

EU Goes Rogue, Trump Flip-Flops & Putin Will Escalate

Dr. Gilbert Doctorow discusses the EU breaking its own rules and international law, Trump flip-flopping yet again, and Putin's likely escalation in the near future. Gilbert Doctorow's new book "War Diaries. Volume 1: The Russia-Ukraine War, 2022-2023" is now available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/War-Diaries-Russia-Ukraine-2022-2023/dp/B0F9VK1WM2> 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 Gilbert Doctorow, a historian, international affairs analyst, and author of **War Diaries: The Russia-Ukraine War**. Thank you for coming back on the program. As always, the news is coming in fast. Well, as the Ukraine war seems to be coming to an end, we're seeing a lot of sudden, dramatic developments. There was the speech by Zelensky, where he more or less demanded Russia's capitulation. The EU has taken big new steps to legalize the seizure of Russian assets and to lock them in. And we see the EU and U.S. negotiations continuing, which seem to be resulting in a very strange consensus around some—well, let's call them absurd—demands that would never be acceptable to the Russians by any stretch of the imagination. So, can you explain what's going on? Sorry, that was a very big question, but pick whichever part you feel is most relevant.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, what we've seen in the last couple of days is an absolute flip-flop in Trump's position. His emissaries attended the meeting of the Coalition of the Willing in Berlin, presided over by Friedrich Merz, who was the strongest advocate for seizing Russian state assets to finance the war over the next two years. Present there were both Gondolin and also Kushner and Witkoff, Trump's emissaries. And they seemed to reach this remarkable agreement on terms that are precisely the Ukrainian terms going back three years, which would return the situation to where it was before February 2022 and restore all the preconditions for Russia's decision to go to war.

The territorial situation, the presence of NATO in Ukraine—the fact that, although it wouldn't have a diploma on the wall calling it a NATO member, de facto it would be one. And, to add insult to injury, we found out a day ago—I think this was via Bloomberg—that the conditions would allow for a kind

of Article 5 U.S. participation in providing security to Ukraine. Everything that Mr. Zelensky could have asked for was approved by the Coalition of the Willing, in the presence of Trump's emissaries, who came out of the meeting saying, "We've never been closer to peace," a point repeated by Donald Trump himself. Now, something has happened. That is not normal. That is against the laws of gravity.

I assume there's something we're not fully aware of—some commotion on Capitol Hill over Trump's conflict with Europe about his national security strategy. There seems to be some kind of revolt going on that forced him to completely change his position on the Ukraine war and to set things up for a Russian rejection of that peace, which would cast the Russians as the bad guys perpetuating the war. So I don't think it's just a casual flip-flop by Mr. Trump because he's inconsistent. I think there's a bigger struggle going on in Washington's political circles that we're not fully apprised of to explain this. But the net result, as far as the Russians are concerned, is that Mr. Putin has been put in a fool's position.

The Ministry of Finance has turned out to be the hero of the day, particularly the hardliner Mr. Ryabkov, who said three weeks ago that all possibilities for diplomacy had been exhausted and that it would be resolved on the battlefield. For that, he got more than a slap on the wrist—it looked like he and his boss might be thrown out of the ministry. The ministry itself seemed headed for a shake-up. Lavrov disappeared from public view for several days, and there was talk that he'd been sacked. I think that talk had some substance behind it, and it was a big fight. They all calmed down, Lavrov went back to his post, but now it looks like Ryabkov was 100 percent right and Putin was 100 percent wrong.

And I think there's going to be a very big change in Putin's policies going forward. In every way, the events have been stunning. But there's still one more thing I want to bring up for discussion—what's going on here in little Belgium, the "mouse of the Lord." What we have here is unbelievable. After all the grandstanding by Mr. Orbán, whom we all know and admire for his patriotism and his defense of European sovereignty—for saying all the right things—the man voted the wrong way every single time. Whenever sanctions came up, he always voted with the majority. He was just extorting various economic concessions for his country.

But the fact remains that he did not prove his worth as a great friend of Russia. So Mr. Orbán has been shown up. The other buddies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been shown up. And out of nowhere, Belgium is saving the day. In today's newspaper, **Le Soir**—it's a French-language paper with the largest readership here—there are two full pages, pages two and three, devoted to what's going on in Belgian politics with respect to the votes in the European Council that take place tomorrow and Friday over the expropriation and confiscation of Russian state assets held in Euroclear.

The position of the newspaper—like that of all major newspapers in Belgium—is Euro-Atlanticist. After all, Belgium hosts NATO and other military headquarters down in Mons, where American

leadership is present, and of course it hosts the European Union, which is fully aligned in favor of Ukraine against Russia. So they have a big political investment in getting along with these organizations, which give Belgium—and Brussels in particular—a place in the world. But nonetheless, despite this Euro-Atlanticist editorial position, they have caved in.

They have this space devoted to what's going on here, and they cannot say anything negative about Mr. De Wever. Yet they admit that every political party in this country—left and right, north and south—backs De Wever. To my understanding, at 8 a.m. tomorrow morning there will be a special session of the Belgian House of Representatives, where De Wever will speak. I think he's invited some people from the Commission to watch this and see what the whole Belgian legislature is saying about the confiscation of assets. He's going to rub their noses in it. With that position, we know with 100 percent certainty that De Croo will vote no. But who else is in this game?

From last Friday, we knew that Italy would be in it, backing De Wever, which is the big weight. And then you've got the smaller ones—Malta, Bulgaria, and our old friends Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. That's seven countries aligned with the position against confiscation of the assets. It would be very tough for von der Leyen to try to overrule seven countries out of twenty-seven. Moreover, their resistance is clear. De Wever cannot back down and stay in political life. So there you have it. The only thing the Front Alliance can do to bring the Belgians around is satisfy its conditions, which are written guarantees from all twenty-seven member states that they will share the financial risk Belgium assumes by releasing the frozen assets and making them available for this non-reimbursable, essentially, loan to Ukraine as collateral.

I don't believe she can get those signatures. France, I think, stands against that. So there will be some heavyweights opposing the idea of a unified EU backing for the risk. That leaves her with the only alternative she's clearly stated: that the EU member states put up the money themselves. Now, that takes us from the lawlessness of her proposal to normal legal proceedings, where heads of government go to their parliaments and ask for approval of budgetary appropriations to lend to Ukraine. We can say it's almost dead in the water. There are very few countries that have the lending capacity or the willingness to risk a revolt in their parliaments against such a proposal, considering all the austerity they're imposing on their own countries for the sake of the remilitarization going on here in Europe.

So I don't believe that von der Leyen will succeed, but this is a guess. I could be wrong. The woman is a dynamo. She has enormous energy, and obviously she has very determined assistants helping her in this. But I think the odds are against her. And if she fails... then the war will end, I'd say, at the end of Q1 2026, under conditions of Ukraine's bankruptcy and the removal of the gang now running the country. They'll be running for their lives. They're not going to want to sign the capitulation, and that will be the only way out—the capitulation. So that's my prognosis. I understand I'm being a bit optimistic about it after these days of real gloom, but after reading the reality here in **Le Soir**, I think there's reason to be optimistic.

#Glenn

In terms of the EU going rogue and, I guess, throwing away the rule of law—they've already taken some big steps. Von der Leyen invoked these emergency powers, meaning the EU member states no longer have to vote unanimously every six months to renew the sanctions. As I understand it, that requirement is now suspended, and the assets will be frozen permanently—indefinitely. But is there also a way for the EU to circumvent any approval from Belgium? Because it just seems like all the rules can be shoved aside. Or, as you suggest, is there still reason to be optimistic that the EU won't take these drastic and self-destructive decisions that von der Leyen is pushing for?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, let's look at the voting on Friday. The emergency powers were not really the critical point. Belgium, after all, voted yes on ending the six-monthly renewals. Why would they do that if it were exactly the same principle as the voting that will take place tomorrow and Friday? It's not the same. What she could have said, with some justification—and I'm sure she did, because there's certainly a weasel mouth somewhere in her team—was: we need to do this to make sure Mr. Trump doesn't get his hands on that money and use it for purposes other than what it should be used for. And we need a place at the negotiating table. We are now excluded. If we pass this measure and the money is not accessible by Russia or by Trump, then they will have to deal with us.

She could say that, and everyone could say, "Yes, you're right," and then they'd do it. But that's not the same thing as the vote coming tomorrow and Friday, which would violate international law. The vote this past Friday didn't compromise Russian ownership of the assets. The vote tomorrow and Friday would—if the frozen assets are released and handed over to a bank, well, that's it. You can argue all you like, but have they been confiscated or not? The Russians' control of those assets has been violated, and you have the basis for a lawsuit—one that Europe would probably lose. So I think this coming vote over the next two days is not affected by what happened with Rikard Wilk.

#Glenn

Well, at the same time, we see these negotiations, and they do take me a bit back to the past four years, because this isn't the first time the EU has organized peace talks. But in all those talks, as we've seen before, they never actually invited the Russians. I mean, some of them—like the peace talks in Switzerland—the Polish president argued that Russia is a country of 200 captive nations that should be free, you know, so... Well, it's not really a peace summit when you don't invite the Russian side and the discussion is about how to break up their country. But here again, they're sitting down. The EU is negotiating with the U.S. I guess it's a nice compromise for the Europeans, because they want to be part of the negotiations, but they don't want to talk to Russia.

So I guess negotiating with the U.S. before they go to Russia makes sense. But the deal they came up with—this 800,000-strong Ukrainian army that the West should finance and rebuild during

peacetime—doesn't sound like a peacetime army at all. And there would also be European troops in Ukraine, with powerful security guarantees under Article 5. I mean, it seems like a non-starter, because again, Russia went to war to prevent Ukraine from being built up as a proxy against Russia. So... now that they've won the war, the outcome would be that NATO builds up an 800,000-strong army, armed with God knows how many missiles pointed at Russia.

Yeah, it doesn't make any sense. But Zelensky said, you know, we get the impression now that the Americans, as you said, haven't rejected this. And Zelensky now says that if Russia doesn't accept it, the U.S. must punish Russia. There are reports in the U.S. media that the Americans are preparing sanctions. Of course, the Europeans are happy, because if the U.S. and Russia are in confrontation again, they hope America will come back to their side and drag them further into this war. So what do you make of this? How do you explain it—besides the infighting in the U.S.? Is this a ploy, perhaps, to get the Ukrainians to accept things like no NATO, or is it actually just Trump becoming a Biden 2.0?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, there's the issue that's going to come up. Assuming they can't finance Ukraine, and assuming Ukraine goes under in the first quarter of '26, there'll be a blame game: who brought down Ukraine? Trump, by doing what he's doing now, is preparing the way to say, "I did everything. I gave you everything you wanted, including a security guarantee, and they sank because you Europeans couldn't get your act together and put up the money to continue the war." So this is the first round of preparations for the blame game after the demise of Ukraine. I don't see any reason to parse the language of the peace agreement that was approved at Monday's meeting in Berlin. I don't see any other purpose in the language from both the German side leading it and from the emissaries of Trump supporting it. The purpose was to sabotage the peace agreements.

And to cast the Russians as the bad guys who wrecked the peace negotiations. That's essential for other discussions and fights going on outside what we're presently talking about. Those are the discussions that will come with the blame game—and are already happening now on Capitol Hill—where Trump is facing a new bill in the Senate to label the Russians as state sponsors of terrorism, which would really cause problems. So he has his own battles going on. But the end result for the Russians is that he's totally unreliable—not because of any personality quirks, though there are plenty—but because he's under enormous pressure and maneuvering for his position before the midterm elections, trying to avoid being blamed as the one who brought down Ukraine.

#Glenn

Yeah, that makes sense. Although with Trump, you never know, because he's always playing someone. So it's hard to say if, yet again, whatever agreement they've made with the Russians now is just another act of deceiving them. But yeah, that being said... what do you think the Europeans are going for here, though? Because besides all this rhetoric about Ukraine possibly winning and

Russia having to pay reparations, surely they see what we're seeing. They know this is coming to an end. Now, if I were an advisor to any of these European politicians, I'd say, look, Ukraine is doomed—why not get on the phone with Moscow right away and cut our losses? I mean, after everything that's happened—the toppling of the Ukrainian government, building this big proxy force against Russia—we've now participated in the killing of tens of thousands of Russians.

We now see that the whole project is collapsing, and once it collapses, Russia can take whatever it wants—and they might look toward Europe with some vengeance. So this seems like the time to cut our losses, get a deal in place, get this whole thing over with, agree to a new status quo. Again, we took a massive gamble. It didn't pay off. It failed. But I don't understand what the plan is now. Are they just going to go into the bunker and go down with the ship on this one? It's very strange to me. I don't understand where the Europeans are coming from. I understand the Ukrainians—this is a very humiliating defeat; they want to keep on fighting. I can understand the American position, the Russian position—but how do you make sense of what the Europeans are doing? Again, you're there in Brussels, at the belly of the beast, so to speak.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I'd like to divide these people up. There are some who can reason the way you've just done, and I'm sure they do. However, there aren't enough of them. I think what Putin said about the low level of confidence and education among too many European prime ministers and heads of state has to be considered. There are some very stupid people who have grand titles—and it's not arbitrary, it's not an accident. There are too many of them for it to be an accident. I think it's a direct consequence of the structure of the European Union and the loss of sovereignty of the nation-states, which has reduced the position of prime ministers to a very low level. And those people at that level—their only promotion in life will be to move into the European Union institutions. So they're not going to cross the line.

I mean, look here in Belgium. Who did we have after they exhausted their possibilities in Belgian politics? The prime minister, Michel, and his foreign minister at the time, Didier Reynders—both from the Reform Movement Party, MR, based in Brussels and French-speaking. They both moved to the European Union: Michel became president of the European Council for five years, and Didier Reynders became the justice commissioner under von der Leyen. And that's it—that's as far as you can go on this European continent. You want to get out of the very constrained powers you have in your little countries, so you end up with very inferior people—inferior by historic standards. Very low-quality people in these exalted offices. And I don't think they're capable of the mental gymnastics you just did.

There are a few people who are not stupid, of course—but mostly in the larger countries. But then they have their own problems, which prevent them from following straight logic. Mr. Macron is a case in point. He's incapable of following logic, because he's working day to day just to hold on to power and isn't thinking strategically anymore. He didn't think strategically when he called that snap

election. So there are problems even with people who are quite intelligent—they're distracted by other things. As for the complete idiots, the lady prime minister of Denmark is a case in point. Do you think she goes through the mental exercise you just did? I don't. She's committed to her ideological positions, and that's it.

#Glenn

Yeah, she's the one, if I'm not mistaken, who actually said that peace might be more dangerous than continuing the war now, because then the Russians might turn their anger on us when the war comes to an end. But there's something to that, though. I mean, at the final stages of a war, it does seem like you're entering a very dangerous phase, because on one hand, as the Russians are coming out victorious, sometimes one lets the victory go to their head—that is, one becomes a bit more assertive, a bit more bold. But of course, there are also some strategic reasons why they might be more bold. When they were all bogged down fighting the Ukrainians, they let the Europeans essentially step all over the red lines.

You know, the Europeans can now speak openly about how they're bringing the war into Russia. So I'd expect it's not unlikely that the Russians would start looking at, for example, the drones or jets flying over the Black Sea—picking targets that their war planners and contractors are using to fire upon Russia—and that the Russians might begin shooting those down. At the same time, of course, while the Russians might be preparing to push a bit harder against the Europeans—and you can see this in the rhetoric—the Europeans think they have to step up as well, because their proxy is losing. So they feel they need to rescue the situation by escalating. It just seems like this is the moment for a clash, as we go up this escalation ladder with no one really in control. Do you see that too, or is it...

#Gilbert Doctorow

I think that President Putin has no choice but to go up the escalation line. As I said, his bet on Trump has turned out badly. Not to get into Trump's personality and all the amateur psychoanalysis everyone in the media does on him, but it just hasn't worked out—for reasons probably outside Mr. Trump's control—and it certainly hasn't produced the results Russia had a right to expect. That puts Mr. Putin in an embarrassing position and raises the question of how much longer the "gently, gently" program can go on. It hasn't been all that gentle over the past year, frankly speaking. As we know, the Ukrainian energy infrastructure is nearly destroyed.

The Russians have been pretty nasty over the last six to nine months. But still, they haven't gone for the jugular. They haven't done anything to destroy Ukraine. They can, and they should. You mentioned very kindly my volume one of memoirs—my war diaries—that was published in May. I believe that by January, or at the latest the start of February, volume two will come out for 2024. I'm just putting the finishing touches on this material as I go through my diary entries for October

2024. And I'm saying, "Oh yes, the Russians are moving very nicely now, at greater speed. I think they'll take Pokrovsk in the next two or three days." October 2024. You know when they captured it? October 25th.

We've all misjudged the pace of the Russian advance. Even now, the Russians have taken most of the major fortified positions, and some people are saying it's going to be a clean sweep to the Dnieper. I don't believe that for a minute. Mr. Putin doesn't have two or three years to get there. Now that his policy of accommodation has been proven wrong, it's high time for him to take the low road and do what has to be done—finish with Ukraine now. There are a lot of people on the periphery of the Kremlin who are advocating that. What I'm doing here is repeating what they're saying. I'm not giving them ideas; they're giving me ideas they've been saying on television for months: bomb the hell out of Kyiv and get it over with.

#Glenn

I think it's important for people to understand that in Moscow, the main argument against going up the escalation ladder—against Russia taking the gloves off—was that they were making some diplomatic headway with the Americans. But with this new development, it's going to put a nail in the coffin of all those people. The whole argument for why they shouldn't escalate feels dead in the water now. And these attacks on Russian commercial vessels as well, especially in the Black Sea—this is something I don't think enough people in the West appreciate, how much anger this is fueling.

Because, again, whatever the Ukrainians are doing, we know they're getting assistance from the West. But also, the Europeans are essentially saying exactly what they want: we need to target more of the Russian energy infrastructure. So we see Ukrainian attacks on Russian energy facilities. Now we see the Europeans saying we have to target the so-called shadow fleet of the Russians. And now, again, allegedly, the Ukrainians are targeting Russian ships. I mean... and if you look at how they've responded, they've stepped up the aggression, especially against Odessa. The lights are off there now.

And it wouldn't surprise me if there are people in Moscow now making the argument that they can't afford to have Odessa stuck in a post-war Ukraine. Again, this is an argument that's very difficult to make in the West, because people here have convinced themselves that Putin is a dictator who decides everything on his own. But there's a lot of pressure building up in Moscow about how to respond to this. I guess my last question is: what do you see the Russians doing now? Will they go for a full military victory on the battlefield? Is Odessa already in their sights? How do you see this?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Odessa is in their sights. But I think there's something they can do that would be less demanding on their manpower and would address the questions you raised a minute ago—the attacks on their ships in the Black Sea. They can shoot down the British spy planes that are providing targeting

information to the Ukrainians. They could, and they should. Britain needs to get a message. They've been the ringleaders in the whole war against Russia. They remain the attack dogs—not the lap dogs they were under Tony Blair. They're the attack dogs. And they're flying planes over the Black Sea in international waters, so what? If the Russians take down some of those planes, the message will be received in London.

And they will draw in their horns. That will have a big impact on the question of attacks on Russian commercial shipping in the Black Sea. As I'm saying, there are things the Russians can do that are escalatory but not as dramatic as taking the city of Odessa—which they'll do anyway. That'll happen. I don't believe Odessa will stay in Ukrainian hands when the Ukrainians finally capitulate. That will be part of the capitulation settlement. They will lose access to the Black Sea. But this lesser action will have an immediate impact on the problem of the attacks on Novorossiysk, the attacks on those tankers, and it will be very salutary.

#Glenn

You know, when people look back at World War I, they always ask, "How could they sleepwalk into this massive disaster?" It was predictable—but it's just as incredibly predictable where we're heading now. All these incentives are building up for Russia to respond and retaliate against Europe. It's almost as if some European leaders would actually welcome it, because then they could say, "Well, look, there you go." After spending all these months building up fake cases about Russian drones around airports and all these different false flags, now they'd have a real smoking gun for their war advocacy. It's this whole illusion, I think, about escalation control—that if shots are fired and there's some direct clash with the Russians, they'll somehow be able to control how fast it escalates. And I don't think they can appreciate how quickly this could turn into a very different war.

#Gilbert Doctorow

I wouldn't liken it to World War I, though, because back then the sides were evenly matched. They were both heavily militarized and waiting for it to happen. Europe now—well, the arsenal is there, they're talking, they're working, they're spending tens of billions of dollars to make up for twenty years of lost investment in their armies. But if they were to go to war now, and take Russian aggressive actions as a casus belli, they'd be smashed. So they won't dare react. We're not going to see a world war starting here in Europe because of Russian escalatory action. The Europeans just don't have the wherewithal.

#Glenn

Well, today is the 17th. On the 18th and 19th, the EU will make a decision on how to finance Ukraine. However they decide to do it, it will only deepen their commitment. So... no, I think we're

looking at disaster. It's quite depressing. Only a few weeks ago, it looked as if there might actually be some diplomatic path. But here we are. So, as always, we finish on a grim note. Thank you very much for taking the time.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, thank you.