can hit where we cannot hit you back, and it hurts you just as much as you hurt us, if not more. But they try to keep a level, right? They try not to go and attack by themselves. They usually waited to be attacked, and then they went after something else. But that strategy might change. Or is my idea just not paying attention to a couple of the Iranian attacks?

#Pietro Shakarian

No, overall, you're right on target with that. But we shall see what happens. Iran's patience—my main point is that Iran's patience is not infinite. And they're tired of the U.S. kind of playing footsie in this way under Trump. So we shall see. But the most interesting thing, Pascal, recently has been this Islamic NATO, which is kind of like a new—it's like a Baghdad Pact 2.0. Can you tell us about the Baghdad Pact? Well, the Baghdad Pact, to give our listeners an idea, was a Middle Eastern NATO, for all intents and purposes, that actually involved Iran. And it involved Iraq. And it involved Turkey. And the idea was to kind of shore up the Western— And also, by the way, you know who else was a member outside the Middle East? The UK. So there you go. But the idea was to—1960s?

#Pascal

50s?

#Pietro Shakarian

1950s, 60s, all the way up to 1979, all the way up to the revolution in Iran, right?

#Pietro Shakarian

And really, the Baghdad Pact was designed to shore up Western and specifically American influence in the Middle East. That was the whole idea at the end of the day. It was really kind of creating a NATO for the Middle East, you know, a NATO structure for the Middle East. And really, what we see is a revival of that. Why are we seeing a revival of that? My belief is because a lot of speculation has been going around about this in the alternative media. There are some who say this is overtly aimed against Iran, some who say it's overtly aimed even against Israel because Israel made these statements that they are critical of Turkey these days.

Naftali Bennett said that Turkey is the next Iran and all this and that. I mean, I'm kind of skeptical of the degree to which Turkey and Israel would actually clash. But I digress. The main point here is that I believe personally that that's just like what happened. So what do we have in common with all

three countries—Pakistan, Saudi, and Turkey? They're all in lockstep with the United States. And that would indicate to me that this Mecca Pact, because actually this was now signed in Mecca, and the idea is, again, it's the commonality there is that they are all Muslims, right? And that was a big kind of symbolism.

But the idea really, I think, is that the American military infrastructure in the Persian Gulf has been decimated by Iran, not only in the Persian Gulf, also in Jordan. We see that as well. And I think that the idea is that America cannot really sustain a presence here like it could before February 2026. So it needs other partners in the region to shoulder the responsibilities. And that's what I see. I see the Mecca Pact as being the foundation for that. That could also bring in potentially other countries, such as Kuwait, such as Qatar, such as Bahrain, you know, et cetera. I mean, all these different—I mean, UAE possibly. And that's what I see, that this is done.

It's kind of like how Trump more or less gave the Ukraine war over to Europe, at least officially, although unofficially the U.S. intel is still very much involved with that, with supporting Ukraine. Marco Rubio even admitted as much, that, you know, even though we're trying to play the neutral broker here, that in reality we're still supporting a side, which is, you know, Mr. Zelenskyy. And that's actually how I perceive it, that this is kind of a way to kind of take that burden from the United States and give it to reliable partners there in the Middle East, or in West Asia, I should say. So that's how I see that.

#Pascal

But, I mean, even if it is, the absence of the United States criticizing this pact is, to me, the indication that this is very much done at the behest—I mean, at least with the thumbs-up—of the United States, because it helps with this burden-sharing idea. But a few more points. I mean, one is, we've never seen that pact. They didn't publish anything about it, the verdict or whatnot. There's no secretariat. There's no council. There's no meeting point. We don't even know if they will exchange sherpas or whatnot. Plus, we of course already have the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia defense alliance that was formed a year ago and that now suddenly everybody just forgets about or doesn't mention.

And the third point: except for NATO, I cannot give you an example of a successful long-term military alliance that has formed and remained. We had the Baghdad Pact that just fizzled away to the point where nobody remembers it. We had SEATO, the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, that fizzled away into oblivion and never worked. And there were always kind of this kind of NATO type: okay, we have the U.S. in there, we have Britain in there, we even have France in there, and then they control their thing. But it fizzled away. NATO is really the only one where North America managed to keep the, you know, to be the offshore balancer and keep the strings to its satellites firmly attached, to the point where the satellites are happy to be like little satellites.

#Pietro Shakarian

There are even questions about NATO, because there are questions about to what degree would they go to implement Article 5? Because Article 5, you also have to think that still, even with Article 5, it's not like a knee-jerk reaction that as soon as—let's say, if Russia were to attack Latvia or something like that—it wouldn't be automatic necessarily that the United States would be jumping right into war. They would still need, at least last time I checked—I don't know what Trump has been doing—but they would need some congressional approval before going to war. So even Article 5 of NATO is not necessarily an ironclad guarantee.

And with this already, this Mecca pact, we already see that that's even less. There are already even significant problems there, because as they signed this pact, Pakistan and Turkey with Saudi—and that's not even counting, again, the earlier, like, Pakistan-Saudi pact. But imagine that after that, the Ansar Allah was still in conflict with Saudi, and you didn't see the Turks or the Pakistanis sending forces over there to the Bab al-Mandab Strait to go fight for Saudi or to go fight against the Yemenis. And they wouldn't dare, let me tell you, because we know for the Egyptians, that was their Vietnam, right?

And if the Turks or the Pakistanis were to get involved, that would become their Vietnam, right? So they would not want to get mixed up. They would not want to get mixed up with Yemen, and they would certainly not want to mix it up with Yemen, because they know it would not be a winning proposition by any means. And that already shows the limitations of this Mecca Pact. How effective is it, really? It almost seems to me that it's not worth the paper it's written on, because if you can't even intervene successfully against, you know, Ansar Allah, which is attacking Saudi, you know, that raises serious questions about this pact.

#Pascal

That's why I don't buy it. I don't think it is meant seriously. It's meant as a political posture, as a kind of a, "Let's show that we are on the same page," but then we'll just forget about it, as actually most of these kinds of pacts have done in history. They were just forgotten about, and you just let them fizzle out and fizzle away. But the other one then is—maybe we change to Europe a little bit—NATO, of course, and you alluded to that: Article 5 is not automatic.

And actually, I think when we look at the U.S.'s recently announced troop reductions in South Korea, which makes me a little bit worried, because one of the preconditions for the U.S. to be able to fight the next proxy war is not to have its troops there. So it's like, if the U.S. starts taking away the tripwire, I think that will make it more likely that the war will come, let's say, to Europe, to the Baltics, or so on. As long as these troops are there, it seems the U.S. is invested, like, physically into it. And at this point, it still seems to me that it is. But how do you see it?

#Pietro Shakarian

I think it is, but a lot remains to be seen. I think the problem is that the United States, as it stands now, is overstretched, and we are facing major, major economic problems potentially, especially coming off this whole Hormuz thing. Because the longer, Pascal, the Hormuz is closed—I mean, already there's going to be some impact that the Hormuz has been closed as long as it has, for over six months actually, really, you can say, or at least closed to Western shipping—that even if you were to open it up tomorrow, everything would not come back to where it was in February of this year. It just wouldn't. And what we're looking at, what we're staring at potentially, is a major, major economic crisis resulting from this situation.

And we're not feeling it immediately right now. Actually, we already are a little bit. I mean, you can already see the effects of it. But it's really going to be in the coming months we're really going to see the major impact of this. And so it's going to just exacerbate this idea that the United States is overstretched, that there needs to be more focus on the domestic United States, you know, and more focus on the U.S. itself than on all these imperial overtures abroad. And so that's going to definitely shake things up geopolitically. And that's really how I see it, that for the U.S., it's going to be a rather difficult proposition.

#Pascal

And, you know... But you also mentioned tripwires.

#Pietro Shakarian

The other one that's also important to mention, I should note, is this idea of the TRIPP, right? So this is this Trump Route corridor, which we were still kind of talking about.

#Pascal

I mean, recently... A different tripwire, but yeah, also a TRIPP.

#Pietro Shakarian

Well, I mean, this is partially done to facilitate the isolation of not only Russia, but also Iran. I mean, that's really the whole idea of this. I mean, and it's also done to kind of facilitate a corridor, a middle corridor that would, you know, provide access to, you know, the energy riches of Central Asia from the perspective of people like, you know, British Petroleum and others. But actually, the architect of this TRIPP was recently revealed in the Armenian media to be this gentleman by the name of Lightstone, who is a big, big, big lobbyist for Israel in the United States, and somebody who is, I mean, really, he's like an Israeli cutout, effectively, at the end of the day. And according to Drop Site News and Jeremy Scahill and Max Blumenthal, he was actually involved in setting up the, I guess you could say, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, right?

So he was somebody who was involved, really, in the atrocities that we're seeing right now in Gaza. So that shows you the linkage to this. It's part of that effort not only to isolate Iran, but also to really kind of maybe even use, you know, the Caucasus region as a launching platform into Iran. We already saw that with Azerbaijan, right? Azerbaijan is extraordinarily close. Aliyev's regime is extraordinarily close to Israel. There was a lot of controversy about that in this past war in particular, but even before that, in the June 2025 war. And so there is actually great alarm on the Iranian side that Pashinyan is trying to kind of join that anti-Iranian front with Mr. Aliyev by putting all his eggs in this TRIPP corridor.

And it's also important to note, again, the Armenian people—this was an election that we just had. This was an election that was completely rigged. It was not a free expression of the Armenian people, their decisive vote to show the Russians what for, or something like that. No, no, no, no, no. This was a vote that was rigged extensively by Pashinyan's government, with the blessing of Frau von der Leyen and all our friends in the EU and Mr. Trump, who publicly endorsed Pashinyan. So this whole situation is actually putting the people of Armenia in incredible risk and incredible danger. Also, certainly it would be the same, by the way, for Azerbaijan. He loves Netanyahu so much. He loves Israel so much. But in reality, that relationship is going to be very detrimental to Baku in the final analysis. Yeah.

#Pascal

But if I was in Baku and looked at things from Azerbaijan, I would say, like, no, no, it's fine because they still have Turkey, right? Before anything would happen to us, something would happen to Turkey. And I mean, it's fine. I mean, there's enough time here. And what we need to do is now to cut off Armenia and everything, and make sure that we connect our lands and whatnot, one nation in two states. And this idea that the TRIPP actually, you know, then cuts the line between Russia and Iran is, in my view, quite mistaken because it just ignores that the two are connected through the Caspian Sea. Yeah, absolutely. But it's so much easier than driving things on a truck, right? Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. And I think that Ukraine tried to bring the war into the Caspian Sea, right? And Iran actually said, "You stop this now or else." And funnily enough, they stopped.

#Pietro Shakarian

Yeah, because they don't want—because I think that maybe Washington thought that this was maybe too much, although it also—I don't exclude, because Zelensky doesn't do much of anything without the consent of Washington. So he's all in. He's bought in anyhow. Absolutely, absolutely. And so I think, again, maybe Trump—or his team—thought it would be fun to maybe merge the two fronts. That's a possibility. There's also the possibility that, you know, Zelensky—I mean, this is what Trita Parsi was arguing—that Zelensky was trying to merge the fronts because he wanted to get the United States directly involved in the Ukraine war and directly involved in a shooting war with Russia, while at the same time also getting the Europeans in a direct shooting war with Iran.

Which is actually, that's probably the most sensible explanation for it. But again, we also have to think: Zelensky does very little without the consent of D.C. So, I mean, but I think that they understood that merging the war so overtly had many, many more risks than benefits. Let's put it that way. And so the Ukrainian assault on that Iranian ship in the Caspian Sea, I think that in the end there was some damage control there to kind of contain the issue from, you know, blowing up too much.

#Pascal

Yeah, so we cannot properly know where the decision was taken not to take this further, but it was definitely a trial balloon, just to see that these two conflicts could merge and/or might be on the verge of merging. But the bigger question to me still is why Iran has strategic patience and is willing to do that. Russia does so too. And it seems to me that the Europeans are working toward undermining that strategic patience for suicidal reasons. But where do you see that one standing? Because, like, these Wildberries factories burning, I mean, it's very dramatic. And it's definitely meant just to further salami-slice the war into Mother Russia. Do you have any indication of how this one is going down there?

#Pietro Shakarian

I think the problem is the European strategy and, by extension, the Ukrainian strategy, right? Doing something like attacking the Wildberries, you know, storage facilities. What this does is, you know, it creates some...

#Pietro Shakarian

You know, flashy headlines and some very elaborate scenes and dramatic scenes, as you rightfully highlight. But does it actually change the overall situation on the ground? Does it change the situation on the front with regard to the battlefield? Now, what do we see? We see Odessa on the Black Sea. It's being, you know, blockaded now. And what does that mean, Pascal? It makes Ukraine de facto a landlocked country, right? It may be followed. I mean, as things become—as Ukraine, you know, becomes more and more exhausted—it may get to a point where Russia actually controls Odessa. And that's not even counting, again, that the Russians are pushing toward—I mean, we had this Konstantinovka, you know, capture by the Russians recently—and, in addition, you know, pushing toward Kramatorsk and Slavyansk.

And the idea of capturing those two cities, that would be really the end of Ukraine's fortress barrier there in Donbas. Once those areas are taken, then Russia would have a much smoother route to really ending this war rapidly. Ukraine does not have that much. I mean, Ukraine has a massive manpower shortage. The Europeans are desperately trying to maybe change the whole dynamics. They want to maybe, you know, try to undermine public confidence in Russia, in the ability of the Russian state to provide security for the people and all that. But it's not going to work in the long

term. And it's, as you highlight, incredibly, incredibly dangerous for the Europeans—the European publics, I should mention. As you well know, because you're in Switzerland right now, the European publics are, you know, not for a war with Russia.

But the European elites, they're all gung-ho for that. And I think that in the end, the European elites are not—if there ever was a clear representation of political elites not representing the interests of their people, it's what we have today with the EU, because what are they doing? They're putting their own people in harm's way for some vague geopolitical goals and for really this imperialistic war in which the Ukrainian people, it pains me to say, are being used as pawns. That's really what's going on here. That's really the nature of this war, that they're using the Ukrainian people to fight a proxy war against Russia. That's really what's going on.

If people don't see that now, I mean, you even have some people on the political left who try to make this whole idea of Ukraine-Gaza solidarity, whatever. And in reality, they're not seeing the Ukraine war for what it is, which is this horrible imperialistic war in which the Ukrainian people are being used as cannon fodder by Western elites. And that's the great tragedy of this. I mean, and Ukraine—I mean, it's going to be interesting to see what happens. By the way, I'm not one of these people who believes that, you know, that when the war ends, I mean, probably what we would see as an outcome of this war, in the final analysis, would be Ukraine would become a rump state.

It would lose a lot of land to Russia, most likely Odessa even. They would even lose that. But I'm not necessarily sure that we would be in a scenario where Poland would take the western part of Ukraine, or Romania would take a slice of Ukraine, or something like this. Because if we look even at western Ukraine, I mean, the majority of the population there is Ukrainian. Would they want to be part of Poland? Would the Poles want them? Those are big questions. Okay, so the Poles, they might have their historical desires for Lvov, the city, but they might not want to bring in so many Ukrainians into their country, right? We have to start thinking like that because I don't think it's realistic.

#Pascal

Yeah, the people there that are currently being revered are not the kind of people that the Poles officially like very much. I also think that there will definitely be a chunk of Ukraine left. What I have a problem with is saying that this rump state is not able to live. I mean, no, it's going to be a state. Austria, it lives.

#Pietro Shakarian

And I think that what would actually end up happening really is it would be a rump state. And I mean, many people in the West would not like to hear this, but it would be a rump state. And at the end of the day, it would probably find some independent accommodation with Russia because there would be no real way for the West, given all of the problems I was talking about financially and

everything like that, for them to really sustain this operation, you know, in perpetuity, where they would have this, you know, Ukraine as a so-called anti-Russia against Russia, that kind of a thing. And similarly, by the way, I can say this also about, you know, Zakarpattia region, the people there would not want to be part of Hungary.

There would be Hungarians in the far south of Zakarpattia that would certainly want to be part of Hungary. But the, you know, the Carpatho-Ukrainian, Carpatho-Rusyn population would not be so interested in that prospect, and it goes on, right? So there would be a rump state of Ukraine, but it would be a Ukraine that would have to find, out of necessity, out of its basic survival for its people and its society, an accommodation with Russia. That's actually what we're really looking at, because it's in the natural interest of the Ukrainian people to have an accommodation with Russia. I mean, they are—it's like one big East Slavic family: Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians. That's the reality, Pascal.

Look how many—you can't even quantify how many intermarriages there are between Russians and Ukrainians. They're that interlinked. In Soviet times, they didn't even consider that an intermarriage between a Russian and a Ukrainian, right? Look at Mikhail Gorbachev. He is somebody who is of partial Russian, partial Ukrainian origin. His wife, Raisa, was fully Ukrainian. Khrushchev was born in Ukraine. He was Russian, but his wife was Ukrainian. It goes on and on and on. Solzhenitsyn... I mean, also Yuri Shevchuk of the Russian rock band DDT, also of Ukrainian origin. There's just so much interconnection there. You can't disentangle it so easily. I don't know if maybe Brzezinski was thinking we could facilitate a clean divorce because, you know, the connections, the Russian-Ukrainian ties, are that, you know, clear.

It's much more ambiguous than he thinks. The history is so interlocked and intertwined, you can't easily disentangle that. And that's the reality that Ukrainians are going to, you know—Ukrainian people want to have peace in the end. They don't want this war to go on forever, as we see. They don't want—we don't want to see a scenario where a young woman loses her fiancé to the meat grinder of this unjust imperialistic war. The Ukrainian people, at the end of the day, will find their own interests. And their own interests would include—the top interest would be to find peace with Russia. That's in the natural interest of Ukraine. And, you know... that's how it's going to end up.

#Pascal

The great tragedy is that we could have had all of that with Ukraine intact, a neutral Ukraine that finds a modus vivendi and that serves as a bridge between the EU and Russia, and not as a bulwark against it. And we're going to have something like that in the end in that little rump state, because the EU will still have to support it while it needs to somehow survive and deal with the Russians. This necessity will at some point emerge. And it will actually, in the end, as my prediction, look very, very similar to what Georgia looks like and have some form of modus vivendi without ever loving the Russians, without ever saying that they're our friends, but just some way of interacting and dealing with it.

And the Georgians just realized that basically 15 years earlier and without the slaughter. I mean, there was a war, but it was not the slaughter that Ukraine is. No, I just wonder why is it that the Europeans, of all people... I understand why the American empire and so on, why it tries to throw everything at their perceived adversaries and just see what sticks. I understand that strategy, and I understand strategist Brzezinski's strategy. What I don't understand is why the elites in Europe are so integrated into that entire affair that they transcend the state, that they transcend the nation of what's good for the European states, and actually just go all in with the empire instead of going all in for what would actually be good for the European continent.

#Pietro Shakarian

Well, I'm going to kind of unpack two things. The first is, before I get to Europe, I just want to mention about Georgia that the Georgian government has done a phenomenal job in balancing, you know, between the East and the West. I would also add, too, by the way, that that election in 2012 that was won by the Georgian Dream Party and that ousted Saakashvili, that was an incredible victory for the Georgian people. And there was serious risk here in Armenia of that scenario being repeated with the June election.

And that's one of the reasons why the EU got so, you know, became—got so involved, because they did not want to see the EU and also the neocon elites in the United States, you know, like Mr. Rubio, they did not want to see a repeat of the Georgian scenario here. And that was very likely in Armenia. Pashinyan's ratings were very low going into that election. There was no way he could probably—if that was a completely fair election, he would lose. But because they were fearing that, they did not want a Georgian Dream, you know, Armenian-style Georgian Dream, you know, kind of like an Armenian variant of the Georgian Dream to come to power, they got involved to kind of completely rig the show. But then again, we go back to this question of why is Europe doing this?

Why are they getting so involved in post-Soviet affairs? Why are they getting involved in, really, post-Soviet affairs that actually lead to their own—that actually are to the detriment of European interests? Because it's not in the interests of the Europeans to use Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians against Russia, or to confront Russia in any sense. You know, the Europeans, given the basic geography, they need to come to some sort of understanding with the Russians. That's because I believe that it's part of a process of the subordination of European elites to American interests. And this is a process that did not begin overnight, that in the Cold War, Pascal, the United States had influence over Western Europe.

That was part of the Western alliance, right, with NATO and all that. But there was also this principle of strategic autonomy that the United States, in order to help bolster this image that in the capitalist West we have more freedom, et cetera, et cetera, we should allow our Western European allies to pursue their own independent foreign policy. Like, if Mr. de Gaulle wants to not integrate his forces with NATO, if he wants to pursue or do his own thing, he should do his own thing. And that model

was highly respected internationally. And it came in contrast, at least in terms of image, with something like the Soviet Union getting involved directly in Hungary or in Czechoslovakia. It made the West look good.

And that principle of strategic autonomy lasted and even survived the end of the Cold War. The problem was that when that strategic autonomy began to clash with the neocon interest of the new American century and everything like this, then it was understood that we need to, you know, completely subordinate the Europeans to our interests. And the key turning point that I referenced before on this program was during the Iraq War, when Mr. Chirac and Mr. Schröder opposed the war very vocally. And at that moment, the Beltway thinkers, the neocon thinkers in the United States, began to see Europe—its allies, its Cold War allies in Europe—as potential adversaries, as a potential challenge, as a potential new pole in the international order, that maybe Europe could be an alternative to the United States.

There are even books written about this, like *The European Dream*. You would see even texts written about that. And so the idea was, we have to subordinate Europe. We have to get Europe in lockstep with us so they will not challenge us. They will not challenge the American unipolar moment or American hegemony, that we have to subordinate them. And so what we see now today with this very, very, I guess we could say, you know, subordinate European Union, and really kind of a European Union that they're acting like puppets of the United States completely—there's no really kind of independent agency there. You saw also, by the way, how von der Leyen was kissing up to Trump when Trump was, you know, imposing these tariffs on the EU and all that. That, it—what it indicates to me is that the project, you know, this was most likely, I mean, this was done with the influence of the CIA to subordinate Europe beginning in the Bush administration period, that that project largely has succeeded.

And what it's done, though, it's been extraordinarily detrimental to Europe. And that's the only explanation I can give for why are European elites pursuing interests that are contradictory to the interests of their own people, because those elites were trained by, you know, they were trained under the influence of the United States. You know, you do see some exceptions to this, by the way, like Spain, right, like Ireland. Spain, unfortunately, though, we see what's happening with them, that they got out of line. Now Trump is trying to kind of, you know, send messages to Spain with this kind of orchestrated, so-called immigrant invasion of, quote unquote, the Spanish enclave in North Africa, Ceuta.

You know, and also trying to kind of, you know, send a message to Pedro Sanchez that, oh, look, you didn't support the Iran war. You didn't support, you know, you're criticizing the Gaza genocide. How can you do this, right? We need you to be in lockstep with us. So that's what I'm seeing, that they are actually—the U.S., in many ways—they're also losing control to some extent, because now we're beginning to see the Europeans, some European leaders, beginning to say, hey, look, I'm out

of this. I'm not going to be, you know, increasing my defense spending at your behest. I don't want to be part of your imperial schemes. I'm out. You know, I'm out of the game. As soon as you see that, now you're seeing efforts to punish those very elites.

#Pascal

This is a very good point, and actually a way to look at this. You know, the United States and NATO, basically, they lost in Vietnam. They lost in the Middle East, in West Asia. They lost against Russia. The one war they did win, and where they still are earning the spoils, is they, of course, defeated Europe. And Eastern Europe and Western Europe, they defeated completely. And still hold on to this, and the boot is still on, and the people under the boot are still licking the boot. That's how far it's going. So this has been going quite successfully for the U.S., in fact. You're right.

#Pietro Shakarian

Yeah, but I think that actually there will be, I mean, especially with all the economic problems coming up, especially with Hormuz, that there is going to be a reckoning over this very soon. I can't say exactly when. I'm not going to be like Nostradamus and give you an exact date when this would actually happen or whatever. But I can tell you that it is going to happen very soon, because just by the fact that Hormuz is closed, and even if you were, like I said, to open it up tomorrow, it would still be a while for everything to kind of function again. Because, again, think about the sour crude that goes into the diesel and the airplane fuel.

The jet fuel. It's a big deal. It's a big issue. And the U.S.—the other problem is with this Iran war. And this is why it was also a really idiotic move for the United States, from the imperial perspective, to get involved in this war, because it revealed the American limitations. If you're a superpower, the one thing you don't want is to reveal your hand, to reveal what limitations you have, right? Part of the mythology is that the U.S. is the strongest country in the world. It's the greatest country in the world. Now, this is the fact that they're able to do image control.

They're able to show—they're able to not show the areas where they, you know, maybe have some inadequacies. And now all of a sudden, though, you can't ignore it. There are shortcomings, right? They're almost out of—they're all—they're out of ammunition. And that's a big, big deal. I mean, how can a superpower be out of ammunition? That's the question you have to ask yourself. If this is still a superpower, how are they out of ammunition? And the truth is, Pascal, even superpowers have limitations, right? We see Russia has its limitations, China has its limitations, and the U.S. has its limitations. That's the reality.

#Pascal

I think we are back to the United States as a great power. I think this idea of the superpowers, it's useless now. If you have four, five, six superpowers, the whole concept is useless. And I talked to a

Chinese colleague recently and said, "Are you worried that the U.S. might do something to you as they did to Iran?" And he just smiled and said, "Come on, look, Iran is a third-rate power and they can defeat the United States. So why would we be worried?"

#Pietro Shakarian

This is going to be a major—it's going to be a major, major turning point in world history. What has happened, what has transpired with Iran? I mean, what can you say about that? That actually is going to be the ultimate—you know, if you're studying history in high school, world history in high school, that's going to be seen as a major turning point for not only the United States, but also for, you know, for the world in general, in terms of the shift toward multipolarity.

The irony also is that Trump, in part, one of the reasons, of course, there's the Israeli influence, Netanyahu, all that, to get into the war with Iran, and we know. But there's also the element of trying to kind of stop the multipolarity, to halt the integration of BRICS, to halt this Russia-China-Iran kind of integration process. And the irony, of course, is that the war only sped it up. Yeah. It only made this process even faster. Yeah, absolutely. So.

#Pascal

Here we are. Here we are at the end of an empire. And, you know, as Gramsci... I mean, Gramsci is being misquoted quite a lot, but I do like the idea of, you know, this world in between being the world of monsters, or the time in between being the time of monsters. It is a dangerous one, but it's very good to have your perspective on regularly. So, Pietro, people who want to read more about you or see more from you, where should they go?

#Pietro Shakarian

They should go to The Nation magazine, because I've been writing there mostly now, these days, in The Nation. I just published this article, "America's Third Red Scare." I published a lot of recent analyses on the Caucasus. You know, probably in the future also I'm going to be writing there, doing most of my Iran analysis there, Russia analysis there. So that's where they can find me, at thenation.com. I also have written a book, Anastas Mikoyan: An Armenian Reformer in Khrushchev's Kremlin. So if our listeners want to check that out, they can go check that out on amazon.com. It's also published by Indiana University Press, so they can look at that. But if they want to see my latest, I guess you could say, geopolitical analyses, they should consult thenation.com.

#Pascal

So the links will be in the description box below. Everybody head out to The Nation magazine, thenation.com. And we will have Pietro back on again soon. Pietro Zaccaria, thank you so much for your time today.

#Pietro Shakarian

Thank you, Pascal.