

Legitimacy of the U.S. Empire Collapses

Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. Colonel Wilkerson discusses how legitimacy for the US empire is collapsing due to mismanaged foreign policy

#Glenn

Hi everyone, and welcome back. We're here today with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of State. Thank you very much for coming on the program.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Good to be with you, Glenn.

#Glenn

So I'm trying to work out the direction of U.S. foreign policy and also—oh, good luck—but also the changing role of the U.S. in the world, because its former role over the past 30 years has to adjust to realities, at least at some point. So, again, a challenge indeed, which is why I've asked you, because I'm not sure how we can understand the division in Washington. Initially, it appeared that there were those who, on one hand, followed the same policy as over the past 30 years—the ones who wanted to perpetuate global primacy—and then there was a split with the America First people, who believe that global hegemony is actually pulling the United States down and preventing it from prioritizing. But again, the dividing lines don't seem to be exactly that clear. What is the infighting in Washington about these days, the way you see it?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Everything. I was just listening to Katie Couric, of all people. I've known Katie since she was the kind of woman who would hike her skirt up on my corporal's desk to get him to reveal state secrets. She was interviewing Richard Haass, former head of the CFR, now head emeritus of the CFR. I listened for about the first 15 minutes, and then I clicked it off and said to myself, "Wow, Richard, it certainly took you a long time to get around to saying anything truthful." That's how difficult it has been for the vested establishment, if you will, to really come to grips with at least some of what Trump represents. And Hegseth and Kristi Noem and Bondi and the rest of that crew—what they represent in terms of foreign policy is, first and foremost, unpredictability.

And Richard's point, of course, was developing—he was getting there. That's terrible. Terrible for a superpower. Well, I have news for Richard: we aren't a superpower anymore. If we are, we're going

down so fast that the air coming out of our balloon—you can hear it on a daily basis, an hourly basis. But I would agree with him: unpredictability, and unpredictability in this predicament we find ourselves in today, with such incompetent leadership, unconstitutional actions on both the domestic and international scene, violations of the law every day. Our Secretary of Defense is a war criminal. I mean, even just parsing it lightly, he's a war criminal. And so is Donald Trump, for that matter. And so is Marco Rubio, for that matter.

So we have war criminals, by any international or domestic law definition, at the head of our ship right now. And next to predictability—or unpredictability, however you want to say it—I'd say there's an absolute lack of overall strategy. Other than, and this was demonstrated by Rick Sanchez on Russia Today this morning when we did an interview, Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff being hosted around Moscow as they pursued filthy lucre—money. They have zero interest in the war in Ukraine. They want it over. They have zero interest in anything of note that anyone would think they'd have, given foreign policy and the lack thereof these days. They're there for money. They're there for money, and Trump is lusting over that. What was it, Rubio?

It was said by Sergei Lavrov in Riyadh a few months ago. You lost \$300 billion through your tariffs on us, your sanctions, and so on. That's what they're after. So, how could you summarize this administration? Money, money, and more money—especially for the Trump family and the Trump minions. And unpredictability, and trying to mask—if they even realize it; I'm not sure anyone in this administration actually realizes this—trying to mask the fact that we are losing on just about every front in the world: political, strategic, economic, cultural. We're losing. And we're losing to the East, as I've said so many times. Ours is going that way, and we're helping it. We are not working to accommodate this new world; we are pushing the old world into it. And we're principally the old world. So it's a disaster.

#Glenn

Well, that should be the key place to start, I guess. That is, what is strategy? What is the grand strategy—the long-term goals that the United States wants to achieve—and how can they achieve those objectives? I mean, we seem to be missing some of this. As you suggest, is it to facilitate a more favorable multipolar world, or is it to resist the emergence of a multipolar world? I mean, irrespective of what people might prefer or think is wise, a strategy itself—no matter what one wants to do—should be clear. And it seems as if it's almost become a goal to have strategic ambiguity. So people and countries don't necessarily know what's being planned, but that also makes it very difficult to chart a clear path forward and, again, march in tact. But...

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's extremely dangerous. It's extremely dangerous. This whole scenario we're developing with regard to Venezuela is extremely dangerous. When you put that much military power—and I must say, in parentheses, compared to Russia's military power arrayed in and around Ukraine—it's not

significant. But in terms of us, it's significant. It's very significant. We've gone from 111 aircraft carriers in 1945 down to about 10 that actually work today. And at any given time, only about six of them are operational. So we're putting the most powerful one of them all, the Gerald Ford, into this absolutely ridiculous situation with Venezuela. So that begs the question: why are we doing this?

I first thought it was because we were beginning—"we" being the administration—in some inchoate way to understand what I just said: that power is gradually, and even more swiftly than I thought it would, leaking away from us and going to the East. That's inexorable. But why are we pushing it? Why are we doing everything possible to aid and abet this diminishment of our own power? Is it because we have a leadership that, either intellectually or—well, I don't know how to say this—in some way is an agent for something else? Is it really purposeful, what they're doing? Because it's very difficult to watch Kash Patel and Pam Bondi and Kristi Noem and Donald Trump himself and Marco Rubio and Hegseth and not think this is coordinated stupidity. What does that mean—coordinated stupidity?

It means they're actually trying to do this to the empire. Now, if you go back and parse some of Donald Trump's earlier statements—at a time when, for example, I knew someone in Washington who knew him and his father fairly well—you might develop the idea that Donald Trump is an agent of himself, in the sense that he wants to diminish our power. Why would he want to do that? Because in that diminishment come great spoils for him and his family, and he aids and abets the decline by acquiring those spoils. That's one way of looking at this otherwise inexplicable group of people. But another way to look at it is simply straight on—don't try to interpret it. Just look straight at it. What you see is what you get. And I'm increasingly coming to believe that's the case.

We have elected a serial killer, if you will, as the president of the United States—a killer of the empire, a killer of our economy, a killer of liberal democracy, a killer of the Constitution, a killer of people. We have elected an administration devoted to that sort of thing. I know that's hard for people with rational minds to accept—hard for me to accept—but I can't come up with another description that even remotely fits some of the things they're doing. If you want to ascribe a policy to it, a grand strategy to it, it's to aid and abet the process of power slipping inexorably away from the West to the East as much and as swiftly as possible—and to make a lot of money off it. I mean, I can't describe it any other way, watching what they're doing.

#Glenn

Well, that Venezuela part, in its own way, makes a little bit of sense. That is, if you think the world is becoming multipolar—there are rival great powers out there—then a key objective for the U.S. would be to reassert its dominance in its own hemisphere and prevent the most energy-rich country on the continent from forming too close a relationship with China, Russia, and others. Awesome.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Just a second, though, if you don't mind me interrupting you.

#Glenn

Yes, please.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

What are we doing in our own hemisphere but giving one of our archrivals the grand opportunity to negate more than a hundred years of American policy? Because that's what Russia has just done with the Monroe Doctrine—tossed it right out the window. It's no longer operative. They are in our hemisphere; they're going to be in our hemisphere. And Putin has given us a little bit of our own medicine. There's enough Soviet—well, Russian—military power in the hemisphere now, and the potential for it to grow significantly, to contest us in a way we never would have dreamed would come this soon after the Cold War ended. But he's ready to contest us now. He's ready to take us on in our own waters, in our own hemisphere—a land power taking on a maritime power and beating it. That's what we're looking at. And we set that situation up. How do you explain that?

#Glenn

Well, that's why I think it's not being done in a very good way. There's an overly aggressive posture toward Venezuela. Not only is it alienating other major powers in the Western Hemisphere, but now it can also bring in other great powers, such as Russia. I'm not very comfortable, to be honest, with Russia entering Venezuela in this powerful military way. I don't like it when great powers get too close to each other, which is also why I'm very uncomfortable with the U.S. in Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

How did Putin feel? I mean, he's given us a dose of our own medicine.

#Glenn

No, I agree. And I do think I can see the strategic reason behind it. That is, if the U.S. doesn't remove itself from Russia's borders, it would make sense to have a card to play—to make the U.S. taste its own medicine, as you suggested. But this is also why I can understand the objective of trying to strengthen U.S. control in its own region. Still, a lot of this seems counterproductive. Indeed. What are your thoughts on the legitimacy behind this whole thing? Because, I mean, narco-terrorism? Maduro is now a drug lord?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, take a look at the New York Times—the Grey Lady, a paper of much esteem in the past, and I emphasize *in the past* because not today. I think the phrase they used yesterday was “dissonance,” to describe, on the one hand, the release of the Honduran drug lord who was already tried and convicted, and, on the other hand, the prosecution, as it were, of Nicolás Maduro, whom the vested intelligence agencies—the professional intelligence agencies in the U.S. complex—say is not a narco-trafficker. Categorically, across the board, they say he’s not a narco-trafficker. Laura Loomer now—who’s just been promoted to the Defense Department, I understand—Laura Loomer says differently. She says that he *is* a narco-trafficker. What kind of dissonance is that?

I wanted to say to the New York Times person who wrote that article—really, you think? You think? I mean, how preposterous is this? You let the guy from Honduras—what’s his name, Juan Orlando Hernández?—you let him go after being convicted of drug trafficking, and the case was pretty solid. I recall, too, that this goes all the way back to Hillary Clinton and Honduras. What a bastard she was with regard to Honduras. And then he goes after Nicolás Maduro, and everyone’s saying, well, he’s going after Maduro because he’s sitting on so much oil—the world’s largest oil reserves, as I reminded Rick this morning when he said Russia had the largest. It probably does in the long haul, if you count everything that’s yet to be discovered.

But proven reserves—Venezuela has more than anybody else in the world. So is that why he’s going there? Okay. But why can’t you develop at least a patina of rationale that’s strategic, rather than just dissonance—just trumped up? I mean, it’s preposterous. And finally, the New York Times had a truthful article saying, “I don’t know how to—I simply do not know how to describe this administration anymore. Words like insane, clowns, incompetent fail me.” I don’t know if you’ve watched a lot of the hearings—I bore myself to tears watching some of them—the hearings that people like Noam and Hegseth and Pam Bondi have in front of the Congress of the United States.

And it's worse than watching the absolute nadir of question time in the British Parliament. I mean, it's crazy how these people respond to questions from a legitimate, equal branch of government—how disdainfully they treat them. And look at what they're doing with the Constitution. I mean, you know, someone asked me yesterday—one of my military buddies, who should have known better—he said, “Well, you kill those people because they were still drug traffickers.” I said, “Do you remember anything about the laws of land warfare and the rules of naval warfare and so forth? When someone's in the water—when you've torpedoed a ship and someone's in the water trying to survive—you have an obligation not to kill them, but to try and rescue them. You can imprison them and make them prisoners of war, certainly under Geneva.”

But you don't shoot them. Think about that ME-109 pilot taking on that B-17. He shoots down two or three B-17s, and then a B-17 tail gunner—bang, bang, bang—gets him. He's hanging under his canopy, and you fly down there and shoot him under his canopy. That's a war crime. That's a war crime. And we just did one. We just did a whole bunch of them. About 80 people now are war criminals for us. I don't know how to explain a government like that. We've abandoned the most important precepts of our Constitution, of what we developed at the Nuremberg Tribunal, what

followed in the Geneva Conventions, and what we preached for years after that. We've abandoned it completely. And here's the stunning thing, Glenn—I don't think Americans care.

#Glenn

I think after a while they become a bit jaded by all of this. But I watched the White House press secretary—she was asked, you know, how is it that the attacks on these boats were lawful? And then some journalist asked, well, what law permits the killing without any stop or seizure—nothing, just the killing? What law is this? And she said, "Self-defense." So it's quite an extraordinary legal case to make.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

If everything they're saying is true, even in its narrowest sense, then as a policeman on a law enforcement mission inside the District of Columbia, for example, or in Chicago or Los Angeles, walking down the street and encountering a 16-year-old young man selling drugs, I have permission to pull out my service revolver and shoot him dead. That's what Marco Rubio has said. That's what Donald Trump has backed up—that these drugs are a national security threat. And oh, by the way, what we told the CINC in charge of Atlantic Command in my Marine Corps War College days, when he told us all about what he was doing in the Caribbean to interdict drugs, was, "Hey, you're not going after the center of gravity." And the admiral had the audacity to look at my Marine lieutenant colonel, who was proving himself far smarter than the admiral, and say, "What do you mean?"

The Marine lieutenant colonel said, "You're not going after the center of gravity." "Yeah, that's the center of gravity—that's what gives them their power, the ability to send drugs across the Caribbean and into America." "No, it's not," he said. "It's the people taking the drugs. That's the center of gravity. You can interdict 11%, 12% all day long, and you're never going to stop them." He even said something very prophetic. When the admiral came back and said, "Well, we're going to go on the Pacific side of Mexico and do another 11%, and then they're really going to hurt, and the street price is going to go through the sky, and it's going to stop everything," my Marine said, "No, what you're going to do is force them to go up the landmass of Mexico, and you're going to corrupt the hell out of Mexico." Bingo.

That's exactly what we did. So you're not even taking on the right target. If this is a national security threat, you're not taking on the right target. Fifty years have proven that it's not the right target. The right target is the people taking the drugs. You dissuade them. You rehabilitate them. You punish them—something. You do something. But you're not going to stop it by going after that guy in the boat who maybe is making a hundred dollars—the most money he's seen in his whole life—to carry drugs in a fishing boat up the coast a hundred miles. This is crazy. This is insane. This is insane-asylum commission stuff. You can't make it up. It's so stupid. And this is presidential policy. Like I said, I don't even know how to describe what I live in anymore. It's certainly not a constituted state as it used to be.

#Glenn

Well, on the topic of the legitimacy of the U.S. empire falling apart—Gaza, I guess, was... Well, I'm not just going to put the U.S. in that camp. We have several European countries that joined in on this. But of course, you and I have spoken before about the genocide. How do you make sense of the peace deal and ceasefire that's since been agreed to, also by the United Nations, in Gaza? Because... is there a strange form of ceasefire that's still firing?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yes. We did a group—I did a little fact check about a week ago—and we couldn't find, since the inception of the ceasefire in Lebanon, or the various ceasefires in Gaza, a single 24-hour period when the IDF didn't kill somebody. And I have to admit, in most cases, it was somebody—plural. So there hasn't been a... I asked a rabbi the other day, "What's the Hebrew word for ceasefire?" He told me, and then he said, "And you ask because?" I said, "Because I don't think Israel understands what it means." He didn't want to go there. But there hasn't been a single day in either ceasefire.

And now they're killing people in Syria in large numbers. Now they've got Erdoğan angry at them—God, he should've gotten angry a long time ago. And we're in there, and the UN is in there, having blessed a deal. Oh God, we even gave it a UN Security Council resolution number that essentially puts the UN's imprimatur on the colonial exploitation of the Palestinians. Nothing's going to change, except now it's going to be blessed. You could argue that the West Bank, Jerusalem, the embassy move to Jerusalem, and Gaza—everything—has been blessed all along. But this put the UN's seal of approval on it. António Guterres should slink away into the night and not come back.

#Glenn

You could have put Lebanon on that list as well. They were all supposed to be under a ceasefire, but no—it continues. How does this sit with the MAGA crowd, though? Because, again, one of the key things that got Trump elected, it seemed, was recognizing that the current path of the United States was not sustainable. That is, the empire was becoming too much of a burden. It was damaging the Republic. And it seemed that he wanted to end these forever wars, pull back a bit to the U.S., and rebuild America's industrial strength.

And, well, yeah, recognizing that since World War II this excessive militarism hasn't been in America's interest—but here we are. And in all the regions of the world, especially the Middle East, it doesn't really... After Trump made all his speeches about how Iraq was foolish, he would never have bombed Syria—that was a mistake. He would never have bombed Yemen—that was a mistake. He would have stayed out of Lebanon, Syria. How is this sitting with that group? Or is it equally split on the matter as well?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, if you're on an autobahn to hell, you don't take the exit that says "Hell Two" or the exit that says "Hell Three." I can't explain Trump, except for his generally mercurial character—he just comes from his own world. I went back and watched some of it the other day because I wanted to make sure where I was in terms of a paper I was writing. How does he go from making the remarks he made condemning the Iraq War that began in 2003—and by implication Bush, Cheney, and the whole crowd—to doing worse than they did then, and threatening to do even more profoundly worse now, in Venezuela, for example? I guarantee you that if we went to war with Venezuela in any fashion, it would be a complete disaster.

It would make Afghanistan and Iraq look—well, it'd make them pale by comparison, because, one, we'd be doing it in our own hemisphere, and two, this is an incredibly different terrain, and not a terrain Americans do well in at all. We proved that in Vietnam, and I'd say Venezuela, in many respects, is even more densely populated—and in terms of how it's populated, and how the terrain fits the population—even as bad as, or maybe worse than, Vietnam. So this is just inexplicable. I don't understand what we're trying to do. And yet I do. What Trump is trying to do is bluff his way through, which is Trump's best practice.

He's not—well, to get back to the original point—he's not a war-type person, but he has used war to get what he wants. And so he's willing to do things like what he's doing with Maduro because he thinks all this show of force is going to hand him Maduro on a silver platter. And to a certain extent, Maduro is fessing up. He's giving all kinds of things, I understand, behind the scenes. He's already given complete access to Chevron, ExxonMobil—whoever wants to come back in and help him with the oil industry—which would be a positive for him as well as for the multinationals. And multinationals don't tend to pay a lot of attention to national governments anyway.

So if they got back in there, it could be a positive thing—if they came back with the idea that they were going to work with the Venezuelan government and not with the rapacious oligarchs who stand in the shade and shadow behind Trump. But this is a situation that doesn't comport with what he said about Iraq unless you believe it's a total bluff. If you believe it's a total bluff, it's like a poker game. He's never going to use that force. He's never going to commit to military action—maybe a little special forces around the edges, but that's about it. He's just doing it to see what he can get, and he's going to get it, and then he's going to shut down everything.

I've got news for him. One of the most dangerous things that Powell and I learned when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—and it guided our actions in many respects afterward—came from our study of military history, roughly from the post-World War II period forward. We found that positioning military force in a certain way, in a certain area, in a certain complement—like this complement off Venezuela right now—is very dangerous unless you actually mean to use it. It's

dangerous because its very presence, if you're bluffing, if you're just threatening, gives you the feeling that you've got to use it. We looked at a number of occasions, even our own operations, like in Grenada, in El Dorado Canyon in Libya, and in Ernest Will and Praying Mantis against Iran.

We looked at all those things and came to the conclusion that if you're going to put—and this became a mantra with Powell eventually—if you're going to put military power out, put it out massively and use it. Do it. Don't play with it, because playing with it is dangerous. You get yourself into a situation you never intended, and your bluff gets called. And you've got a real problem when you can't make good on that bluff. It's even worse now because our military is not what it was in 1989 or 1990. By a far cry, it's not. And I don't think Trump knows that either. I don't think Mattis knows that. In fact, I don't even think the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff knows that.

Now, we've got special operations forces out there contaminating the scene every day, and they've become a major instrument of American military power. As I understand it, this last killing—this extracurricular killing after the extracurricular killing—shooting the guys who were, you know, drowning or whatever, that occurred from land. A SEAL team, probably on land, fired a laser-guided or whatever drone at them and then continued to kill them when they were already hit. If that's the case, then we've allowed, like we did in Afghanistan and like we did in Iraq, this huge conglomerate of special operations forces that we've created to kind of take over warfare again.

It's like having a Wagner Group that's blessed and inside the military. And, you know, I don't say that lightly. We have created a nightmare with Special Operations Command—a nightmare. It spreads through the Rangers, through the CCT, through the Green Berets—not so much them as the others, but a little in the Green Berets—and every component of the Special Operations Force now. They're not what they used to be. They are the forward-leaning, bloody-minded killing group of the United States military, even to the point where four-star admirals and generals get annoyed, or worse, at their participation in their area of responsibility, often without the four-star's knowledge. This is what we've done.

#Glenn

I made the point before that Trump seems like the president of low-hanging fruit, though. That is, he can threaten sanctions or threaten military force in order to extract some concessions. But as you said, it all relies on a bluff. And, well, sometimes if a bluff isn't called, it's still not great for your reputation. It creates a lot of uncertainty. And, of course, as you said, the bluff could be called as well. But I think this is where real estate differs greatly from politics, because you want stability and predictability in politics. It's not as if you score a good real estate deal and that's the end of it.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It is for him, though, I think. You hit something there—you put your finger on it. That's the way he looks at it: deal, deal, forget it, deal, forget it, deal. There's no continuity, and there's no purpose to the deals overall.

#Glenn

It just seems like the overarching strategy for the United States should be to adjust to current realities—that is, to carefully navigate this world from a unipolar position that's already gone. It's creating collective balancing from all the major powers who now see common cause in countering the U.S. The goal should be to transition carefully into a multipolar system where the U.S. can still have a privileged position and ensure that other great powers don't find common cause against it. But I don't see that reflected in any of these policies. One exception, though, could be the Ukraine war. There, it seems as if some of Trump's impulses or instincts have been correct. Again, I'm not sure if I'm being too optimistic, but it seems like he looked at this war—and at Biden's idea of knocking out Russia—and questioned it.

So, by using Ukrainians, the U.S. could then focus on China as a way of restoring hegemony. It looks as if Trump recognized that the war had been lost, handed it over to the Europeans, and, in the withdrawal process, tried to get some money from the Ukrainians and the Russians. I mean, I would have played it differently, perhaps, but at least he's putting an end to a war that, at best, we could only hope to lose more slowly—while spending more Ukrainian lives. But what are your views on this peace deal, though? Because as we speak, Vitkov and Kushner are in Moscow meeting with Putin. Do you think it's possible to get the Ukrainians to sign off on Russia's demands first? Or do you think they'll be able to get the Russians to make some concessions on their demands?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't think Putin's going to concede on almost anything. There may be some fig leaves they can come up with that'll look like a concession to the American people and maybe even to Trump. But I don't think there are going to be any substantial concessions. And I think Kushner being there is a very vivid signal of what it's all about. It's about money—about him wanting to restore relations with another peer power where there could be a lot of profit. Might even be a hotel or two built in Russia. So that, I think, will drive Trump and his negotiators, inspired by him, toward a solution that might seem to work at first—it might even be acceptable—but I don't think it's going to mean peace in our time at all, because you've got to get rid of Zelensky.

And I think the Ukrainian people will do that in a short time, one way or the other. And you've also got to deal with the Europeans who are still around and not elected yet. They'll all be elected very shortly, just like in the Netherlands and elsewhere. But you've got to deal with them, and you've got to deal with the residuals in Ukraine. That's the component that really worries me the most, because I'm hearing there are somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000 Bandera followers. And these are

some of the most dedicated killers on the face of the earth. They are not going to accept any kind of deal, and they will sabotage that deal any way they can for the next decade or so if you don't deal with them. In a sense, Putin's right when he talked about going in—and Lavrov too—and exterminating them. That's what it would take.

I don't think that's possible, and I don't think Putin's ultimately going to want to do that. But that's going to mean ten years of misery, I guarantee you, in the heart of Europe. And there are going to be other people who will fuel it—not least the Central Intelligence Agency, MI6, and Mossad—because they've learned and made excellent contacts within this group. Money-making is part of it, and that's the way we make money. I love it when the CIA denies, for example—as they did on Judge Napolitano's show—that they've never been involved in drug trafficking.

We almost fell off our seats when we heard that. The intelligence professionals group I belong to—because they've been doing it since Laos and Cambodia—has been making money off drug sales to finance operations when Congress wouldn't approve the funds. It's that simple. And we've even had presidents go along with it. So I don't see Ukraine ever coming to a really peaceful resolution. And that's sad, because it's going to destabilize the whole situation in Europe. And how are these governments going to change? Well, they're going to change, principally. They're going to throw Starmer out. They're going to throw Macron out—they've already thrown him out; he just doesn't know it. They're going to throw Merz out.

They're going to do just like they did in the Netherlands. And then you're going to have this moment of looking ahead and saying, "Do I go off that 5% business—it's irrelevant anyway—and drop back down to maybe 2.5% for whatever defense turns out to mean, and rebuild my social programs, which are the heart of my success in Europe? Or do I do a little bit of all and make a mess in Europe? What do I do with the monetary union? And what do I do with the fact that I don't need a visa to cross borders?" I don't long for Europe's future in any way that suggests it might be positive. I think we're looking at a very vivid potential of going back to something like a 1930s Europe, rather than moving ahead—and certainly not moving ahead with the unions.

#Glenn

Well, a lot of it is going back to the past—the revival of German militarism, the rampant Russophobia. I mean, there are some very interesting developments I didn't think I'd see in my lifetime again.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Let me ask you a question. How do we go from Helmut Kohl—who, I assume, was expressing at least the view of many West Germans at the time—being reluctant to accept the reunification of the two Germanys and remaining in NATO, to today and what you just said? I agree with what you said. How did Germany make that metamorphosis? How did it change so fast—from a country that was

very cautious about provoking the bear when it didn't need to, to a country that hates it and might build up an apparatus to contest it once more, which has proven in the past to be utterly futile?

#Glenn

That's a great question. Well, I think the whole model for Germany has fallen apart. Helmut Schmidt argued once, in 1978, in a speech where he made the point that for Germany to rise, recover, and be a strong power again, it would have to clothe itself in the European mantle—that is, the EU, or then the European Community—and NATO. Those two pillars were essentially the condition for Germany's return. And I think a lot of that foundation has begun to erode. This is why I think Europeans, not just Germans, are so insecure now. Because when the Cold War came to an end, some of them thought, you know, let's have a multipolar system—something that also constrains the U.S. But then everyone went all in on this collective hegemony.

So if we just have unipolarity, but it has two legs—the U.S. and a united Europe—then together we can have this liberal hegemon. So we'll dominate, but the whole world will benefit because we're a force for good. That was, yeah, that was kind of the idea. Now the conflict—well, it backfired. Especially, I think, if they were honest, most of them would recognize that Ukraine was one bridge too far. But now that the whole thing is falling apart and we're in conflict with Russia, I think many would like to revert to the old Cold War. That is, let's go back to containment. But the world has changed. Russia is not the Soviet Union. The United States has other priorities; it doesn't have the same resources anymore. And Russia has many more powerful partners.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's a leading capitalist state now.

#Glenn

Yeah, and nobody cares about Europe to the same extent. Russia's main objective now is to pivot to the East, to reorganize its economy toward China, India, all these countries in the East. The main reason for looking West is military deterrence. So I think a lot of this—the role for Europe—they don't have a vision for what the new post-Cold War, or this current era we're going into, will mean for Europeans. They thought only a few years ago that they'd be sitting at the table with the United States, dominating the world, being one center of power. And now suddenly they're waking up: they're not even a center of power in a multipolar world. Europe will probably fragment as the U.S. starts to pivot away. The economies are going south. Security-wise, everything's gone wrong.

The political leadership will face a massive legitimacy crisis, I think, in the years to come, after all the foolish decisions they've made. Even the EU now isn't pretending anymore that it can deliver economic benefits to its member states. They're calling it the "geopolitical EU" now, which basically means the hatred of Russia will keep us united. But I somehow doubt that'll be enough after this

war is over. So there's panic in Europe. And I think part of it is this lack of imagination—what exactly is Europe, and what's its role in the world now that it's becoming multipolar? I think Europe could only exist in this format, you know, a bipolar or unipolar format. In a multipolar world, I don't think there's any reason why, say, Greece or Latvia or Ireland should have a common foreign policy or anything like that.

So I think it will fragment, and Europe will no longer, you know, be the one moving the pieces around at the table. We've become the piece. I think this is what's angering the Germans and others. They want to show that they can either stand on their own legs or show off so the Americans will see that we're still relevant and perhaps not leave us. This is—that's the sad part of their foreign policy objectives. My point all along has been that it was a mistake to re-divide the continent. If you want Europe to be relevant in this century, we can't depend on Russian boogeymen. We should have found a way to integrate them into a common Europe. But in today's Europe, that's treason talk. We're only allowed to hate. That's the only thing we have left.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

If you were really thinking strategically—and I think Powell, H.W. Bush, and Jim Baker were—you'd say, okay, from the Urals toward Europe, we want one sort of economic complex, maybe political eventually. In other words, we want the Russians in whatever is Europe. I mean, the last time I checked Rand McNally, the Russians were part of Europe geographically, on the map, whatever you want to call it. And you would have said, okay, that's how we contest this inexorable movement of power to the east. We need every player that has any interest in the West as the West. And I kept trying to come up with something—you know, the old mantra was that NATO was formed to keep the United States in, the Russians out, and Germany down. Okay, that's no longer an applicable mantra. So what do you replace it with? You bring the Russians in, you join them with the Europeans, and you don't want to fight the eastern power shift.

You just want to accommodate it. That's the reason I like the term "multinodal" rather than "multipolar." Because "multipolar," you know, as Chas Freeman's always saying, is like telephone poles. "Multinodal" means you've got to cooperate. And, you know, that to me would have been a hell of a lot better approach. The sad thing to me is that Bush, Shevardnadze, Gorbachev, and all the rest of the players at that time—Mitterrand, Kohl, Major—we even talked to Maggie Thatcher—agreed. How did we go so badly wrong? I think that's going to be a huge question that people, if there's anybody alive in 2050 to do this, are going to ponder. Why did we miss this opportunity?

#Glenn

Well, that was the main grand strategy of the Russians after the Cold War: "Let's just integrate with the West." You know, China, Central Asia—yeah, they're nice partners, but they'll slow us down as

we rush to the West. So let's just put all our eggs in one basket. And once they did that, they realized they didn't have any negotiating power and could be pushed out. So, no, I think it was a terrible strategy.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

We've retained a hatred for them. I mean, I look at Lindsey Graham and I say, "Lindsey, you're from the same state I am. You ate the same potatoes and rice and grew up in the same place I did. Why do you hate Russians? Viscerally, you hate Russians."

#Glenn

We come up with this strange excuse, like, well, they're imperialists, they always want to take over Ukraine. But no one in Moscow made any claim to even Crimea before the coup of 2014. Even Michael McFaul—no one hates Russia more than him—even he recognized that, yeah, that was a response, that was a reaction. So why do we have to pretend the goal is to restore the Soviet Union? I mean, it's a mass delusion, and everyone has to participate. Otherwise, you know, you're not in the club anymore. There's no legitimacy for you. So let me just ask one last question, because I know you have to go.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I'm interviewing you.

#Glenn

Well, you argue that Western intelligence agencies might fuel instability in Ukraine after this war. But how long has this interest in the Banderites and any anti-Russian force in Ukraine been around? I mean, you were in the White House 20 years ago. How central—how much of a focus was there on Ukraine? And how did people look at Ukraine? What would have been the utility of Ukraine?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

In 2002 and 2003, I saw the CIA—be careful here—I saw the CIA working with the military, particularly a four-star and a couple of three-stars in European Command, recruiting and talking about how they needed the help of everyone in Ukraine. They viewed the so-called Bandera group, the Azov Battalion, and others like them as the most stalwart, rugged fighters in Ukraine. At the time, I wondered, what the hell are we doing, and why are we doing it? And then, when I left the State Department, I kept my eye a little bit on what was happening in Ukraine, and I realized that up to 2014, we were doing the same thing—but in spades.

And I realized that Mossad was there, MI6 was there, and they had a tag team going—developing Ukraine to be not just a member of NATO, but a formidable power within NATO. And at the same time, to rape, pillage, and plunder its resources, which is always an imperial desire. I mean, it started very early—very early, at the same time, as a matter of fact. We were buying newspaper editors, we were buying newspapers, we were buying television stations, we were buying communicators in general. We were siccing the NGOs on them without their knowing it, lots of the time. They'd been infiltrated by the CIA. And we were teaching them—we were weaponizing liberal democracy. We did it in Georgia, we did it everywhere. And we were very successful. We were very successful.

I remember some people asking me, why do you think these countries suddenly cast aside neutrality and wanted to join NATO? Would you like to know why? We built their governments. We paid for their governments. Just as surely as Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon paid the labor union heads, the newspaper editors, the business leaders in Chile to get rid of Allende. It was a model we had used before, and we expanded it for Europe. And we put the CIA not on the ground in teams—there was no Kermit Roosevelt looking at Mossadegh. It was NGOs, basically, using liberal democracy as a weapon to convince people: one, no Russians, no Russians; and two, the best defense is a liberal democracy. And if it's a liberal democracy, you've got to do this, this, this, and this. And first of all, you've got to come into NATO. We need lots of countries.

#Glenn

But at least during the election interference in Ukraine in 2004, during the Orange Revolution, there was some pushback within the West—like in the Guardian newspaper. I remember they ran several articles where they made that point.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I guarantee you, some of our allies didn't like what we were doing.

#Glenn

But we're making the point that this is America picking a new government for Ukraine. This is a coup d'état. This is NGOs being weaponized. This has nothing to do with democracy. So there was some discussion, but then ten years later, when the whole Orange Revolution was repeated—only more brutally, with the Maidan revolt—everyone was forced to march in lockstep. There was no dissent anymore.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's all you knew—and a few Europeans. You're right, there was dissent.

#Glenn

Yeah. Even then, nobody wanted to object to the EU. Nothing of the sort. So anyway, as I said, I know you have somewhere else to run off to now. So thank you, as always, for taking the time. I really appreciate it.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, thank you for giving me a great interview.