

Ex-Agent REVEALS: CIA Makes Peace Impossible

Mainstream Media keeps feeding us narratives about Russia without ever bothering going there. In contrast, a man who has been listening in on the Russian viewpoint for a long time is Larry C. Johnson, a former CIA analyst and member of group "Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity". Links: Sonar21: <https://sonar21.com/> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> TImestamps: 00:00:00 Intro 00:01:05 Larry Johnson's CIA Background & Early Views on Russia 00:06:28 The Origins of Russiagate: Intelligence Operations & DNC Hacking Claims 00:15:47 Who Controls the Security State? (CIA/FBI Lack of Oversight) 00:22:20 Absurd Narratives: Venezuela, Election Interference & Media Gatekeeping 00:32:22 The Best Government Money Can Buy: Corruption in Congress 00:35:48 Is the New National Security Strategy Meaningless? 00:42:27 Russia's Pivot East & The End of Eurocentric Dominance 00:47:14 Can the US Reform? (Plus: What the West Can Learn from Russian Hockey)

#Pascal

Mainstream media keeps feeding its narratives about Russia without ever bothering to go there. In contrast, a man who has been listening to the Russian viewpoint for a long time is Larry C. Johnson, a former CIA analyst and member of the group Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity. He's joining me again today. Larry, welcome back.

#Larry C. Johnson

Hey, Pascal. Thank you again for the invitation. This time I don't have to show up as Larry Wilkerson—I was able to grow my hair out.

#Pascal

The background story here is that I reached out to you thinking I was contacting Larry Wilkerson, because the emails got kind of entangled. But I'm very glad you came on the show and that we now get to talk as well. I want to dedicate an episode to your work, because you've been working with and about Russia for a long time, trying to understand them. So I wanted to ask you—during your time at the CIA, as an analyst—how did you get into the topic of Russia, and how did you approach it in the early days?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, actually, my only exposure to Russia back when I started at the CIA was an eight-week internship on the Afghan Task Force. That was when the Soviets were in Afghanistan, and I worked in the covert action arm. We produced propaganda to try to rally world opinion against the Soviets. My contribution was that I had T-shirts made with pictures of Afghan refugees, and we were passing them out—CIA was passing them out—on the beaches of Uruguay, in Punta del Este. The T-shirt said, “These children can’t go home for Christmas.” Now, ignore the fact that they were Muslims and didn’t celebrate Christmas, okay?

All right. So I talked about my first real exposure. Then, when I became an analyst, I remember one time we got a collection of documents where the Sandinistas were desperate to get advice from the Russians on how to deal with the threat of shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles against helicopters. My job was to translate those documents. But, you know, I had never really delved into Russian culture or Russian history that much until the start of the special military operation. And it just... it seemed off. I mean, I was saying, you know, we’re trying to provoke a fight—we’re not trying to avoid it, we’re trying to provoke it.

And hence the title of Scott Horton’s book. Yeah. So then I started just digging in and recognizing that, you know, we just had a blind spot in the United States when it came to Russia—not even knowing the history. You know, when I read Alex Krainer’s book several years ago, about Bill Browder, the grandson of one of the heads of the Communist Party in the United States, and then Browder’s subsequent anger at Putin basically because Putin is not a communist, I just—well, I started writing, trying to be objective and step back and say, look, this constant expansion of NATO to the east was without justification.

And, you know, when you go back in history and say, “OK, give me the list of all the countries that Russia has invaded since 1991.” Well, none. And people say, “Well, what about Georgia?” Well, in the case of Georgia, the Russians had deployed peacekeepers there since the collapse of the Soviet Union because there were still territorial disputes within Georgia between these other territories. And it was the Georgians who attacked the Russians—with strong encouragement from NATO, by the way. So, you know, as I sat back and looked, I realized Russia has been the victim in this. I got into it a lot in 2016 with the whole Russiagate nonsense because I had some access to information at the time.

I’m the one who went to Devin Nunes in March—I want to say around March 12th, 2017—to warn him about Russiagate, that this was an intelligence operation involving MI6, GCHQ, the FBI, and the CIA. I gave him a couple of names of people he needed to talk to and the kinds of documents he needed to see. And that’s what led Devin Nunes to launch that whole investigation. Kash Patel was his investigator. At the time, I knew that Russia was being completely set up as the fall guy. They were just a convenient enemy. And so, when you start—well, I get angry when I see people lying about issues like that, because people end up getting killed.

#Pascal

The thing is, they lie on so many levels. And just as a side note, there's an official report commissioned by the European Union and carried out by a Swiss diplomat, Heidi Tagliavini. The Tagliavini Report explicitly states that the first shots were fired by the Georgians—there's no question about that. Who started the war? And still, to this day, the German chancellor and others keep repeating that Russia started the war against Georgia. It's just, you know, the untruths, the lies that are being told—they happen on several levels.

With the Russiagate issue, I've been wondering—some people, like Glenn Greenwald and others—they interpret it mainly as a way for the DNC, for the Democrats, to kind of excuse away this absolutely unforeseen loss of the presidency. They really thought they had it locked in, right? Until the end, they thought Trump was someone they could easily take down. So, he interprets this as a way the Democrats started a rumor that just completely went haywire. Do you also see it like that, or do you see other motivations behind Russiagate?

#Larry C. Johnson

Oh no, it was far deeper than that. One of my former CIA colleagues—let me just say, he served in several hotspots, in Lebanon and El Salvador. He was in Lebanon when the chief of station, William Buckley, was kidnapped and then killed. So he was an experienced guy, involved in operations in some of the most sensitive areas. I had started writing in 2016, after the Christopher Steele document came out, because my small consulting firm—I had two other partners at the time—you know, we wrote reports, but not like that. I mean, that thing was an embarrassment. It had so many obvious errors. So I started writing about it, and in the course of that, my CIA buddy called me up and said, "Hey, you're not going to believe this."

He said he'd just had a conversation with one of his former colleagues who was still at the agency. That colleague told him that in the summer of 2015, John Brennan, then head of the CIA, organized a task force. A task force brings together people from other agencies—so you'd have folks from the DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, from the National Security Agency, from the DOD on the operational side, and maybe from State INR and the FBI. Peter Strzok, for example, was, I think, at one point part of that task force. The task force, in the summer of 2015, was told to collect intelligence on all of the presidential candidates except Hillary. Tasked by who? Well, John Brennan assigned the task, and he was doing it at the behest of Hillary and her campaign.

At the time, remember, it wasn't certain—most people were joking that Donald Trump would never win the presidency. So they were collecting intelligence on Trump, on Marco Rubio, on Ted Cruz, and on Bernie Sanders. It wasn't just on Republicans; it was also on Sanders. And the way they got around this was by using foreign intelligence operators. The NSA is prohibited from collecting intelligence on me, but they can call GCHQ in Britain—my God, they can collect on me—and then pass it to the NSA because it's what's called liaison intelligence. So that's what was going on. It wasn't just GCHQ; the Belgians were involved, the Germans were involved, the Aussies were involved.

And this was a pretty comprehensive, coordinated effort. So, for example, how did they get onto George Papadopoulos? I mean, George Papadopoulos—nice guy, nice kid. I've met him and his wife, talked to him, and interviewed him. But he was a nobody. And yet, in August of 2015, he's in London, and he either called, texted, or emailed Corey Lewandowski saying, "Hey, I'd like to get involved with the Trump team." Well, guess what? That communication was intercepted by GCHQ, and it was then filtered into the John Brennan task force. Then an intelligence operation was constructed to entrap—I mean, it sounds crazy, but this is exactly what happened.

Papadopoulos, then out of the blue, gets offered a job as a vice president for this consulting firm in London, which later turns out to be an MI6 front. And then we have an email exchange between Brent Budowsky, who was a longtime Democratic operative in Washington, D.C., and John Podesta. It was dated December—this came out in the WikiLeaks dump of information. In that exchange, Budowsky and Podesta were talking about how they were going to hang the Russian affair on Trump, make it all about Trump and his "boyfriend," Vladimir Putin.

So as the campaign went on and it became clear that Trump was most likely going to win, that's when it all shifted to Trump—and the full force of the covert operation that Gina Haspel, the former CIA director, was coordinating with British intelligence officers went full blast, starting in May 2016. And that May 2016 date also coincides with when CrowdStrike claimed the Russians hacked the DNC. Complete nonsense. They didn't hack the DNC. Go back and read Dmitri Alperovitch, who was the head of CrowdStrike at the time. He gave two different accounts within two weeks of what happened—one saying it was the end of April, the other saying the first week of May. Okay, you can overlook that.

But the message was that CrowdStrike knew, no later than May 5th, 2016, that the Russians had penetrated the DNC. They were on the inside, by God. So, you're a cybersecurity guy—what do you do? They sit back and do nothing until June 10th, 2016, at which point, you know, two weeks—actually, more than two weeks—after the emails had been taken from the DNC. Because the DNC emails were taken—the last day was May 25th. So we've got 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31—that's six—and then ten more days, June 10th. That's when CrowdStrike goes, "Stop the presses, shut down the servers! Oh my God, the Russians are here!" Now, what happened was that both the CIA, NSA, MI6, GCHQ—everybody and his brother—were spying on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Everything that was sent to them, they knew. They weren't a real threat, right?

#Pascal

Oh, yeah. What do you mean by that? WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks was a real threat to the intelligence community, right? Well, from the standpoint that it published truthful information. Exactly. Precisely. I don't mean it's a friend to us, the commoners—it's an enemy to those who work behind the shadows, right? Correct.

#Larry C. Johnson

Correct. Correct. So what happened was, sometime—I don't know if it was Monday the 27th or Tuesday the 28th—they intercepted a communication between Seth Rich and Julian Assange, or with WikiLeaks. And it was Seth Rich who sent the information to WikiLeaks. Now, how do I know that? A friend of mine—when he dies, I'll be able to reveal his full position, but he's still alive—told me. I was working with a lawyer named Ty Clevenger, who was trying to get documents out of the FBI, and now the NSA. The NSA sent him a document confirming that they did have ten documents classified Top Secret related to Seth Rich.

But my buddy said, "They're lying. There's a lot more— a lot more." But the point was, they intercepted these documents from Seth Rich and knew. And that's when they constructed this whole narrative that it was the Russians who hacked it, and they were going to pin that on Trump. So that's really where it got launched—that part of Russiagate with the DNC. Go ahead, I can see you getting ready to ask a question.

#Pascal

Yeah, because—okay, so this all goes back to the... If it all goes back to the intelligence agencies, I just need to ask you. We know the Pentagon has never passed an audit in its entire existence. We know the CIA can refuse, and the FBI can refuse, requests for information from Congress. They just say, "I can't tell you that because of national security." So the security state in the U.S. is like... And the Pentagon is separate, right? It's not even part of it. But the security state—you can't really oversee it, right? It's like a state within a state, with all these different branches, and it connects with those outside, especially the Brits.

#Pascal

How does that work? How does it actually run? I mean, is it like a fiefdom? Who controls this thing?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, nobody really controls it. It has a kind of bureaucratic inertia of its own. That said, that doesn't mean they're terribly competent. There's a lot of incompetence and buffoonery that goes on. But it's dangerous because there's no real independent oversight, despite what the House and Senate Intelligence Committees claim. In fact, here's how I know that. When Devin Nunes was first appointed to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, my next-door neighbor—who happened to be one of the biggest defense lobbyists in Washington, D.C.—came to me and said, "Hey, I've got this member of Congress."

He'd just been appointed to the Intelligence Committee, and he didn't know anything about the CIA. My neighbor asked, "Would you meet with him and sort of give him a heads-up?" I said sure. So I took along my other friend I mentioned earlier—the one who told me about his friend who'd talked about the task force John Brennan had set up inside the CIA. We met Devin for a meal—I can't

remember if it was lunch or an early dinner—at the Republican Club up on Capitol Hill. We spent about two and a half hours briefing him, giving him a foundation. That was in 2012. So about five years later, when I had information about what was really going on with Russiagate, I could call him up and get in to see him.

I think Devin is a very honorable guy and really tried to be fair. But my point is, he didn't have the knowledge base to realize when he was being jerked around. He just had a little bit of knowledge, and when you're going up against the intelligence professionals, they know what they're doing. So, this was a joint intelligence operation between the CIA and the FBI—at a minimum. And really, shame on Donald Trump for not taking further steps to expose this. But, you know, it is what it is.

#Pascal

Can he? I mean, in theory, Tulsi Gabbard is now in charge of all this. Do the people at the top actually—are they even able to, you know, drill down?

#Larry C. Johnson

They can if they want. Yeah, they can if they want. But that's—you know—the problem is, you get this, "Oh, let's not make waves. Oh, let's not—this is going to create some other problems. This may compromise certain assets." But it needs to be exposed. I think Brennan, Comey, Clapper—they all need to be in prison. They actively worked to subvert a democratic election. I'm not sitting here saying, "Oh, I think Donald Trump is great," or "I endorse Donald Trump." I don't. But there's a way our system is supposed to work. They subverted it actively, and they tried to subvert it prior to the election. That failed.

Then they were kicked into a backup plan after the election that involved, you know, the impeachment efforts, setting up Mike Flynn, and then, you know, again, perpetuating this myth. This is what's so hilarious to me. We're really upset that some foreign government was interfering with our elections—what in the hell has the United States been doing since the CIA started operating in 1947? The number of foreign countries where we've stolen elections, cooked elections, interfered both through covert action and through public outlets like Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, the USIA—you know, please. The hypocrisy in this is staggering. And yeah, Russia had \$70,000 in Facebook ads. Oh, great. I know, I know.

#Pascal

But doesn't it show this? Isn't it revealing how allergic this whole apparatus is to the very things they do? Because they're aware, right? It's this projection—because we do it, we assume others must be trying too. But I do think America, I mean, the US, is the best. It's just the best of the best when it comes to this game. I can't imagine even the Russians coming close to that level of success in interference, even during the Cold War.

#Larry C. Johnson

You know, the Russians actually, from what I've seen, don't have a history of going out and doing all the subtle—or let's call it the tsunami—of propaganda to manipulate and control elections. I mean, if they want to interfere, they do it like they did in Kazakhstan two years ago. Yeah, you know, send in the troops, crack down on the crowd, protect the existing government. But, you know, the latest one is that it's Venezuela. Venezuela's the one that's been stealing all these elections. Have you heard that one?

#Pascal

I haven't even heard of that yet, but—oh, okay. I mean, the level of nonsense about Venezuela has reached new heights, including claims like Venezuela is fueling Hamas or that Hamas is in Venezuela. I mean, it gets so dumb that...

#Larry C. Johnson

There are members of Hezbollah, or groups that are affiliated merchants. Let's be clear about what we're talking about—we're talking about Lebanese Muslim merchants. And they're family networks. The big center was in Colón, Panama, at the Colón Free Trade Zone. Until a few years back, the Colón Free Trade Zone was the second-largest free trade zone in the world after Hong Kong. Massive place. And you have a number from a diaspora that came out of the Middle East, the Levant, around the 1900s. A lot of them settled in Panama. There's another center off the coast of Venezuela, Isla Margarita—it's sort of a smuggling hub. There's also a town in northeast Colombia called Maicao.

Maicao is, you know, it's primarily—not like Hamas is out there parading around. But you do have people who are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and are Muslims. Also, from Maicao and Colombia, you go to Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, on the border between Paraguay and Brazil. When you look at that location, I mean, it's a huge free trade zone. Most free trade zones are near ports, where ships come in. This one's up by Iguazu Falls—the cataratas of Iguazu. And there's this massive airport over in Brazil where a lot of goods are flown in by plane. And again, the Muslim population lives in Brazil, not in Paraguay. They cross the bridge every morning.

And then the last major site is Iquique, Chile. Now, I did work about 25 years ago mapping out some of the family relationships. You even had the Bin Ladens in Colón, Panama. But the Hachems, the Waqeds—these families—their cousins, brothers, uncles, I mean, extended families had merchant relationships that tied it all together. Now, I'm going into detail on this because the current effort to portray Venezuela as having manipulated elections is being pushed by Gary Berntsen. I know Gary—he's a CIA officer. He led the second, what was called, Jawbreaker team into Afghanistan in late October 2001, after the 9/11 attacks. And he wrote a book called **Jawbreaker**, I think with Ralph Pezzullo, who used to be a New York Times reporter.

Well, they're now pushing this idea that since 1999, Maduro was involved with Dominion, the voting software company, creating these machines. Laura Loomer did a whole lot—no, sorry, Lara Logan—Lara Logan did like an hour-and-a-half podcast with these guys where they laid out how, supposedly, the real country that's been manipulating elections globally is Venezuela. Which is why, they say, we've got to get rid of them now. And I'm thinking, you know, I love irony. My mind works like a 14-year-old boy in a comedy writing room, because I'm going, no, that's funny. Here's a CIA guy representing an agency that's probably overthrown an average of three or four countries a year since its inception, and we're now pinning global election interference on Venezuela? Really?

#Pascal

This is why comedians are out on the street these days. It's like, you know, reality writes better scripts than anyone ever could. I mean, it's insane on a different level, but it seems to be, at least in the mainstream media, working again, right? CNN and so on—they're actually discussing this. There are expert panels on what, 20 years ago, would have been the weapons of mass destruction.

#Pascal

Should we take this? It's working, right?

#Larry C. Johnson

Look, we're still at that stage with the media. You know, I started my media career, I think, in August of 1994, with the capture of Carlos the Jackal—so, 31 years ago. And, you know, that launched me into the media sphere because I gave good soundbites. I could be pithy and funny, and I actually knew what I was talking about because I'd worked with the CIA, I'd worked with the State Department, and I had this consulting business where I was working with U.S. military special operations forces. And, you know, from '94 on, I was on everything. I did CNN Crossfire probably 16 times, at least. I debated Alan Dershowitz once around the Y Summit that was held under Clinton. I was on ABC Nightline at least a dozen times, and on the Jim Lehrer NewsHour multiple times.

I was an NBC terrorism analyst. I was a Fox News analyst. I got paid for a year, so I went all over the media. Where we are today—at least back then, 30 years ago—you'd have different points of view represented, particularly in electronic media: TV, radio, podcasts. Not today. Two areas where you're not going to hear an alternative voice are, first, the genocide in Palestine—if you want to have Jeffrey Sachs on, he's not allowed; Ray McGovern, not allowed; Doug Macgregor, not allowed. It's unbelievable how completely shut down the process is. And it's the same with the war in Ukraine. So it's like we've got this corporatized media now that really plays gatekeeper, and they don't allow any alternative voices.

The way you get rid of them—that's a conspiracy theory. So I asked people, "Okay, when you're using that term, what do you mean? Are you saying there are actually people in the shadows working together to manipulate or produce a particular outcome without being exposed?" If you're telling me that, yeah, there are those kinds of conspiracies—they exist, they're real. But if you're telling me that Maduro conspired with Dominion Voting starting in 1999 so they'd be ready to manipulate the election in 2020 to prevent Donald Trump from getting a second term, I'm throwing a—well, I'll clean it up—a penalty flag here. Like in soccer, you go with the red card—doing the red card.

No, that's not what's going on. In fact, when you go back to 2016—or I mean, in 2020—the 2020 election was stolen. I believe that. It was stolen the old-fashioned way. They had pre-printed ballots with Joe Biden's name on them that were inserted into the machines. That's all. It was simple. And I know that for a fact, because my business partner, who's now retired, actually went to the postal facility that handled the ballots. He found the place where the ballots were printed. He's got the affidavits from the truck driver who hauled the ballots.

He's got it documented from point A to point B—or point Z. But what happened was, once the idea of fraud in 2020 was out there, we got all sorts of stories. We heard, "Venezuela did it with Dominion." No, no, no, no—it was the Chinese. "The Chinese did it." No, no, no, no—wait a second, it was Leonardo's spa in Italy. "It was the Italians that did it." No, no, no—there was a battle in Germany between U.S. Special Forces and the CIA. People were killed; they were trying to uncover the information. Then my favorite—this guy Dennis Montgomery pushed the idea that the CIA had this computer called Hammer and Scorecard.

There were at least six, maybe seven different theories—conspiracies, claims—about how the election was stolen. And the reason they were put out there was to create a genuine fog of war. It's like if you've ever had a dog in a field and you wanted it to hunt a particular bird, but then a squirrel comes running by—it chases the squirrel, not the bird. Mm-hmm. These were squirrels. They released all these squirrels, and people were chasing them. "It was Leonardo's Spa!" "No, Dominion voting!" "No, it's Venezuela!" "No, no, it's China!" Meanwhile, the actual way they did it—nobody looked.

#Pascal

What does this tell us, in your view, about the political system of the United States? I mean, on paper it's a democracy, right? But democracy isn't in the voting—it's in the counting. And even beyond that, you know, it almost doesn't matter. At the end of the day, you have some people in power—from one side, from the other side—and then you have the people in the shadows, the little fiefdoms and dominions. How do you understand the U.S. as a political animal, the way it exists today?

#Larry C. Johnson

We've got the best government money can buy. Now, the question is, who's got the money and who's paying? And that's where it gets interesting. AIPAC's not the only one in the market for buying up its share of members of Congress. You've got the defense industry—I saw it firsthand with my next-door neighbor. Members of Congress, these people get elected, they show up, and they've got to raise money. I mean, there's relentless pressure on them to call people up and ask for money, unless they were born naturally wealthy. Or they're a shrewd investor like Nancy Pelosi, you know, to come up with money that way.

So what he does is line up all his clients—Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, you know—and they put on a fundraiser for the member of Congress. Those corporations call some of their clients and say, "Hey, everybody's got to come in," and they write the checks. My buddy, my neighbor, gave the checks to the member of Congress. Now that member of Congress is on the hook. So when my buddy Mike would call up, the member of Congress would answer the phone. That's the defense industry. The same thing goes on with the pharmaceutical industry—big money there. So we've got a Congress that's completely corrupted and compromised.

You know, right now, with this investigation that's underway into the \$360 billion that went to Ukraine, we know for certain—we've got bank records and documents—showing that \$48 billion was stolen by the Zelensky administration. And some of that money ended up in the pockets and bank accounts of 29 members of the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. I know the names of two senators—one a Democrat, one a Republican. They've updated the numbers: the Democrat got 26 million, the Republican got 19 million. So it's just, you know, corruption. So it's not... Go ahead.

#Pascal

Sorry, in this sense, what this leaves us with is just the ultimate endpoint of unfettered capitalism, where you have an oligopoly of people who basically run the show on behalf of the moneyed elite. But it gets mixed up with the security apparatus and everything below that, right? You also have these entrenched fiefdoms and so on. And that's the apparatus that moves forward and then creates policy papers and so on—like what just came out, the National Security Strategy, right? Yeah. Do you take the new National Security Strategy seriously? Or do you think it's just a handful of, like, five or six people who wrote something that nobody at the lower levels will take seriously? Will the beast keep working the way it always has, or does this actually have an impact?

#Larry C. Johnson

I'd say it's the kind of book you should keep on a shelf near your toilet, and if you ever run out of toilet paper, the book itself would come in handy.

#Pascal

Because the content reflects what you're going to put on it, or because it's totally useless?

#Larry C. Johnson

I think it's totally useless. It signals—well, I've heard that Elbridge Colby had the lead in drafting the document, so let's say it reflects his thinking. But that said, is it actually going to be reflected in action? Now, with respect to Europe, we're seeing the United States and Europe—well, I think they've had that kind of conversation that a couple who've been together for a while has, where one says to the other, "Yeah, I think we need to start seeing other people." That's where they're at right now. Europe is outraged that the United States wants to go have a relationship with someone else.

#Pascal

Just to add, I think it's outraged in the way a beaten wife, who's been slapped several times across the face, is outraged that he still wants to go see somebody else. It's like, "No, come back—beat me more."

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, you know, exactly. I mean, it's really perverse. If what's written down on paper is actually put into action, it means we'd have less belligerence with China and with Russia—less chance of a war. So that would be a good thing. It also talks about disengaging from the Middle East, but I think that's predicated on the assumption that, A, the United States has obliterated Iran's nuclear capability, which it has not, and that, B, the Zionists have complete control and have contained Hamas and Hezbollah—which, again, I think are false assumptions. So there's this notion that we're going to pivot to the Western Hemisphere.

I'd feel more comfortable if the strategy said, "You know what, we're going to see if we can fix our broken schools, our cracked roads, and our crumbling infrastructure in the United States before we decide we've got a mission to go out and heal the world." So I'm not as alarmed by it. I noted with interest that, with respect to Ukraine, it basically said, "Okay, it's not our problem anymore. Here, Europe—good luck. We'll send you some money, we'll send you some weapons, as long as you send us money. But Ukraine is yours. You figure it out." And the Europeans are going, "What?"

You know, you just left the baby on her doorstep, and now we've got to care for it? They're not ready for that. So, you know, I think too much drama is attached to it because—can you go back and recall what was said in Trump's December 2017 national security strategy and how that policy evolved? No. And it's the same for Biden's; it came out in January 2023. These are usually forgettable documents. This isn't like the one written in 1948 that became the foundation for U.S. policy toward the then-Soviet Union and, later, international communism.

#Pascal

But that document wasn't—you're referring to George Kennan's "Long Telegram."

#Larry C. Johnson

Yes, that's correct.

#Pascal

And that wasn't even written by an administration. It was written by a really brilliant analyst—he was actually in the embassy in Moscow, right?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, he was a diplomat, a State Department Foreign Service officer, and had been there for quite a while. He was extremely knowledgeable. So, Kennan's letter—that was consequential. It did help shape strategy and guide it. But after that, we've never really seen the United States act with a strategic plan, whereas China does. Good Lord, China has five-year plans, and by God, they implement them. People are held accountable, which is one of the reasons we've now seen China actually surpass the West on the technological front. And, you know, frankly, in how they care for their people in terms of health care. Would you rather be in Europe? Name a country in Europe where the average person—how are you going to get health care there or in China? And again, I would argue that even the health care options are much better in Russia compared to the United States.

#Pascal

But, you know, health care is a really interesting example. I mean, you can even have capitalist countries—although I hesitate, because Japan is not a real capitalist country. But, you know, over here everybody gets a health care insurance card that you have to pay for. If you stop paying, they don't take away the card. The service isn't linked to the payment for the service. You have to pay, and they'll punish you if you don't, but they won't take away the card. But that's beside the point. You're right.

I mean, it's just the way the system works, right? At this point, it's becoming dysfunctional, I would say, in large parts of the West. What about the way Russia approaches it? Because you've been to Russia, and you've even—well, you've talked, you've interviewed Mr. Lavrov, you've talked to Mr. Karaganov, and so on. How do they view the United States as a political entity? Because you can't—well, even if it's dysfunctional, it's still there, and it's still highly dangerous. How do you think the Russians are approaching their relationship with the U.S. now?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, there's a split. I think, you know, with Lavrov and Ryabkov, within the Foreign Ministry, they still see it as in Russia's interest to engage the United States. They want to talk. And I think there's agreement across the board in Russia—yeah, okay, let's talk to the United States if we can, if they'll listen. But you also have a growing number in the camp of Sergei Karaganov who believe our future is not in the West. Our future is in the East. Our future is with China, in Siberia, maybe even with Japan or Korea. It's with the Global South, but it's not with the West anymore. And so I think a growing number of Russians have come to that realization and said, you know what, this is too toxic and troubling a relationship.

But the other thing that's taking place now is—you know, and you're young enough that you'll get to witness it and see it come to full fruition—the replacement of this Eurocentric relationship: the financial and political system that was erected at the end of World War II. And it really reflects what I call 500 years of European culture dominated by Christianity and all the schisms that took place within that—the birth of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, and then the rise of colonial empire building, where they took the commission of Jesus to “go out and make Christians of everybody” and turned it into “go out and grab as much territory as you can so we can control the wealth, control the resources, and exploit the people.” That mentality in Europe never arose in either Russia or China, because Russia and China didn't have colonies in Central or South America.

They didn't have colonies in Africa. They didn't have colonies in Asia. They had relationships, which is a different thing—where they would deal with people on a different level, but not like the Europeans. And the Americans sort of got infected with that European mindset of, you know, “What can we get out of you? What can we take from you? How can we control you? How can we dominate you?” That's a genuine mindset in the European sphere. But it's coming to an end, because Europe no longer dominates the way it did militarily and economically in the 18th and early 19th centuries. So now there's been this transformation, and China embodies the essence of that transformation. I mean, when I was in high school—so that was 53 years ago—Richard Nixon showed up in China with Henry Kissinger.

And they opened this whole era. And, you know, at the time, I think the Chinese literacy rate was around 60%. The vast majority of the population lived in poverty. And look at what they've done in 52 years. They literally have robots doing things that, A, Americans can't build robots like that or produce them in any numbers, and B, when it comes to—let's take literacy as a benchmark—China now has almost universal literacy. The literacy rate in the United States is about 79%, with average reading comprehension at a sixth-grade level for only about 50% of the population. So China has now surpassed the United States educationally, where the U.S. once used to be, if you will—as Reagan called it—the city on a hill, a shining light that others would flock to.

#Pascal

Do you think that at some point, you know, it's going to be inevitable that in the U.S. there'll be some sort of Gorbachev—someone strong and understanding enough to say, "We just can't go on living like this. We need to change. We need an American glasnost and perestroika."

#Larry C. Johnson

I'm afraid the only way we'll get there is through either some economic or military disaster. Because, you know, it's just not in human nature to change when you think you're doing okay. And even though the signs are obvious in our society that we're not doing okay—particularly when you look at the reading and math scores of kids coming out of inner-city high schools—it's like, you know, only 20% can meet even a minimal standard, and not even at grade level. The numbers at grade level are just not even close. And we allow that to go on.

And meanwhile, we're spending \$360 billion in Ukraine to arm them with weapons we can't produce, and then we find ourselves in a situation where we're going to threaten China—and China just cuts off the rare earth minerals. Then all of a sudden, these critical weapons systems the military wants to produce can't be produced because there's no alternative source for those minerals. You'd think somebody would sit back, plan for this, and think it through. That's why I keep coming back to this: there's no strategy. U.S. foreign policy is more like a bad jazz band, okay? Riffing. They've got a few notes they're playing, and they're just all over the place. It's like a Saturday Night Live skit—"More cowbell!" We keep saying, "What we need is more defense spending." Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing. You know—more cowbell.

#Pascal

Yeah, but the problem is that that jazz band has the second-largest nuclear arsenal in the world.

#Larry C. Johnson

That would be a problem.

#Pascal

So this needs management. And I'm just saying, like, you know, in a sense—how, like, to China, to Russia, to the Global South—it's like, what do we need to do for this jazz band not to go kaboom, right? Because we don't want that. We don't want that. We want the jazz band to come and play with everybody so we have a nice tune, right? How do we achieve that?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah. That's where we've got to rely on countries like Russia and China to try to be the adults in the room. You know, that whole generation—at least in the aftermath of World War II—we still had

people in leadership positions who could remember the sacrifice, what it cost. And the United States hardly paid any price in blood. We didn't suffer serious losses, and we made a lot of money off of it, so it was good in that regard. But they also saw enough death and destruction to know, "Oh, this is bad." And so the George Kennans, and even the younger version of that—the John Glenns—you know, John Glenn came in at the tail end of World War II as an early astronaut.

But you still had people who put a priority on arms control agreements. Even at the height of the Cold War in the '70s, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to agree first on the SALT treaties—Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties. Then we got to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Agreement. So we were actually able to reach agreements with the Soviets. Now, what happened once the Soviet Union disappeared? It wasn't Russia that walked away from those agreements. It was George W. Bush who canceled the ABM Treaty. It was Donald Trump who canceled the INF Treaty. And here's Russia saying, "Hey, we've got this new START—let's keep that alive." And the Trump administration said, "Oh, we'll see, we're not sure, it's not a priority." It's dangerous.

#Pascal

It's the height of irresponsibility. Yeah. Yeah. I seriously wonder how to manage it, because this cannot be managed by a single country alone—not even by the United States. I mean, nobody in the U.S. has the single-handed capacity to manage this. They just don't, because it's a network of how things work. Yeah. Larry, thank you. This was very insightful. And we'll do follow-ups on this, especially about Russia, because I'm a great fan of the way you're trying to engage and understand what's going on there. We've never needed understanding of other parts of the world more than we do now—it's getting more and more dangerous. But if people want to follow you and see that analysis develop, where should they go?

#Larry C. Johnson

Sonar21.com—S-O-N-A-R-21.com. Let me just, in closing, offer one observation that I found really insightful. It was from Vyacheslav Fetisov—or Fetisov, depending on how you pronounce it. I probably say it wrong. But Slava was his nickname. He was the preeminent hockey player in Russia in the late '70s, early '80s, and throughout the '80s. Then, in the '90s, he came to the United States and played. He ended his career with the Detroit Red Wings, and with them, he won two back-to-back Stanley Cups. God, what a decent man he is. And he's sanctioned—he can't travel to the United States because of his association with Putin and the Russian government.

So his daughter, though, lives in the United States, and he's got at least one grandchild—maybe two—in the United States that he can't see. They have to travel to Russia. But what he told me, when he moved from playing hockey in Russia to coming to the West to play, was that the biggest shock for him was how individualistic it was in the West. They weren't saying, "We are a team. We must play together, we must complement and reinforce each other, we must be a unit." He said that

mindset just didn't exist in the West. And one of the reasons they succeeded in Detroit is that they brought in four other Russians.

And the Russians all brought that mindset of, not "I've got to be the star," but "How can we work together to achieve a goal?" Now, that's not communism—that's a cultural attitude, right? I don't want to say it's unique to Russia, but it's at the heart and soul of their approach. And that's why I think, boy, Russia's got something to teach the world on that front. If we can learn that mentality—not "How can I get ahead?" or "How can I be the star?" but "How can I work together with others as a unit so we can, in fact, score the goal, get the puck in the net, put the ball in the hoop—pick your sports metaphor"—I think that was a very profound insight for me.

#Pascal

If we managed to collaborate, you know, we could go so far. We could go again to the moon and the stars. Yes. So, you know, when I teach international relations, I usually start with a picture of the globe and say, "Look, we're eight billion people on this marble floating through space, condemned to self-organization—and we're just not good at organizing it."

#Pascal

We're just not good at it. Instead of working together, we kill each other—we make a sport out of it, right?

#Pascal

Depressing—but very good remarks. Larry C. Johnson, everybody who wants to follow Larry, go to sonar21.com. I'll put the link in the description below, and we'll talk again. Larry C. Johnson, thank you very much for your time today.

#Larry C. Johnson

Thank you, my friend. It was a pleasure.