

Steve Jermy: End of U.S. Military Primacy - New Strategic Thinking Required

Royal Navy Commodore Steve Jermy commanded warships in the 5th Destroyer Squadron and Britain's Fleet Air Arm. He served in the Falklands War and in the Adriatic for the Bosnian and Kosovo campaigns. Then retired after an operational tour, in 2007, as Strategy Director in the British Embassy in Afghanistan. He is the author of the book: "Strategy for Action: Using Force Wisely in the 21st Century". Steve Jermy Substack: <https://stevejermy.substack.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Royal Navy Commodore Steve Jeremy, former strategy director in the British Embassy in Afghanistan. And he also commanded warships in the 5th Destroyer Squadron and Britain's Fleet Air Arm. Also, he writes articles on Substack with excellent analysis, although they do not always conform to the state-approved narratives. But I have left a link in the description. And yeah, thank you for coming on the program and also for producing your great articles. They're always, yeah, fascinating to read.

#Steve Jermy

Yeah, it's a pleasure to be back on, Glenn. As we've just been discussing, I'm hoping to be across in Norway in November at a CPAC conference. Perhaps we can get the chance to sort of meet up again. But yeah, no, I think the article which prompted me to get in touch, or for us to talk, was about the balance of power. And I think it's quite an interesting one because, as you immediately pinged back, we're starting to get onto the land of Mackinder. For some of your listeners and viewers, it'll be about the real origins of geopolitics and the World Island and things like that. And that will be fun to discuss.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, we can jump straight on to that. Well, I do want to ask about how you conceptualize balance of power and the main factors or variables which should be considered in assessing it. And I wouldn't mind coming back to Mackinder afterwards because I think these ideas kind of shape modern geopolitical thinking.

#Steve Jermy

Yeah, I'd been thinking about this for many years, Glenn, and I wrote about it in *The Strategy for Action*. And in the book, I sort of talked about the difference between the balance of power and the balance of passion. And I'll come back to the balance of passion. But I realized that more work was needed in terms of understanding the balance of power. And the starting point for me was John Mearsheimer's work, of course. And John actually says that potential power is a function of both wealth and the population size. So the bigger the population, the stronger you're likely to be. And the wealthier you are, then the stronger you're likely to be.

I sort of narrowed it down a bit, though, to two principal factors when I wrote about this originally about 15 months ago. But the more I've been thinking about it, the more I realized I needed to update that article. And I think there are three foundational factors. The first is industrial production. The second is energy. And the third is the capacity to think and act strategically. So, taking those through, I think what people often talk about is they assume that a country, because it has a big GDP, is powerful. And I think that's self-evidently wrong, because the problem with GDP is it is a sort of all-encompassing figure that includes the service sector itself, houses, finance, and so on.

And when you look at, for example, the Russian economy, I think about 30% of the Russian economy's GDP comes from industrial production, whereas that factor in, say, the British and the French economy is much, much smaller. And, of course, in war, industrial production matters because you can't build as many loans as you like and throw them against the enemy, or as many insurance policies, and throw them against the enemy. It's not going to make much difference. Whereas when it comes to 155-millimeter shells, then it is going to make a difference. And what we know is that Russia is outproducing the whole of the West in terms of 155-millimeter shells.

And, of course, what we're looking at here is economies in the West that are essentially financialized economies. And this is the distinction Michael Hudson makes between industrial capitalism and financial capitalism. So, you know, we're in a situation at the moment where actually we can't produce enough equipment to actually support the Ukrainians in the Russia-Ukraine war. And the Americans are also having significant problems in the Iranian war. That's the first of the foundational factors. And I do think it's self-evident, but it doesn't seem to be self-evident to our leaders. The second is energy. And again, this ought to be self-evident.

But the fact is that actually, if you haven't got reliable sources of energy, then you're going to struggle with your industrial production, as the Germans are finding, as they're deindustrializing by shutting themselves off from cheap Russian natural gas. But also, you can't run operations without significant amounts of energy. War and operations draw very, very heavily on energy. I've cited in the article that when I was in Afghanistan, I was, even as a sort of an experienced operational

person, I was shocked to find that to get one litre of diesel to the front line in some of the provinces that British and NATO troops were in, it took 400 litres. So 400, and it gives you a sense of just how costly energy is in war.

I mean, I can remember during the Falklands War, we would replenish the ships about every three days. I later went on to drive a Type 23 frigate, Type 21 frigate, and we'd come alongside and get fuel every three days, roughly, in operations. And that would be 200 tons of fuel, 200 tons of diesel. I don't know what that equates to in terms of litres, but it's a lot. So war and operations are extremely energy-intensive, as indeed is the industrial capacity to support them. There's a lovely quote from Admiral Yamamoto, who before the Second World War said that anybody who's seen the oil fields of Texas and the automobile factories of Ohio knows that the Japanese can never win a long war with the United States. And so it proved that.

What I'd missed, though, in those foundational factors was something which I ought to have thought about, which is the ability to think and act strategically. Because you can be the most powerful country in the world, but actually, if you have people who are incompetent running the country, then you're in trouble. And to me, I think we lack now, evidently, competence in the capacity to think and act strategically. And I come to my conclusion: track record of defeats, if you like, for the West and NATO in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and pending defeats in Ukraine and pending defeats in Iran. And I think that's unequivocal evidence that we lack people who have the ability to actually think and act strategically.

I happen to think that if we thought all of those wars through properly, and with deep thinking, using a structured approach that we certainly use in other places in the military, that we probably would never have engaged in any of them because we probably would have recognized the problems. So that's the foundational factors. What had also struck me, and I think it's profound as well, is that military power is geopolitically conditioned. So, in very simple terms, if you've got a navy, it's not much use in land operations, and vice versa. But it's become much more important because what we're now seeing in both Ukraine and in the Russia-Ukraine war is that the West is unable to defend itself against sustained strategic bombardment by a combination of drones, missiles, be they hypersonic or conventional ballistic missiles.

And this is beyond doubt, I think. We've seen in the work of people like Ted Postol that there are technological reasons why we're unable to defend ourselves. I think there are also other reasons. I've written about this in *The Principles of Air Defence*. And the problem is that our systems and our force structures are not structured to allow us to actually operate in that way. That in turn means that if you can't achieve air superiority—that's the ability to use the air and to deny its use to your adversaries—that you also probably can't achieve sea control. And that's the same thing except for the sea. So that's your ability to use the sea and deny its use to others.

And we just have to look at the situation in Iran. And in Iran, we've seen that the United States has been pushed further and further west. And even now, I think the bases in Jordan have been

damaged. I can't remember how many F-16s have been damaged. And I can't remember, I think there's an A-10 Intruder damaged. So those aircraft are not safe in those locations. So therefore, American air power can't be used. But so too are the carriers being pushed further back, and so too are the American ships being pushed further back. Now, what that then means is that you can't actually deploy land forces abroad because you can't deploy them to the mobilization places that are safe.

And similarly, you can't deploy amphibious forces abroad because you can't get them into the landing zone safely without sustaining major, major levels of damage to your forces. And the last bit of this is logistics because, again, we're now struggling with logistics, or the Americans are struggling with logistics, as indeed is NATO. If you can't achieve air superiority and sea control, what that means is that the whole of the American power projection model, which is based on a strong air and sea force, is now under question, because it's not clear to me that it is indeed any longer deployable. So notwithstanding the fact that it's still an extremely powerful nation, we're now in the situation that actually I don't think the Americans can deploy power in the way they used to.

And that, in turn, means that the end of hegemony is indeed here because, of course, it relies on the ability to deploy power at a time and a place of your choosing. The last bit of geopolitical utility, Glenn, as well, which again is what I call the balance of passion. And I'm distinguishing here between, on the one hand, national power, which is military power; on the other hand, political passion. And what I'm really talking about is looking at the reasons why Vietnam was lost and why Afghanistan was lost. And in both cases, it was about the cause and the willingness of a nation to actually support a particular cause for which it's being invited to fight.

And in Afghanistan and in Vietnam, I would say that the weaker technological forces of the Viet Cong and the Taliban defeated stronger military enemies. And the reason is that the Taliban and the Afghans and the Viet Cong and the Vietnamese believed much more in their cause, and they were prepared to pay a much higher blood price than were the Western forces that were arrayed against them. And so if the balance of passion is against you, then that in turn means that the utility of your force is reduced. Again, we can see this, I think, in the U.S.-Iran war, where actually a relatively small level of casualties.

I mean, I think we're in hundreds in terms of injured and just above a dozen or so in terms of killed in action. It's still a very significant political issue in the United States, so much so that I think there's very little support for the U.S.-Iran war in the United States. So as a result of all those factors, Glenn, I think we are seeing a profound shift in the balance of power worldwide, and a shift from the ability of the United States and maritime nations to deploy power towards those countries which are structured in this way. So they have force structures such as the Russian force structure, which is an integrated army with integrated air defense and a significant rocket forces structure.

And when I say rocket forces, I'm talking about those sorts of rockets that we all often see in military parades in Moscow and in Beijing, large transporter rockets. Because unlike the West, the

Russians and the Chinese and the Vietnamese—not the Vietnamese, the North Koreans and the Iranians—have had these forces for years. So they're at least five years ahead of us now, I would say probably more like 10. So the shift is here, and notwithstanding what some people might think, the idea that having the United States on your side means in turn that you're going to win is now a very unsafe assumption. It's an unsafe assumption for Ukraine and NATO, and it's an unsafe assumption for Israel in the Middle East.

#Glenn

Well, some of this seemed to be partially recognized, though. After NATO backed the toppling of Yanukovych and triggered all of these conflicts in Ukraine, we heard reports that Obama was cautious about escalating because he recognized that this was right on the border of Russia, which gave Russia the advantage of logistics, as you said. Getting material from the U.S. to Ukraine, the Russians would always have that advantage. If you're all the way in Eastern Ukraine, if any of your artillery is being exhausted, you have to ship it all the way to Poland to fix it. You wouldn't have these problems. So, you know, he recognized that. Obama did recognize the Russians would have this advantage, but also what you referred to as this—and the passion that is, for the Russians, this is an existential threat.

So they would fight this to the bitter end, while the West would be very unpopular to have any significant casualties, which is why we also have to fight with Ukrainians. What he did leave out, though, was the industrial might. I think he subscribed to the same McCain slogan that Russia is just a gas station masquerading as a country. This was, I think, Obama's assumption why the ruble could be turned into rubble after 2014. And as you suggest, this can be extended to Iran. I mean, if you look at the military might, Trump keeps focusing: where's their navy? Where's their air force? But that's their advantage, though. They can make cheap missiles and drones. They don't need the Air Force or Navy, for that matter.

I mean, they have, but this is not the source of why they're able to essentially defeat the U.S. And again, like the Russians, they see, for good reasons, this being an existential threat. The willingness to sustain casualties, absorb the pain, and keep on going—this is understood not just by the state, but by the public. Much like in Russia, capitulation might mean the destruction of the country, so there's no other option but to fight on. I did wonder, though, in the industrial might, because that kind of slipped out of our hands. I mean, the political West, we used to have this. It just seems like in the 1990s, when globalization kicked in, we went for this new international distribution of labor. That is all our trade agreements entailed.

We'll need more IP protection while our industries can be outsourced. So again, the U.S. wanted to focus on tech, finance, services. That's where all the money was created. And they could outsource their industrial production, car manufacturing, but also military, for that matter, that this kind of industrial might disappear. The idea was always, we will make the iPhone, the Chinese can produce it. This is what the international distribution of labor meant. But now, of course, as I say, when it

comes to producing basic things like artillery shells, the Russians can outproduce the entire political West combined. Obviously, we have to reassess the focus on GDP alone. But what do you think, though? The U.S., NATO, Europe, or however you want to define the political West, what should Western leaders do differently?

#Steve Jermy

I think the first thing they should do is try to work out why it all went wrong. And I think within the structure of the analysis, there is the answer. I think you're right. I think what happened in the West was that we sleepwalked into this situation. But it wasn't entirely sleepwalking, because we sleepwalked, but being guided by two sets of people. The first were the Chicago School of economists. And I often look back to the Falklands War, where Thatcher won a major victory. And as a result, within Britain, we suddenly saw a major breakout of privatization. And the general idea was the support of the Chicago School of economists, who were saying, leave everything to the market. And so the state stood back, and we left everything to the market.

And I think that the other people, of course, who were very happy to pick up that baton were the financial sector and, in particular, Wall Street and the City of London and others involved, who were very happy. I think there was also probably an element within the United States which saw that, at least with China, the sort of outsourcing to China made good sense for Wall Street, but also would help in terms of democratization and drawing China into the Western world. But of course, what we were doing was also allowing Wall Street and the Chicago School of Economists to outsource our military production. And on reflection, probably not a good idea.

And I think that we were being seduced by the overall—the way that economists use GDP, and people thought about GDP as a measure of power, because in military terms it isn't a measure of power, as we're seeing. We can see a number of wars looking back, all the ones that I've just ticked off from the 21st century. In terms of what we should do, I think it's time to take a really good, long, hard look through this and other analytical lenses at what our military power really is. Because in Europe, I think we're little other than weak. We're weak in terms of industrial production. We're weak in terms of energy production, apart from your country and, to a lesser extent, mine. We have no hydrocarbons produced. And anybody who thinks you can run a war on renewables, then welcome to fantasy land. It's just a ridiculous idea.

And I speak as somebody who's worked in that sector. So I think the last bit of it, and I think this is as important, is to work out why we have made so many mistakes with our strategic thinking. And I'm afraid a lot of it is to do with leadership. And we have leaders in both the political and the military sector, and indeed amongst our defence officials and our foreign officials, who are not competent. I use the analysis—the way that I assess competence in terms of strategy is: are you effective in terms of achieving an operation? Are you efficient? So, did you achieve the operation

with the level of resources that you allocated to the operation? And were the results enduring? And if you look at, for example, the Afghan debacle—and it was a debacle, looking back—the West was there for over 20 years, and NATO for nearly 20 years. And we failed on all of those metrics.

And as we left, the Taliban were closing in on Kabul, and soon it was all over. So the question is, how do we get to that situation? And part of this is the simple thing of the inability to think and act strategically. I'm very fond of quoting General André Beaufre, who's the French general who said, "In war, the loser deserves to lose because his defeat must be a consequence of poor strategic thinking either before or during the campaign." So the issue is one of competence, and I think it's important for Western leaders—and this isn't just about political leaders—but Western leaders to look across their establishments and work out why things went wrong, and then work out whether they need to actually change systems so that they can actually get people in to support them who are actually competent.

And one of the first things I would do would be to look back through all of the advice that I'd had from particularly the military leaders. And the military is supposed to be the leaders in strategy. But in my experience, they know better than anybody else. Unfortunately, some assume that they're better than anybody else, and so they tend to be listened to. I mean, how often do we see people like Jack Keane on American TV explaining why it should be so easy to defeat Iran? No, it's obviously not. But I think we've got a class of military and, to a lesser extent, political leaders who are not competent, and we need to actually go deep into that and work out how we can change that class.

That's not going to be easy, and it's going to take time as well. We've also got force structures which are probably now not fit for purpose. We've got to also, I think, really look hard at these two wars, the US-Iran war and the NATO-Russia war, because neither—we can win neither—because we're weak across all of the factors that I took into account, and we are going to lose. And we'd be much better, I think, to actually extract as quickly and humanely as possible from both. And then, on the other side of this, we need deep inquiries to work out why it's happened. Unfortunately, we're going to be probably, because of events in both wars, in the middle of an energy shock, or what I foresee to be an increasing energy shock, and that in turn will lead to a significant economic shock.

So we're going to be doing it at a time which is not good. But that doesn't change the fact that actually, if we're only able to do this competently, then something needs to be done, and that something needs to start at the top. I think we're just starting to see a bit of that in Britain, interestingly. What I'm detecting is a prime minister who doesn't support the U.S.-Iran war, doesn't support Israel. He's actually come out against them. And I've got this intuitive feeling, although it's not yet backed up by anything said publicly, he doesn't really believe in the NATO-Ukraine war as well.

And the reason I say that is that he recently spoke in Parliament, saying that we had to be really, really careful about making sure that the domestic agenda was not subservient to the military agenda in operations abroad. Now, that may or may not be some sort of implicit questioning of the

NATO-Ukraine war, but it would not surprise me. We're also just starting to see elsewhere in the mainstream media, at last, people who are wondering about these wars. The Spectator, which is a very well-read political magazine in Britain, comes out weekly, has said that Ukraine is losing the war. And we're seeing elsewhere in the United States press as well these sorts of things coming through. So, the sooner we can extract ourselves from these wars and then start to work out what went wrong, the better, Glenn.

#Glenn

Well, I think that's a good point. That is, when you lose a war, at least you can reflect upon what was done wrong, learn, and readjust. It just seems that after each war, instead, the topics just change. So, for example, after the war in Afghanistan, the concern seemed to be that, oh, this could break NATO because it's such a humiliating defeat. So we just ignored it and then moved on to the next thing. And I think once we're defeated in Iran or in the war against Russia, we're going to end up maybe in a similar situation. I mean, it would be to our own interest, I would think, to have a profound discussion, not just about the current ones, but also Afghanistan—what went wrong. And also what was true in Afghanistan, as it is in these wars now, is all the lying.

The Afghanistan Papers showed they knew things weren't going well, and they covered it up. So this need to defend or shield the narrative from reality, why is this required? And, you know, it's just, again, something that can help us to reorient the strategic thinking because, well, as the title of an article you recently wrote, you know, the whole myth of U.S. military dominance is being shattered. You know, this is, for me, this is quite significant because after the Cold War, as we know, the U.S. established a security strategy and thus also a world order essentially based on global dominance or unipolarity, in which no state or group of states should even have the realistic ambitions to rival the military might of the U.S. I mean, this was our strategy.

This was the hegemonic piece. But towards this end, the perception of the U.S. being powerful was also important, as other states had to make sure they didn't get in the way of the U.S. or at least challenge it in a significant way. But I think this need to project the image of being all-powerful also means that any weakness can't be—it has to be covered up almost, because then the image of all this massive power, which is without flaws, which no one can stand up against, it becomes so powerful itself that we can't actually discuss our own weaknesses. And if you don't discuss the weaknesses, the problems, they just begin to fester and fester.

And I just think that, you know, as the U.S. fails in proxy war against Russia or direct war against Iran, now we see that this perception of dominance has really collapsed. And, you know, the people in Washington aspiring to restore global primacy for, you know, for very good reasons are now very concerned. But, you know, if you don't address this, you're just building up this huge dam, but at some point the whole thing's gonna fall apart. But how do you think, though, they should—what kind of reforms, or maybe that's too simplistic a question, is required here? Because how do you shift the problem in strategic thinking? Yeah, it's a good question. It's a very good question.

#Steve Jermy

It's a personal question for me because I wrote it, *Strategy for Action*, and the subtitle was *Using Force Wisely in the 21st Century*. My goodness me, we've used force unwisely in the 21st century. My goodness me. But I wrote it because, as I started to look at the problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, at the time that I was writing it, initially I was working in the Chief of Defence Staff's office, but then I was actually in Afghanistan. And the striking thing for me in Afghanistan, after about a month, was that I had been to, despite what I was being advised to do by the British, which was to go to Helmand and see what was going on there. To which my response was, "We've got 4,500 troops there, so I should think we probably know what's going on there."

I went around the rest of the campaign, and the striking thing was that in both Bagram, where the 82nd Airborne Division were there at the time, and there was a Spanish-Italian headquarters, a brigade headquarters in Herat on the west of the country. And I talked to what are known in the military as the J-5, the planners, so the G-5, J-5. That's just one of the numbers in a sort of NATO headquarters division of the headquarters. And in that, I asked them the same thing. I said, "What strategy are you using?" And these are all really bright young majors, Glenn, and they're chosen for the planners because they need the brightest and the best in those roles. And

#Glenn

They all looked down at their feet.

#Steve Jermy

I was sort of a one-star officer. They all looked down at their feet and said, "Come on, do tell me." And same thing from both sides. Same thing: there isn't one. We're just making it up as we go along. We don't know what the strategy is, so we're just doing the best with what we've got. And I know this was still the case in 2012, I think it was, because Danny Davis and I have talked about this, and he said it was exactly the same when he was there in 2012. So we ought to have been looking at that. I mean, I spoke to British House of Commons select committees in Britain about this, and this inability to think strategically.

I think the problem I had then was there were just two wars going on, and so the database was a bit small. Now the database is overwhelming. But it needs a general recognition, and I just hope that the way that general recognition will probably play out—it's a pity it couldn't come out more quickly—but I think it will probably come out as the totality of the defeat becomes clear. I think as the totality of the defeat in Iran becomes clear to Americans, I think it's already clear to a lot of Americans. But it will be very, very difficult to cover that up. I mean, it's amusing, isn't it? Ironic, I should say, that the president is saying that they've destroyed the Iranian Air Force and Navy.

And yet, so what? Because if your Air Force and Navy is being pushed out of the Gulf, as the American Air Force has, taking significant casualties on the ground, and your Navy is under attack and is being pushed out of the Gulf of Oman, then so what? It doesn't matter if the United States can't maintain air superiority or sea control. I think in Europe, I would like to think that it will cause us, these defeats, to question two things. I would hope that as the totality of the casualties become clear in the Russia-Ukraine war, particularly on the Ukrainian side, which we're almost certain are heavily underreported in the West.

But as those casualties become clearer, and the people in the West who were responsible as the cheerleaders for keeping the war going at a time when those of us in the independent media said you should be thinking differently about this, I do hope people have the courage to self-reflect and ask themselves the question whether they got that wrong, because it's that sort of questioning that we will need to have. But actually, if we can extract ourselves from both these wars, then what we really need is a really, really big getting-back-to-basics approach. Getting back to basics about what armed forces are for, because the danger is that actually people see armed forces, or we saw armed forces, as things that we could use abroad to intervene.

And how often have we heard that, you know, humanitarian intervention? How many times have we heard that as a sort of doing something abroad, which rarely, if ever, worked? But actually, they're for defense and not for offense. I think as Europeans as well, I think that one of the things we should be doing is questioning two fundamental pillars of European security. The first fundamental pillar is the United States, and what we have seen in Europe is the criticality of having the United States engaged in Europe. I don't know why we still have that as a pillar, because the Americans have got us five places in the national security terms, five on the priority list, compared to the mainland USA is one. Then it's the Western Hemisphere.

So that's the Americas generally, is number two. China's number three. The Gulf is number four. And there's Europe at the bottom. And they want Europe to organize its own defense anyway. And I think we should. And I can't think why we can't be able to do this. The second thing, the second great pillar of security, is NATO, though. And I'm afraid that the joke that we used to use in describing NATO when I was on the Standing NATO Force Mediterranean, which was NATO stood for "No Ability to Organize." That's absolutely true. We've seen NATO intervene, although really it was an American intervention in Kosovo, which I was part of. I didn't see what was going on at the time, I'm ashamed to say.

But that intervention was done with very questionable legitimacy. And in fact, there's no legality because it had no Security Council resolution to support it. But the legitimacy was very questionable. Then, of course, there was the Afghan war, and NATO failed in that. I also think this is such an obvious thing to say, but it needs to be said, is that NATO's role was to prevent war in Europe. And we've had a war in Europe, so NATO has failed. And last but by no means least, NATO is now unable to support the Ukrainians to win the war in Europe. As I've said before, NATO exists to confront a

threat created by its existence, but doesn't have the capacity to confront the threat that its existence has created.

And I think it's time for us to really get back to basics about European security. And a good place to start would be listening to Russia. Russia is talking, has talked unambiguously and for years, about common security, a common European home, a need for an integrated approach to security. They've always seen the war's ultimate end to the war will require mechanisms in Europe which prevent future wars like this. And the reason that I titled the article some time ago—not "The Shattered Myth of U.S. Primacy," which has really caused me to focus on the balance of power—but the article on the spirit of Westphalia was, again, it seemed to me that Europeans have done this before and could do it in the future.

Westphalia brought to an end the Thirty Years' and the Eighty Years' Wars. And you'll know much more about it than me, Glenn, as a proper scholar and academic. But the Europeans did it then in very difficult circumstances. And I think we could do it again tomorrow. I just hope that, and I think that, what will start to cause us to look at this will be the unfolding energy crisis leading to the unfolding economic crisis, which will really expose in acute contrast the lack of money in Europe to be able to keep the Ukraine war going. And I think when that happens, I think there will start to be a lot of self-reflection.

I mean, how will Europeans feel about cutting back on budgets for health, on budgets for social security, on budgets for the arts, on budgets for education, on budgets for investment in the energy infrastructure, which is critical to any modern industrial society? So let's hope that this is how it plays out. Indeed, that's my forecast, is how the Russia-Ukraine war is likely to play out, which is that it will be the shock to the European economy which will finally force Europeans to the table. But I hope that at the same time as being forced to the table, that actually they're starting to think about all of the things that went wrong in these failures of the 21st century.

#Glenn

Well, what you suggested, you know, listen to the Russians. You know, it's strange that this has become a revolutionary idea or something controversial because, you know, as you say, for more than 30 years they've been saying the exact same thing. That is, we need a pan-European security architecture. You can't just expand the blocs from NATO, a military bloc from the Cold War, and revive this Cold War logic, and, you know, of course this is going to be a concern for us. And somehow, I think for NATO, the threat of even recognizing this argument is that it accepts that our opponents have legitimate security concerns.

So I just saw the German Chancellor Merz make this speech in which he said, "Oh, of course it's not NATO. They're not worried about NATO; they're worried about democracy." I mean, after 35 years of this, and really, this is still what they're saying. But I do understand it, though, because the hegemonic project must be framed as good, as a benign hegemon, a force for good, as NATO would

say. So it's based on values. So if you don't like our military infrastructure moving towards your border, our interventionism, well, then you don't like our values. That's essentially the thing.

But it also extended to Iran, because I remember when the American forces started going in in February, I was making the point publicly that I don't think it's going to work, because if you look at the intentions of Iran, it's an existential threat. They will fight to the bitter end, and the capabilities—they have the ability to strike all the bases, to shut down the Strait of Hormuz. But we don't discuss this. Instead, if you argue then that, well, then you're an Ayatollah apologist, you don't care about freedom. And what about little girls? You know, this kind of stuff. And, you know, so if you can't see the world from their perspective, you can't recognize the security interest. You can't recognize their strength because everyone has to be weak and hopeless.

I mean, there's no reason why recognizing that the opponent is winning should be considered pro-Iran. But this is what it's defined as, and thus you can't actually say anything. And it's the same with the Russians. I noticed, you know, if you say that actually the Russians are winning, you know, that's considered a pro-Kremlin argument. But why? Why can't you recognize that the opponent, as an objective reality, is winning? Or the casualty numbers? Why do we all have to lie about it? If you argue that the Russians are taking far fewer casualties, that's also considered pro-Russian, so you can't say it. If you say, well, actually, the Russians were provoked. They see this threat to their security. That's a pro-Russian thing because you're seen as legitimizing what they're doing.

So I'm just thinking, if you have to pretend as if they're losing, if the only acceptable thing is that they don't have any legitimate motivations, everything is about military opportunism, how can you analyze anything? I mean, strategic thinking does go down the toilet. But I do want to jump towards the Mackinder point, because that's one of yours, Alfred Mackinder. I mean, he more or less invented modern geopolitical thinking, I would say. And of course, much of his thinking was organized around sea power. And in your article, you do point out that the U.S. has lost some of its, I guess, geographical advantages, that its sea power itself doesn't mean what it used to, which kind of goes at the heart of the Mackinder argument. I was wondering if you can, I guess, unpack the Mackinder idea, but also how it applies to what you're arguing is currently changing.

#Steve Jermy

Well, I think what makes it interesting is the tripolar world. And I've often said before that we are now in a tripolar world, by which I mean there are three great powers: the United States. And notwithstanding what I've said about the balance of power, that doesn't mean to say that the United States isn't still an extremely strong military power. It is an extremely strong military power. And then, of course, you've got China and Russia. And the people who sort of look down on Russia just don't understand, or seem to be incapable of doing military analysis. You know, the Russian army is, you know, sort of pushing 1.5 million and probably the most battle-hardened army in the world.

They look at progress and they make a deduction that because actually the Russian army isn't moving at the speed which they, in their armchairs, would have moved, that it must be incompetent. And again, you get into the contradictions of Western debate here, which, if it's incompetent, why are we worried about it? But anyway, the issue, I think, is that, and I haven't really sort of got to the bottom of this, it's the sort of these conversations which help. But the issue is, I think Mackinder said that, and I'll get this quote wrong, so correct me if I remember, but he said that who rules Eastern Europe rules Eurasia. Who rules Eurasia rules the World Island, I think, and who rules the World Island rules the world.

So I think what he was sort of saying was that the two countries at the moment, or what I would imply from that, the two critical countries at the moment in the World Island, which is Europe, Asia and Africa, is how he sort of conceived it. Two critical countries are China and Russia, and both in different ways. And people often see Russia as the junior partner in that relationship. I don't. And the reason I don't is that China is a significant importer of hydrocarbons and needs Russian hydrocarbons. And furthermore, Russia might not be as big in terms of population as China, but it has fought a war against NATO, a proxy war, of course, and has won.

So they're two very, very powerful nations. But I think the issue here is that if you're still trying to retain hegemony in America, then you're in big trouble, because I can't see how it can be done anymore. I can't see that Europe could be defended by the United States. I've said this before, years ago, in sort of talking about the weakness of NATO and our inability to actually protect our seas to allow us to even get the American forces to Europe, if the Americans had the political will to do, which they don't. But so too do locations such as Taiwan, so do locations such as South Korea, and so do locations such as Japan.

So in all of these nations which have been part of the political West, but which are now on the periphery, and I don't mean the periphery in a political way, but a periphery in a geographical way of the World Island, we'll need to think very deeply about their situations. Your country, my country, Norway and Britain, we're both on that periphery. And it's how we think about our future security issues. I think a good way of doing that is actually to go back to the OSCE. But I think there's a lot of thinking to be done, going back into Mackinder's work. I've got his book. I've got it here. It's a tiny little book. And I'm rereading it just to look at the implications of what I'd said for the way in which Mackinder thought and wrote.

I think he wrote primarily just about the turn of the century, turn of the last century. I think he died just sometime after the First World War. But there's a lot of really interesting stuff in it. I mean, some of it, of course, is dated. But the other person, of course, who's interesting here is Julian Corbett, who was the maritime strategist, the better of the two maritime strategists. I think he wrote *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. But what Julian Corbett said, and I quote this in the "Shattered

Myth of American Military Primacy" article, he said that the key to your navy is not what the navy allows you to do, but what it allows your army to do, because people don't live at sea and they don't live in the air.

There's an open question, though, about trade, of course, and we're critically reliant at the moment still on the sea for so much of our trade. Ninety-five percent of most heavy things are moved by sea. That's just a question of physics. But that could be different, you know, with the railway systems that are being developed and the way that the Chinese are doing this, and indeed the Chinese who are becoming a major maritime power. This shift, I think, is profound. Of course, with China now as the factory of the world, a good example here is shipbuilding. I think I'm right in saying, I can't remember if it's 70% or 80%, but actually China builds between 70% and 80% of the world's shipping. That's a factor which is staggering.

And the idea that we in the West are going to recover that situation anytime soon is fantasy. So I think the other part of this is working out how those nations that are in the political West but living on the geographical periphery of the World Island actually engage with the two dominant powers in the World Island. And I think this is a time for engagement which is less values-based and more trade-based and more practicality-based. And we may not like some of the things that are going on in China. We may not like some of the things that are going on in Russia. That will depend on your value sets and how you look at it.

But actually, I can think about other nations that we've treated until now as allies, many in the Gulf, for example, who are much more autocratic than we see in these two powers and do things within their legal systems which, if it were an adversary, we would be complaining about. But because it's a Gulf state government, who we see as part of our allies, we're prepared to be quiet about it. We see this in Ukraine as well. Some of the things that are happening in Ukraine, both corruption, but also the way in which the Azov Brigade and people have been doing things, again, very, very kept very quiet. So too is the press-ganging of Ukrainian people kept quiet.

I think in part, I've wandered a little bit off Mackinder, but I'll come back to him later. In part, a lot of this has to do with culture, the way in which Western politics so much matters about the narrative and about spin. But no, I think there are profound changes going on here, and I think that the consequence in terms of the international relations between the political West of nations on the periphery of the World Island and the dominant powers of the World Island is a thing which we should be thinking long and hard about, and thinking about it from a point of view of national security and economic security, as well as just militarily, as the way we've been doing in the past.

Fundamentally, we're now in a situation where we're much weaker, and we need to actually understand that. And I think that recognizing that would perhaps start changing the political discussion in the peripheral West to a discussion which is much more realistic and practical rather than sort of values-laden. I think as well, perhaps the last bit of this would be some self-reflection across the political West, because my guess is, and you may know this better than me, Glenn, is that

the rest of the world get this wrong. And they may not be shouting about it, but the rest of the world will get this. The rest of the world will be watching what's been happening in Russia, Ukraine.

They'll be watching what happened in U.S.-Iran. And they generally will understand what's going on in a way that we can't. The reason we can't is that we're encumbered by a political narrative which is all about our values. And if you're not standing up for us, then obviously you're part of the barbarians at the gates of the political West. But no, there's a lot of Mackinder thinking to be done here. Glenn, you probably do it even better than me, I'm sure. But I'm not stopping on thinking. I just think that article has just started me on the road to working out what's going on in terms of international relations, because we're entering a new era.

#Glenn

Well, if you want to, as you say, the purpose of your article was to revive some of the strategic thinking. And the first step would be to recognize, I guess, how strong the ideas of Mackinder have been in terms of influencing policies. I mean, I think it's in the U.S. National Security Strategy of 1988. It refers to, you know, as you said, the Eurasian heartland, which was the concept of Mackinder, where the security strategy recognizes this was part of the reason why the U.S. fought the Cold War. This is why they joined World War II. So to suggest it's something only for the academics, I think that's a big mistake. But it was a unique position, though, that the U.S. and the British had before them.

That is that the British were considered throughout the 19th century as being the guardians of the balance of power as a maritime state off the coast of continental Europe. The Americans took it over. But again, the whole idea that, well, they're guardians of the balance of power, because the whole point was we can't let any hegemon or alliance appear in Europe or Eurasia that would disrupt the balance of power, which would then allow them to threaten Britain or later the U.S. Again, I always suspect that much of this thinking by Mackinder might have emerged already from Napoleon's Continental System, when all the Europeans came together, and then the idea was to shut out the British, and this would essentially weaken Britain.

So this was the land powers uniting against the maritime power. And also, I think during the war against—well, the Napoleonic Wars—we also saw, for a brief moment, the Russians shifted sides a bit, and they started sending this Cossack army towards British India. And this was seen then as the land power expanding out to the periphery and challenging the benefits of the maritime dominance. Yeah. So I think for this reason, always this overarching strategy of keeping the Germans and the Russians at odds with each other, or splitting up the Soviets from the Chinese, as Kissinger wanted, all of this kind of fits within this thinking.

But this is also why the Americans and the British were offshore balancers. That is, if you have big wars, stay out from the wars, build your strength, join in on the wars towards the end when everyone's exhausted, and the purpose should be to restore a balance of power so there won't be

one dominant state. Again, I think in the '90s we have to recognize what we actually did, because this broke completely with it. NATO was a bid for hegemony. It could have made sense in the '90s, but when that hegemony is gone, what are we doing? Then the U.S. is inside Europe with the Europeans, with these very big ambitions which can't be met.

They will exhaust themselves. That was one of the benefits of offshore balancing. You can be away and build your strength. And also, all the other rival powers in Eurasia, instead of balancing each other, will start to balance the country with the hegemonic aspirations. So for me, it doesn't make any sense at all. I mean, this reminds me of when I saw Hillary Clinton in 2012 arguing, "Oh, we have to undermine the Eurasian Economic Union that the Russians lead in Central Asia." But why would you do that? This would create a balance of power in Eurasia. Now they're drifting more towards China. Is that good? I mean, if you're splitting the Europeans from the Russians, the Russians are developing a lot more dependence on China. If you ask the Indians to cut their ties with Iran, now Iran is gravitating closer to China.

I mean, none of this makes any sense. I think by doing less, a natural equilibrium would assert itself, and you could have some, you know, the major powers would prevent any other hegemon from emerging, with China being the main one with the potential capacity to do so. Instead, this hegemonic approach by NATO and the U.S., it just seems to feed the last thing one wants, which is for a Chinese hegemon to emerge. For me, it's astonishing, but there's no real discussion. So I guess here, just a last brief question: What would you do differently? Because it is... I mean, for me, maybe I'm wrong in everything, but the fact that one can't even discuss any of these things without being seen as undermining, you know, the benign hegemon of the West, it's, yeah, it's very, what's the word I'm looking for?

#Steve Jermy

It's very limiting. Yeah, it's terrible. It's terrible because we're actually—we're not acting in our own self-interest. You know, I like to think that Europeans could do something here, because the first thing to do is recognize the balance of power has shifted. It's not shifting; it has shifted. So it's no longer the case that America is the dominant military force. And we're clear on that. It's also the case that the thing that people were trying to prevent has happened. It's happened because, on the one hand, we were so thoughtless in our strategic thinking and the way in which we thought strategically, but also we were so thoughtless in our economic thinking. So for both of those reasons, we're now in a situation where we have a very strong and unified hegemony between the Russians and the Chinese on the World Island.

And so, you know, that's an existential fact, which is unlikely to change for at least a decade, I would have thought. Not least because, as the Americans try to regain their military power, the Chinese are just cutting off rare earth minerals and things like that, which are critical to the maintenance of that power. So, you know, this has changed. And I think the question now, amongst all our reflections, is to establish solid working relationships between Europeans on the one hand

and Russians and Chinese on the other hand. I'm sure we don't want to stop our relationship with the United States. Those are familiar and go back centuries. But equally, the balance of power has shifted.

And so the first thing to do, I think, is to recognize that. That's what I think the article shows, is to recognize that and then ask ourselves the question: what does this mean? And what it means is some of the fundamental ways in which we thought about security in the post-Cold War era are no longer safe. You know, one of the two pillars of European security were NATO and the United States. And I think both of those pillars are pillars on which I would not base a future European security strategy. I'd base it on the overall Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe for my security, and then start to think about my trading relationships and improving those with these two great powers.

Because we in Europe, without working out what that relationship might look like, I think that we're just going to make things worse and expend more and more capital, human and economic capital, on a failed endeavour, which will end up with us even weaker than we already are. What was it that you said? You said, you know, "The strong do what they will; the weak suffer what they must." We don't necessarily need to suffer, but I think we do need to accept that Europe in particular, and the United States as well, are no longer the strong areas of the world. And then actually we're into a much more multipolar world—is the wrong word—but a world in which there is going to be a new dynamic as a consequence of the shift in the balance of power. Well.

#Glenn

It's always a great privilege. Thank you for taking the time. Just one more time, I did leave a link to your article in the description, so make sure to read it.

#Steve Jermy

Yeah, no, terrific, Glenn. I look forward—with a bit of luck, we might be able to see each other in person again in November—but hopefully we'll talk before then.

#Steve Jermy

Thanks, Glenn.