

European Leaders Can Choose War or Diplomacy

Dmitry Polyanskiy is the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. Polyanskiy argues that we are entering a dangerous stage, as European leaders must now choose war or a return to diplomacy. Please like and subscribe! Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Dmitry Polyanskiy, the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. Thank you very much for coming back on. We see that after decades of the Cold War, being locked in a struggle with the U.S., there was, of course, the post-Cold War era, in which the European security architecture was organized around NATO expansion—once again locking the U.S. and Russia into this zero-sum rivalry for another 30 years. But this new national security strategy, if genuine—and I have to emphasize that—could signal an opportunity for a complete reset in U.S.–Russia relations. Do you think there's reason for Moscow to be optimistic, or at least cautiously optimistic? What are your thoughts about the new document, as a diplomat who engages with your American counterparts?

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Well, it's a U.S. document, first and foremost. It has certain signals that we take note of. But, of course, we primarily have to focus on our bilateral meetings, arrangements, and talks. The breakthrough meeting, I think, was in Anchorage, and we continue to build on the outcome of that meeting. Today, my foreign minister emphasized that the meeting between Secretary Blinken and President Putin and his team on December 2 was very much a continuation of the spirit of Anchorage, which means the impetus is still there and that we're still talking and discussing things.

So we believe that for us, it's more important how we discuss things bilaterally and what we design bilaterally, rather than unilaterally through documents. I don't want to criticize it, and I don't want to praise it. It's a U.S. document. And, of course, there are a lot of interesting things there—a lot of signals that are different from what we could have imagined a year ago, or especially a couple of years ago. So it's an interesting development, an interesting development. What's important is that we're now talking like adults. We're not avoiding difficult issues; we're trying to find solutions.

It doesn't mean that we're on the same page everywhere, but at least we've started to talk to each other and to identify the problems the way adults should—unlike Europe, which tries to ignore many security issues, to live in some unrealistic world, and to portray Russia as a foe, an enemy not worth speaking to. We're doing it in a normal, pragmatic way, as great powers should interact, because a lot of responsibility is on their shoulders and they have to face the situation in the interest of the whole world. That's what we're doing, and that's quite encouraging right now.

#Glenn

Do you see limitations still on this diplomatic path? Well, I guess—are there limits on how far U.S.–Russia bilateral relations can develop without first resolving the war in Ukraine, given that this has been primarily a proxy conflict between NATO and Russia?

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Well, a military solution in Ukraine was not our choice. We made many attempts to resolve this crisis of European security by diplomatic means, but we were not heard, so we had to do what we did. From day one, as you remember, we kept reiterating that we would prefer a diplomatic solution for Ukraine and for all the contradictions that now exist in Europe, in Ukraine, or elsewhere. Ukraine was totally a Western product—it was a Western-inspired, unconstitutional coup d'état. Now this country is bearing the fruit of what happened in 2014, or even earlier. And it's up to those who were behind this coup d'état, behind this anti-Russia project implemented in Ukraine, to find a solution that would allow us to move forward with dignity, with a clear view of the future, and with optimism.

So far, Europe is not doing this. There are different winds in the U.S., which is encouraging. But Europe is very disappointing, and every effort they make seems aimed at derailing the process, undermining it, and pushing Ukraine to keep fighting—with all the terrible consequences for the country, its people, and its future. This is Europe's choice, which is very strange and, I would say, quite selfish against the backdrop of what's happening with the help of Russia and U.S. leadership right now.

#Glenn

Often when I listen to different analysts or commentators, they tend to split on what the United States' ambitions really are. Some say they're genuine in pursuing peace, given that during the bipolar or unipolar era there was a natural confrontation with Russia. But in a multipolar world, the incentives should be more toward cooperation. The alternative view is that this is just some kind of strategic sequencing—handing over the confrontation with Russia to the Europeans. And the question that often comes up is: if the U.S. really wanted to, given that it has so much influence over Ukraine, wouldn't it be able to do more to end this conflict, since it provides so much intelligence, weapons, logistics, advisors, and everything else? Also, some solutions seem like ones

the U.S. could offer itself—such as not expanding NATO. You don't need Kyiv's consent for that. It looks like it's within Washington's ability. I was wondering how you make sense of this.

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Well, there are some hints that this is the logic in Washington right now—to find more sustainable, long-term solutions that go far beyond the situation in Ukraine. They're still very modest, and I don't want to overstate them, but it's quite an encouraging trend we're seeing now, as we've started to discuss these issues. Because for many, many years—well, of course, the logical starting point would be President Putin's speech in Munich in 2007—we were trying to show the problems we would inevitably face if the West didn't change its logic: the logic of a zero-sum game, the logic of NATO being the cornerstone of its security, the attempts to undermine the notion of indivisible security, regardless of the fact that they agreed to include it in some OSCE documents. So this process was clear from the outset—it was bound to lead to big problems.

And President Putin in 2007 made an absolutely blunt assessment of it and a clear analysis of what lay ahead if the West didn't change course. The West didn't. The question now is what will happen after a Ukraine settlement, because that settlement is only part of the picture. There's a bigger picture, and there's a big elephant in the room that we can't ignore. Americans have started to adapt their optics toward this. I'm very encouraged by some statements from U.S. representatives—for example, regarding the OSCE, a very important organization that's undervalued right now and a bit idle or sleeping. But the ideas that were put forward earlier could be the basis for cooperation among all the members of the OSCE, all European countries, and it might bring us somewhere positive—somewhere forward-looking.

Again, a lot of caveats—a lot of countries that don't want to see reality the way the U.S. sees it right now. But still, it's a start. And after we find a solution to this crisis, we'll have to deal with a bigger issue if we don't want to end up in a situation where there's another war in Europe—not because Russia wants it, not because Russia wants to attack NATO or the EU, but because of the trend that the current European allies have tried to form. In their societies, the only logic they have is that Russia is an enemy, that Russia will inevitably attack, that Europe should prepare for war with Russia.

And they try to use it as a smokescreen to conceal their own mistakes, their own miscalculations, the problems of their society. This is a logic that's been used for decades: if you have big problems at home, try to find an external enemy and try to sort of “zombie” your public opinion, because war becomes a solution for bankrupt political elites who want to preserve their existence. Nothing new here. Everything's in the history books, but unfortunately, many people don't read them.

#Glenn

Well, in this new security document, the United States seems to argue that NATO expansion is past its due date—that it's time to find different solutions. NATO expansion essentially redivided the

continent and brought back some of the logic of the Cold War. You mentioned the OSCE. Do you see any possibility of actually going that deep and addressing the root causes—reducing the role of NATO and elevating the OSCE? Is that something the United States is interested in? I mean, the OSCE part.

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Yeah, I think it's too early to be overly optimistic about this, but there are certain elements—certain statements—that could lead somewhere in the right direction, toward understanding the root causes of the crisis. As for us, it's quite clear that NATO is absolutely not part of the solution; it's part of the problem. It's a relic of the Cold War. There were some very bold ideas—I remember them at the end of the '80s, beginning of the '90s, and even in the early 2000s—to create some kind of pan-European security organization. That would mean there'd be no NATO in the form it exists now, but rather an organization that would take into account the legitimate security interests of all European—and not only European—countries, maybe in a broader Euro-Atlantic dimension.

But these bold ideas were absolutely sacrificed by the logic of NATO, and NATO has become an offensive bloc in the absence of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. That was quite clear, and the crisis in Yugoslavia was a clear example of how this transformation of NATO—without having a rival or foe capable of withstanding the pressure—was implemented in practice. This was a terrible development for Europe and for the world. I think this is the root cause of many of the problems we're facing today. For many years, Western countries didn't acknowledge that this was a problem. For them, the task was to create a security architecture that would exclude Russia, that would be at the expense of Russia—and that was the criterion for judging the success or failure of this architecture.

This logic should remain part of history and not part of what we're working on right now. There are indications that there's an understanding we need to be very creative and open-minded in addressing security issues—first and foremost in the U.S. And again, this is encouraging, but I wouldn't overestimate its importance, because the U.S. is an important player, yet there are others who are still very stubborn, still very much stuck in the past, in this Cold War mentality and Russophobia. For me, there's still no light at the end of the tunnel in that sense, so there's a lot of work ahead. Russia has always been willing to do its part of the job.

Russia was always open-minded, but we were not heard. We were always treated as some country on the outskirts of Europe. And if we speak about this organization, its logic—instead of trying to embrace everyone and work on a security equation that would include Russia—turned out to be a kind of Western tool to “civilize,” in brackets, the countries east of Vienna, to impose Western values, to meddle in their internal affairs. If this logic changes, I think this organization has a very bright future, and Russia would be ready to work with everybody else. If not, well, I think this organization might also become part of history, which would be a very wasted chance for European countries to attain real stability and a bright future.

#Glenn

I remember in the '90s, a lot of us—very American senior leaders—had high hopes for the OSCE as well, and were quite disappointed by NATO expansion. George Kennan, William Perry, and multiple others felt the same. But when we hear now about these proposed peace agreements coming out of the United States in different versions, it suggests that the concessions expected from Russia would be, for example, that Russia wouldn't move on restoring Ukraine's neutrality—so, no NATO. And of course, Donbass is also non-negotiable, but the Americans are suggesting there might be a deal where they essentially draw new administrative borders for Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. Is this something the Americans actually have—well, I'm not sure what can be disclosed yet—but is this something based on discussions with Russia, or is it more of an American wish list?

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Well, I'm not part of the team discussing the details of this possible arrangement. I didn't take part in the meeting that happened on the 2nd of December, so it might not be very wise for me to speculate on the details. But I know there is a serious conversation. It implies, of course, a territorial issue. You mentioned concessions from Russia—well, one concession from Russia, and I think even President Trump indicated this, is that if there is an agreement, we will stop our advance into the rest of Ukraine, because we will have some guarantees that the remaining part of Ukraine will live according to normal, civilized rules—where everyone has the right to national identity, to speak the language they want, to freedom of religion, and where there will be no glorification of Nazi criminals.

All these things are important, and they are on the table. What's very important is how the remainder of Ukraine will look. We want to have a normal, peace-loving neighbor, like it used to be before 2014—or maybe even before 2010, I would say. We want to have the country with which we signed the strategic treaty. We acknowledged the neutral status of Ukraine, and all these things about NATO appeared later on; they were not agreed with Russia, of course. So we want to come back to that situation, and we don't want to have this hornet's nest on our borders. We want a normal, peace-loving neighbor, and we are ready to have very good, neighborly relations with this country.

And there are a lot of indications that it's a possible scenario, given the fact that more than seven million Ukrainians found refuge in Russia after the beginning of this crisis. And that's much more than in Europe. Still, there are a lot of bonds between our two peoples, regardless of the attempts by many in Europe to show that there is permanent animosity between Russia and Ukraine. This is not true. I am absolutely sure that Russians and Ukrainians will be able not only to live in peace but also to cooperate when this absolutely artificial regime that was imposed in 2014 goes away, and when no one interferes in Ukrainian affairs the way Western countries did before 2014—and especially after 2014.

#Glenn

Well, you've mentioned a few times the European leaders and how they're continuing on a path that could lead to further conflict with Russia. But recent statements from different European leaders suggest they're preparing for a long-term confrontation with Russia, even if the United States pulls back from this conflict. Do you think there's a possibility we could actually end up in a direct war?

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

If everything goes on like this, and if the elites in Europe don't change—if they continue the course they're on—there's a big possibility of such a conflict, and it won't be Russia's choice. It's becoming, you know, the only *raison d'être* not only for NATO but also for the EU. As I told you, they need an enemy, someone who can attract or distract the attention of European populations from all the problems they have at home. They need someone to blame, but it's ridiculous, for example, to blame Russia for the problems with the living standards of Europeans when Europe itself decided not to buy cheap Russian energy sources.

So look at Germany—what happened there. Is it a problem caused by Russia that Germany now has to buy energy sources from the U.S. and other suppliers, with prices that are, of course, not competitive with those from Russia? This was a deliberate choice, and the German and European allies bear full responsibility for it, but they don't want to take responsibility. They want to find an enemy, and that enemy is Russia. So if nothing changes, we're facing a very dangerous future. But I know that not everyone in Europe thinks this way, and I'm not talking about countries like Hungary or Slovakia.

There are sane voices in many European countries, and hopefully they'll be able to turn their position into practical steps and press their allies to move away from this absolutely suicidal course that Europe is now choosing. This is a big issue—whether they'll be able to change the optics and engage in real, constructive, and open-minded dialogue with Russia. First and foremost, I'm thinking of the OSCE, but there might be other opportunities for us as well. There is such a scenario, such an option, which Russia would prefer. Today, for example, my foreign minister confirmed that we would be ready to sign legal treaties—legal guarantees—with NATO and the EU as a first step toward finding a solution to our problems.

No one will attack anyone. So it's kind of a non-aggression pact, I would say, between the EU, NATO, and Russia. Are these blocs ready to accept this kind of logic? I doubt it very much, because judging from what their leaders are saying, they're not ready to do so. They're not ready to abandon the concept of Russia being an enemy and allegedly willing to attack the EU and NATO. There are also some ridiculous things—like recent statements by the acting Finnish presidency of the OSCE and by Mrs. Kaja Kallas, who is notorious for her weak knowledge of history—saying that Russia allegedly attacked its neighbors 22 times and that nobody attacked Russia in the 20th century.

This is very ridiculous, very provocative, but it shows the line of conduct they want to make the basis for any further European action. I'm absolutely sure both of them are aware of the facts of history, because this isn't some peculiarity—it's the basics of history that they're trying to ignore with these statements. They're deliberately trying to shape public opinion in Europe, especially among young Europeans who, for many reasons, may not have a strong knowledge of history, to make them believe that Russia is an enemy, that Russia has always been threatening Europe—which is, of course, ridiculous. And I hope most people in Europe understand how absolutely unnecessary the scenario being imposed on them by such statements and such policies really is.

#Glenn

Let me just ask you one last question. Is there any diplomacy going on between the Europeans and the Russians? Because we now see that Lavrov said European leaders are gripped by a militarist frenzy. He said that if they want a war, then Russia is ready for it right now. Meanwhile, NATO's Secretary General, Mark Rutte, said that Russia is our next target and that we have to prepare for war because Russia is coming for us. I mean, if we're seemingly heading in that direction, is there really no talking? Are there at least any unofficial exchanges happening, or is there just no communication at all between the two sides?

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Well, it takes two to tango, of course. Russia was always there; we never stopped our dialogue with Europe. Europe did, in a very condescending and short-sighted way. I can tell you that if we speak about the official context, the public context, and attempts to establish something, I don't think we can boast of anything substantial—well, maybe except for President Macron reaching out to President Putin at some point, which led nowhere. So President Macron's erroneous logic hasn't changed. I can tell you that, informally, I feel a certain change in the attitude of our European colleagues, even here at the UN. There have been more meetings in the corridors.

There have been more informal exchanges, which haven't led us anywhere so far, but they might become a building block for some re-engagement in the future. Again, I can clearly distinguish between countries like France, Germany, Italy, even the UK—I don't know—maybe the Netherlands, Belgium, some others, and also Switzerland. They try to find solutions informally and to be open-minded. And then there's another group of countries, now mostly limited to four—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. These countries are very hysterical about any possibility of re-engaging with Russia. They keep everyone else on this suicidal track.

And I think the other members of the European community are very mindful of these hysterical, Russophobic nations that try to monopolize Eastern policy and Russian policy in their hands. I don't know whether they'll be successful in intimidating the others the way they do right now. But again, there's a trend—very modest, but still—a desire to re-engage from certain European countries,

though not from the EU, of course. Unfortunately, the EU structures and the EU leaders we have right now are also damaging this prospect. They're trying to align themselves with these radical, Russophobic voices from the three Baltic states and Poland.

This is quite clear. But it's up to Europe to decide which path it wants to take. Again, we can't force anyone. We are open and ready for dialogue. We have concrete ideas, and they know that. Hopefully, we'll be able to re-engage on some platform in the near future, because it's in our interest and in the interest of the whole world. But another scenario is also possible: if Europe remains where it is—if it's stubborn, if it doesn't want to re-engage—then of course I can't exclude that at some point there will be a military problem which, as history shows, will again leave Europe in ruins, with all the broken hopes, and we'll have to start from zero.

Of course, we don't want such a scenario. Nobody in Russia is interested in it. Nobody in Russia wants to attack the EU, NATO, or anybody else. The question is, what is the choice of the other side? I hope they will make the right choice and be able to re-engage with an open mind, to look for this optimal security equation that would include Russia, that would include the basic notion of indivisible security, that would think about the whole of our European continent and not about shielding European countries—the countries of the EU—from Russia, from the influence of Russia. This is a big mistake, and I don't think Europe should make it twice.

#Glenn

Thank you. And yes, I also hope there will be some improvements in diplomacy. The shutdown of diplomacy has, in my opinion, been one of the great tragedies here—being unable to even speak. So I hope, well, probably not with Carlos, but at least if you get some indication that other European leaders are talking, hopefully there's a reason to be optimistic. Hopefully, I'll add. But thank you so much for taking the time.

#Dmitry Polyanskiy

Thank you very much.