

Report from Moscow: Europe Is SCREWED |

Larry C. Johnson

Reporting from Moscow, Larry Johnson describes his dinner with Sergei Lavrov and explains why he believes Russia has lost faith in negotiations with Washington. He and Pascal discuss Ukraine, Europe's confrontation with Russia, and the danger of wider war. Johnson assesses American weapons production, missile shortages, Iran and Yemen, and the economic consequences of energy disruption. They debate whether Western strategy reflects deliberate attrition or an overestimation of American power, and consider the prospects for prolonged conflict and diplomatic stalemate.

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#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with an update by the always super brilliant Larry Johnson.

#Larry C. Johnson

Larry, welcome back. Yeah. Well, I don't have my Florida shirt on. And the only cigars I have are these little things, which—I had lunch yesterday with one of the members of the Duma, Alexander Babakov, and he was hosting a group of international observers. So it included a gentleman from Argentina. Since I'd lived in Argentina, we had something to chat about. He was a porteño from Buenos Aires, and I lived in Córdoba, Córdoba West. A couple of gentlemen from Spain, a gentleman from Lebanon, one from Syria, a young woman and another gentleman from Greece, one from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Anyway, one of the people at that meeting had these little cigars, and I said, "Oh, you know." And I said, "Well, I'll take one." They said, "One? No." They gave me like six. So.

#Pascal

Maybe I need to explain. I mean, you're currently in Moscow, right, where you've already been for quite a while, a couple of weeks. You were there together with John Mearsheimer as well, who just

recently reported. And apparently, I mean, you know, the international isolation of Russia seems to be going really well, huh?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, yeah, it is so.

#Pascal

Can you speak a bit to that? Like, how's Moscow now? How does life feel there?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, it's like, you know, I woke up this morning to reports that there had been a massive drone strike on Moscow. I didn't hear anything, you know. So I did see there was a little bit of smoke out on the horizon. Moscow is an amazing city. It really is. It is clean. It's safe. It's just, you know, bustling with activity. The two biggest dangers in Moscow are the traffic jams—you know, you get stuck in traffic—and the food. You're going to put on weight. No, in fact, this lunch that the Duma member, Mr. Babakov, hosted yesterday was at this restaurant whose name is basically "not fish restaurant," Rybnyy. Rybnyy is not fish. It's all meat. So just the very name itself is intended as a joke, but the food was sensational.

#Pascal

So overall, like, life in Moscow is quite normal, although the war between Ukraine and Russia, the proxy war, is ongoing, right? What did you make of these negotiations, you know, that were happening also around the time when you probably arrived there a little bit earlier, and Kushner and Witkoff again in Moscow, Russia again entertaining them? Where are we at on that front? Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, in fact, a week ago Monday, Alistair Crooke, John Mearsheimer, Judge Napolitano, and myself had dinner with Sergei Lavrov, as well as Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov. In fact, I took a Florida shirt, one of my Hawaiian shirts, so-called, and gave it to Lavrov. And it was funny because I said, "Hey, I'm known as Larry the Shirt Johnson, so I'm giving you one of my shirts." And he goes, "Is it used?" And I go, "No, it's brand new. Come on."

#Pascal

He accepted it? He accepted your shirt? Oh, yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, yeah. So, you know, maybe one of these days, if he gets a vacation down on the Black Sea, he'll, you know, break it out and sit there and be drinking, you know, a fruit drink with an umbrella in it, you know.

#Pascal

And how did that dinner go? What were you talking about? How was Lavrov treating you guys?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, great. It was a very relaxed, I'd call it relaxed and informal, just like, you know, we were at the, they call it the official residence of the foreign minister.

#Pascal

But he doesn't live there. It really is.

#Larry C. Johnson

I think it was like the intel, the home of Lavrentiy Beria during the Stalin days. So it got sort of a dark past on that front. But he was very, very open, very warm. We did a few vodka toasts. You know, I was told by another friend of mine whose father was a diplomat in the Russian diplomatic corps that during previous visits, when he was with his father overseas and Lavrov visited, that Lavrov likes a Johnnie Walker Black. So we had a good toast. Mearsheimer, you know, Mearsheimer is a hoot. I love the guy. He always asks very direct questions, nothing shy about him. You know, he came away from the dinner very clear that while Russia is— they're open to negotiation, the negotiations are still based upon the outline that Vladimir Putin presented to the Foreign Ministry in June of 2024. Hmm.

And basically, it is that the West must immediately recognize the former oblasts of Ukraine as now Russian territory, which means Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Crimea. That these are all now permanently part of Russia. That NATO needs to get the hell out of Ukraine. That the support that the United States and the West have been providing Ukraine militarily and intelligence-wise, that needs to come to an immediate end. There needs to be elections. You're not going to have this group of Nazis running around Ukraine. They want a legitimate government. Russia hasn't backed away from that. And Lavrov, as he has said in public—you know, he wasn't revealing some deep, dark secret—but he said in the past that Trump is agreement-incapable. So they don't really view the entreaties by Kushner and Witkoff as serious.

#Pascal

May I ask you about that one? Because Mearsheimer, a few days ago, reported about that dinner with Lavrov on his YouTube channel, and he said what surprised him the most was that apparently, in the lead-up to the Anchorage summit, where the big deal was supposed to be, you know, just the struck handshake and so on, the biggest surprise to Mearsheimer was that apparently Vladimir Putin was willing to basically end the annexation of the additional oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, where the front lines were. And that was, like, the biggest kind of concession that he didn't think was possible, but that it was apparently agreed upon.

And then they flew to Anchorage and they shook hands, and then Trump couldn't deliver. Trump couldn't get the Ukrainians and the Europeans to agree to that or to stop. And the question on my mind is, why? Is that real? Because if Trump, if the United States actually switched off the information sharing and the weaponry and so on, you know, it would be over. It would be done. Yes, the U.S. is a long lever there. So there's only two possibilities. Either he couldn't pacify his own hawks, you know, around him, the deep state still runs the show, or he was lying. What do you make of that?

#Larry C. Johnson

I think it's both. He's lying and not able to pacify the neocons.

#Larry C. Johnson

Look, I've told the Russians, in my own view, I tell them the story of the frog and the scorpion. And you may be familiar with that, that the frog is sitting on the shoreline, and the scorpion comes up and says, "Hey, give me a ride to the other side of the river." And the frog says, "Well, no, you're a scorpion. You're going to sting me, and we'll die in the middle of the river." The scorpion goes, "No, I'm not. I'm not going to do that. I'd be crazy." So the frog says, "Okay," lets the scorpion climb on his back and swim it across. And in the middle of the river, the scorpion stings him, and they're sinking. He's dying. And the frog says to the scorpion, "Why did you do that?" And the scorpion says, "I'm a scorpion."

I can't help myself. And I remind the Russians that the United States is the scorpion. The United States is not interested in finding a peaceful settlement with Russia because the entire conflict is contrived. And what do I mean by that? You're too young to remember the Cold War. During the Cold War, there was an active competition between the international communists that the Soviet Union represented and the capitalist West. And those competitions were played out in the war in Angola, the war in Central America, you know, the support the Soviet Union was providing to the Sandinistas, support the Soviet Union was providing to Cuba, and then, of course, the war in Afghanistan.

You know, those were the big three big focuses for the CIA back when I was involved: Afghanistan, Angola, Central America. And yet, during all of that, you know, we were actually—we were fighting proxy wars. And we'd just come out of Vietnam, where Russian pilots, or Soviet pilots, had flown North Vietnamese aircraft that had shot U.S. airmen down. Despite all that, we talked. And they entered into genuine agreements with the SALT Agreement, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Agreement, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. There was, if you will, a mutual respect. We didn't agree with the Soviets, but at least there was a respect. We don't have that now.

There is zero respect on the U.S. side with respect to Russia. And, you know, back in the '70s, we had a number of prominent Soviet Russian dissidents fleeing to the West. Dmitry Simes is an example. Dmitry came, you know, he was facing a prison sentence in Russia. He fled to the United States, ended up, you know, finished his PhD, became a prominent foreign policy guy in Washington, met Richard Nixon, ran the Nixon Center, which was one of the major think tanks. You had Sakharov, a nuclear scientist. You had Solzhenitsyn. Today, what we're seeing is the reverse flow. Dmitry Simes had to flee the United States, coming back to Russia in order to be safe, because he was facing political persecution in the United States for no other reason than he was providing advice to Donald Trump about Russia.

No, and he wasn't even, you know, wasn't plotting a revolution, wasn't plotting violence. So we're in a situation where the United States has an irrational, unfounded hatred of Russia. And it's just, to me, it's crazy because you come here, this country, it is a Christian country. They are practicing Christians. We in the United States claim to be a Christian country, largely. Yes, there are Jews and there are Muslims, but it is primarily a Christian country. The overwhelming majority of Americans have been Christian. There should be a natural alliance there with Russia. But instead, the Russians are treated like these authoritarian monsters.

And, you know, the other thing I find so fascinating about Russia is, despite that focus on Christianity, they don't have the same kind of ethnic tensions or, if you will, Islamophobia that you see in the United States. One of the biggest sort of examples of that is General Apti Alaudinov. General Alaudinov is a Chechen Muslim. He is a practicing Muslim. He is a patriot. He's a hero of Russia, a designated hero. Just an incredible man. There's none of this where they even question his Islamic faith. None of that. So, you know, I watch this irrational conflict between the United States and Russia, and it's all built up around, "We want to destroy Russia."

#Pascal

Yeah, that's the goal, and that's the stated aim. And then the question is, A, why? B, how to get off that self-destructive track? And a Swiss PhD student made a very good observation to me a few weeks ago, Alberto Antognini. He said, look, the way that things work at the moment, the relationship between especially Europe and Russia, but to a good extent also the United States, just

resembles much more the visceral hate of communism of the 1950s, much more than the idea of, you know, mutual coexistence back in the late '60s and '70s. We are kind of in the 1950s-type of visceral hate. And apparently that's also what still, to a good extent, influences even the neocons, right? Beyond the, you know, realist kind of grand strategic Brzezinski-type of divide-and-conquer kind of stuff. It's still, to a good part, this hate that influences the policy thinking in Washington. So with Trump, then, nothing has changed in that sense, right? And Trump, maybe, yeah, you think he gave up on this whole project of finding a solution, and now it's just like how to ride it out and dump it on somebody else.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, I think so. You know, what is, again, the absurdity of the Trump administration? You know, let's go to the recently concluded agreement with Greenland. Oh, we're going—we're going to exploit the Arctic. The United States has two ancient icebreakers that are powered with diesel. Okay, Russia's got six nuclear-powered icebreakers. Two are in production, soon to be completed. And then they've got 37 diesel-powered icebreakers. Okay, so the United States isn't even in the ballpark of competition for economically exploiting the Arctic. Now, the United States would like to cooperate with Russia, but again, I come back to the frog and the scorpion. You don't want to get into any kind of business relationship with the United States at this point.

#Pascal

How did Lavrov take that when you made that observation? So what do you think the Russians are doing now? Because it seems to me, for the longest time, for at least 20 years, 25 years, they were seriously trying to rebuild that connection. They thought it must have been a misunderstanding. But it seems to me that they're getting to the point where they're also realizing, yeah, we're dealing with a scorpion. So how are they going to deal with the scorpion?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, no, I think they have made the decision that, you know, and I'll put it in terms of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman. And, you know, pick your villain, whether it's the guy or the gal, that when you're trying to have a relationship with this other person and they're just toxic, everything they do is designed to make you miserable, to hurt you. And so you finally reach a point where you say, you know what? We're not going to have a relationship with that person anymore. We're going to go our own way. I think that's where Russia is. And we've seen that reflected in the comments of Sergei Karaganov that, you know, recognizing that there is no future with the West.

#Pascal

Yeah, but the problem is, in that metaphor, you know, the home, the house they're in, the doors are locked and the windows are barricaded. You can't get out. So how do you deal with that lady, girl,

lady or guy that is toxic in the other room? Can't get away from them, right? So there must be a way, and especially with the Ukraine war. I mean, so it's going to be a military solution. So Russia probably decided this is military, period. I mean, Mearsheimer comes to that conclusion.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, no, and John is right, in my view, on that, that Russia has realized there's not a diplomatic solution to be had right now, or at least one that Russia can live with. That is, this will be decided militarily. It will result in the military defeat of Ukraine and, by extension, the military defeat of Europe. Now, what I've heard clearly—and Pepe Escobar and I did, we interviewed General Aladinov together—the Russians fully expect to be at war with Europe.

#Pascal

Really?

#Larry C. Johnson

Oh, yeah. Yeah, the Russians are not planning a surprise attack. They're not planning a preemptive strike. But it was just a matter of fact that, you know, they're looking at what Europe's saying and what Europe is doing, or principally what the Poles are saying, the Germans are saying, the French and the English, what they're saying, what they're doing, and concluded: we're going to be at war with them. We're going to have to fight them. So they are resigned to that as a future reality.

And that should scare the hell out of the population in Europe because the leadership in Europe is so out of touch with their people. The average Pole, the average German, they don't want to go to war with Russia. Hell, they prefer to have Russian oil and gas coming in, which would certainly help their societies right now that are getting savaged, absolutely savaged, by the shortage of diesel, aviation fuel, and gasoline. But they've chosen this path of confrontation with Russia. And, you know, Russia is turning. This is Karaganov's point all along, that the future of Russia now lies in the East, not in the West.

#Pascal

You know, Larry, as much as I want to say yes, I think the problem is that the warmongering elite of Europe at the moment is still able to string enough people along with the Russophobia. And you're going to see that this upcoming next Sunday, today in a week. Switzerland will reject, probably with 60 or 65%, the neutrality referendum, the one that I've been working for, because the no side managed to successfully link it to Vladimir Putin. It's like, this is a Putin initiative. And they did that successfully. And that kind of dynamic is reproducing itself in all the European states. Anything that calls for peace and de-escalation is immediately linked to being pro-Putin. And this Russophobia still manages to fuel around 65% of the population to say, like, no, no, no, not with Russia. And that

now creates this absolute disaster where we're going to— that's going to start, apparently, this self-fulfilling prophecy.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, yeah, and this hatred of Putin, again, it's so irrational. And the people in the West that want to get rid of Putin, hello, there are some people that could replace Putin that are not as, let's say, congenial as Vladimir is. I mean, Vladimir Putin has really, you know, made a point about trying to find compromise, trying to, you know, where the Russians were. And Lavrov reiterated this point in our conversation with him a week ago Monday, that back in April of 2022, the agreement that was on the table that Russia was willing to accept had been brought to the table by the Ukrainians. It would have left Donetsk and Luhansk as part of Ukraine. All it did was provide very specific protections for the Russian speakers and the clergy in the Orthodox Church. That was it. And, you know, they walked away from that. So Putin all along has been willing to make some concessions. But that's over now. Those days are over.

#Pascal

Because concessions are never enough for the neocons, right? They don't take yes for an answer. The only thing they accept is absolute submission, and then you do what we say, right? This is like the whole thing that Jeffrey Sachs keeps repeating over and over. They only accept submission. And the thing is, they got the submission from the Europeans, absolute submission, compared to where they were 20 years ago, 25 years ago during the Second Iraq War, right? And they demand that from Russia, and Russia's not willing to do it. Hence, you need to fight it out.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, and the Russians, especially militarily, they're so far ahead of the West on a whole number of issues. The traditional Western perception of the Russian military is this rigid, doctrinaire organization that's inflexible, that can't adapt quickly to things on the battlefield. That's just dead-ass wrong. They've done just the opposite. And, in fact, you can make the case that that is the description of the Western military. So, for example, by May of 2022, it was clear that this war was shifting towards artillery. Artillery was going to be a major factor. Russia immediately pivoted and began producing significant quantities of artillery shells just to keep the frontline troops sufficiently armed.

What did the West do? Well, General Dynamics said, "Oh, let's build an artillery factory outside of Dallas, Texas. We'll spend \$533 million to do so." And now we learned about three weeks ago they closed that factory, having not produced a single artillery shell, after \$533 million. So right off the bat, you've got a situation now where Russia is producing in one month the amount of artillery rounds that all of NATO, all of NATO combined, produces in one year, if that. So that's just one example. The innovations with drones, the innovations with hypersonic missiles. Russia's got at least

four variants of hypersonic missiles. The United States has maybe one, and that's not even proven yet.

So, you know, what we've seen on a whole variety of both technical issues, tactical issues, is that Russia has proved very effective. And, you know, their air defense system reportedly last night, you know, they took out over 1,600 drones. Now, a few got through, reportedly hit a refinery down in the southern part of Moscow. Again, I didn't hear it, see it. But the point is that Russia still has an effective air defense system. The West relied upon Patriot, you know, the PAC-3 missile that goes to the Patriot. That's proven to be ineffective. Israeli Iron Dome, ineffective. David's Sling, ineffective. So the West doesn't actually have an effective air defense system that can be deployed and used anywhere. So, again, Russia is geared up for war if it comes.

#Pascal

Yeah, but I mean, that will be a devastating thing because it's another war that you cannot—you can fight it, but you cannot really win. I mean, there's no—just like with Western Ukraine, right? The Russians also, according to Mearsheimer, nobody thinks about occupying Western Ukraine because it's a wasp nest, right? The same thing with Germany and France and so on. You can send missiles in there and, like, blow up stuff, but you cannot really send troops and occupy the thing the way you did in 1945. So, I mean, it's just another headache on a headache, and a constant—we are looking at constant war on the European continent, right? Which, again, in the sick mind of the neocons, is a good thing because it wears down the adversary, right? You exhaust the adversary with 10, 15, 20 years of warfare until they break. It's sick. It's absolutely sick. But that's the kind of planning that's probably going on. How do you think that Russia can deal with that, this kind of idea of exhausting it?

#Larry C. Johnson

Because

#Pascal

Let's face it, that's what happened to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Ten years and they got—

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, yeah. So Russia has had what I call its Wizard of Oz moment. So in the movie Wizard of Oz, which, good Lord, that's now 90-some years old. Yeah. There comes that moment at the end of the movie where Dorothy, with her three traveling companions, the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and their little dog, Toto, they're in front of this great and powerful Oz, this booming voice, this orb that appears to be all-powerful. And then the dog runs over and pulls back the curtain, and there's a little old man behind it.

Russia had believed that the West was this all-powerful Oz, that the West militarily was superior, that the West was economically superior, and that Russia had a bit of an inferiority complex. Like, oh boy, we can't compete with them. They're so much ahead of us. And then came the special military operation, the ensuing sanctions, and then Russia sort of realized, hey, we're strong enough that we can actually stand up against them. We're not as weak as we thought. And then the discovery—and I verified this in conversations with different military personnel, both current and retired—that they didn't understand how weak, how limited, the strategic depth of the United States was. That's what's been exposed in Ukraine.

They thought that the United States and the West had all these, you know, Wunderwaffen, these wonder weapons that would be changing the battlefield, whether it was the HIMARS or the Patriot missile system or, you know, the F-16, that it would be just a game changer. And then once Russia got in and was facing it, yeah, they dealt with it. And then it turns out the United States didn't have the industrial capability to sustain production of those weapons at a level at which they were being used on the battlefield. I think that was a real—I'll call it a shock—to the Russian General Staff. They realized, here, you know, we thought these guys were like 10 foot tall. It turns out, yeah, they're more like 4 foot 7.

#Pascal

How did the Iran war impact Russian calculations? Did you have any discussions about that? You know, how Iran managed to successfully basically, you know, fend off the Americans? Like, how did that impact them?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, yeah, it's been a cumulative effect. Because before the Iran war was the effort to rein in the Houthis that failed. The United States failed back in May of 2025. Remember, Trump started this new Operation Rough Rider in the middle of March of 2025. And for seven weeks, the United States was really putting military pressure on the Houthis. And what happened out of that? The United States declared victory and left, and said, you know, the Houthis had capitulated. The Houthis did no such thing. But it illustrated that the United States' air power from aircraft carriers was extremely limited. It couldn't accomplish everything.

And then that message is reinforced with what happened when they started the war with Iran and launched attacks on the 28th of February. The U.S. was only able to sustain about 45 days of combat activity and then was running short of missiles. And, you know, despite Trump's denials that that's the case and excess denials, we just had the inspector general come out last week, a week and a half ago, and admit, yeah, we're short missiles. The supply chains are such that we can't produce Tomahawks and JASSMs at the level that we thought. And it's going to be years before, you know, the PAC-3 missiles will be back in any kind of supply. So all of that is—that's all led the Russians to say, oh, you know, they're not as strong as we thought.

#Pascal

Yeah. However, we are now hearing that the U.S. is apparently contemplating restarting the war in big terms with Yemen and just sent out a notice to all of their embassies that Americans all over the Arabian Peninsula should be careful and whatnot, one of these warnings that usually predates war, that precedes a military operation. So despite the fact that the U.S. seems to be running low on military equipment, there seems to be enough around in the stockpiles in order to contemplate new military maneuvers. Is that the case? Or is this, like, again, posturing without the actual backing of reality?

#Larry C. Johnson

No, no. No, I think the U.S. is getting ready to strike. I think it will be focused on the Houthis, but they could go after Iran as well. And as you correctly noted, the U.S. embassies in Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Iraq, Jerusalem, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have issued urgent security alerts for American citizens across the Middle East. There are currently eight tankers airborne over the Middle East right now, which means likely strikes against targets. Again, it's not specified yet who's going to be hit. But if nothing else, the activation of these tankers and trying to step up more kinetic activity, that's going to worsen the global crisis that right now is being experienced with respect to diesel and aviation fuel, because that fuel gets diverted into these military activities, which means it's less for the civilian side. Yeah, so this is—and whatever attacks that they launch, particularly if it's launched on the Houthi positions, it's going to be ineffective.

#Pascal

I mean, the Houthis, what I've learned now yesterday from Syrian colleagues is that the territory there is very similar to what Iran has at its coastline, which is a lot of mountains, a lot of granite, and a lot of very defensible positions in the highlands. Well, the United States is again looking at the same kind of quagmire there, but yet they apparently are dead set on going there. So how does that square with the running out of ammunition, running out of implements of war that we are also told is happening at the same time?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, well, they've not reconciled. That's the disconnect. You've got the policymakers, the guys making the decisions, the Hegseths, the Trumps, where they are in denial. They are refusing to acknowledge that they have a problem. In fact, in the continuing system, we can do whatever we want because we've got unlimited supplies. Then they're going to launch the operation, and then the actual logistics, the guy that is running that, they come and say, "Sorry, we don't have any more."

And this, again, this foolish notion that we can defeat ground forces with air power. You know, that's been the myth that has guided the Air Force since it was our Army Air Corps back in World War II. They've always believed that they could accomplish this, and it's never worked.

Didn't work in World War II, didn't work in Korea, didn't work in Vietnam, didn't work in Iraq, in either 1990 or 2003. And so here we are again, but now they're expending weapons at a level that cannot be reproduced because of the supply chains that China controls. And so this is—and what happens is, when the United States does these attacks and fails to achieve its objectives, it reinforces the notion of the United States being weak, which emboldens the other side to take stronger action. So, I mean, it's just, you know, instead of stepping away and disengaging, the United States keeps doubling down. It's the old sunk cost fallacy.

#Pascal

That seems to me also we are getting closer to the moment of Germany, Hitler in the bunker, right, where he still does the planning, and once they tell him, look, he's not coming, General whatever it is, he's not coming because he's been defeated, he goes—and, like, this beautiful movie, right, The Downfall. The Downfall is beautiful, and then the Swiss actor, he takes off his glasses and shatters them and says, like, "Everybody get out," and he has a last outburst. What else to that moment in the United States, where it finally will be the end of what is available?

#Larry C. Johnson

I think so. I mean, it really... We don't like to admit it. We've got this image of ourselves. You know, I think of it as, you know, a guy that was a star athlete in high school, and in his mind, he stands in front of the mirror and still looks fit. But he's got this huge belly and, you know, has put on about 50 extra pounds and is nowhere near as physically fit as he likes to think he is. And that's the United States. Because, look, on top of this, separate from the military issue, you've got the economic issues that are killing us.

You've got the United States racking up debt at an unprecedented level. When Donald Trump took office, it was \$36.2 trillion, and he's added \$3.8 trillion in debt in less than 24 months. And he's on track that \$40 trillion is going to become \$41 trillion in about another four weeks. You know that you've got the diesel shortage and the aviation fuel shortage. And there's no quick solution to that. They've been able to mitigate those costs up to now by drawing out of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Well, that's, you know, empty, effectively empty now.

#Pascal

Do you think, I mean, what enables this kind of boldness is, of course, that they took over Venezuela, and Venezuela has that heavy crude that the United States actually needs. But according to what I've read, I mean, they're still, like, years away from actually being able to properly... Right. Right.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah.

#Pascal

So the timing also won't work out, even with Venezuela in your pocket.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, it's not just heavy crude. I mean, it's high in sulfur, but it is extremely thick. Think of it like I tell people: take a coffee mug, fill it up with peanut butter, then put a straw in and try to suck the peanut butter out. Good luck. That's the consistency of what they're dealing with down there. And so it requires special methods to extract that from the ground. And frankly, they're not in a position where they can do that yet. So, you know, previously, the United States was dependent on the import of heavy crude because 70% of the refineries in the United States, they're set up to process heavy crude or crude that has a high sulfur content.

Well, in the past, they imported it from Russia. They imported about 8% to 10% from the Persian Gulf. The rest came from Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela. Well, Russia's off the table now, as is the Persian Gulf. So right off the bat, you've got a shortage that probably could add up to, say, 20% less. Then you've got Canada, and relations with Canada ain't that great right now either, where you see Canada turning to the EU, saying, "Hey, let us become like an associate member." There's a trade war between the United States and Canada, and the Canadians will try to find alternatives for their oil.

They'll sell it to China. Mexico can't make up the difference, and Venezuela can't make up the difference. So now you've got a genuine shortage of this sour crude that's needed to produce diesel. And I'll just note, in my own hometown back in Florida, south of Tampa, when I left on the 5th of September, the price of diesel was \$5.52. My wife just sent me a note yesterday. She said, "It's up to \$6.49." It's up almost a dollar in two weeks. And in Europe, across the board, whether we're talking Germany, Italy, France, the Europeans are getting crushed, and it's only going to get worse.

#Pascal

I've had discussions on my channel with German colleagues, lawyers—a lawyer who said, like, look, I'm now helping more companies to leave Germany than ever before. Everybody, it seems it's not

just a brain drain; it's also a company drain that's now starting. Yeah. And he says it's a dire situation. Nobody should start up any kind of business in Germany or France at this time. It's like, time to leave and go. So we are looking at major economic catastrophe for both economies, the Europeans and North Americans, in the next couple of years.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, no, I mean, this is going to be a global economic crisis that I know some analysts suggest will be worse than what befell the world in the 1930s. You know, it will be a global depression, and that will be catastrophic. And I don't think they're being alarmist. I think they're accurately reading the tea leaves. I've got this one analyst. His name is Carl Miller. He's been sending me some of these warnings. And I would just note he had warned about what was going to take place with Yemen back on the 1st of July. Okay, I've got the text messages, and he was saying, "Keep your eye on Yemen. This thing's going to get ugly." And sure enough, it got ugly. He's indicated that we're going to see something similar take place in Jordan. And so pay attention. Jordan, you could actually wind up in a situation where King Abdullah would be forced out. The potential collapse of Saudi Arabia, also a possibility. So there's some real disruptions on the horizon.

#Pascal

If that happens, if King Abdullah is forced out, and if Saudi somehow—there's a political lapse inside—I mean, what this will lead to is Israel actually moving into both of those.

#Larry C. Johnson

Israel will try. Yeah, you're right. Israel will try, but the odds that this will provoke a broader war in the Middle East are very, very high.

#Pascal

I mean, there are people—Brian Berletic—but also I've had a couple of people on my channel, Neil Bonner, and a couple of people who say, like, look, yes, this might look like utter foolishness and the decline of empire. But actually, if you look at the strategic planning papers that have been put out for years, these are all scenarios that have been contemplated and are part and parcel of an elaborate war of attrition against the Eurasian continent, actually, in order to keep splitting everything, right? Just keep the chaos going, keep the chaos rolling. And the United States has ways of mitigating the worst. The Europeans don't, and of course all of the regional powers don't. But it will, over the long term, lead to the collapse—or at least that's the imagination of the strategists—of Iran and eventually of Russia. Is there anything, to your mind, to this type of interpretation of the chaos that is being sought at the moment, which seems so self-defeating?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, I agree with Brian that these kinds of policy papers have been written, and let's call it, the thinking behind it is there. But I think inherent in them are some assumptions about the U.S., the strength of the U.S. economy, the strength of the U.S. military, that are dead-ass wrong. And that's where the United States is running up against the limitations of its own power, where it thought it was, you know, capable, unstoppable. And then it turns out, hey, we've got—like right now, with the debt-to-GDP ratio—it's just off the charts, and it's going to get worse.

And the ability of the United States to mitigate that and maintain a solid economy—again, we just saw that despite \$533 million, couldn't produce one damn viable artillery shell. A half a billion dollars, and it failed at that. You've got a Department of Defense that's spending upwards of a billion dollars on a drone, right? I mean, just crazy stuff. Or, excuse me, \$250 million for one drone called the Triton. \$250 million? You got four of them for a billion? And one of them, the Iranians have already shot down? I mean, this is unsustainable military production. And then to top it off, you need a lot of rare earth minerals that come only out of China. And the Chinese are saying, no, we don't think so.

#Pascal

It seems like a strategic dead end like we haven't seen in history in a long time. I mean, this doesn't even cohere to the problems that the Soviet Union was in, because it tried to rectify it. That was the whole point behind Gorbachev's election in 1985, right? As in, you know, him being put into power is like, go and reform the thing. He reformed it out of existence, but that was an accident down the road. The U.S. doesn't seem to be even in repair mode yet, right? Or do you see anything, any sign on the horizon? And two years ago, we could have argued that Donald Trump is kind of the repair guy on the horizon that is supposed, or might come in, to fix it. But turns out, oh no, he just became another wheel in the system, right?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, no, the U.S. is in denial. We've convinced ourselves that we're still unbeatable, and nobody can touch us, and we're the best, we're the strongest, we're the biggest. And it's simply not true. But, you know, reality has a way of intruding. And that's why I say, you know, these reports that we're seeing today about the impending U.S. military action—and I suspect it's going to be against the Houthis, but it could also be against Iran. And if it's against the Houthis, the Iranians may say, "Okay, we're going to go after those U.S. military bases and destroy them."

#Pascal

How many of them are there? Because now, like last week, The Washington Post, I think, published these pictures that were declassified. And it seems the damage to the ones immediately surrounding in the Gulf states was devastating. How many of these bases are still working and can be used by the U.S.?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, the ones that are working are probably there in Jordan. And again, they're vulnerable, and in Israel and Cyprus. I don't think there are any left functioning in any kind of condition in any of the Gulf states, whether it's Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or UAE. They've all been effectively destroyed, disabled. Any that are still up and operating, they're extremely vulnerable, and Iran can reach out and touch them quite easily.

#Pascal

One more question. Where is CENTCOM actually located? How come the Iranians haven't struck at one of the actual command centers yet?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, CENTCOM, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. A long ways away.

#Pascal

Okay, okay. So there's nothing—the planning and so on doesn't happen in the region, or is it like in Germany?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, what it used to be, Al Udeid Air Force Base used to be sort of the forward headquarters for Central Command's air operations. They called it AFCENT. But just before the start of the attacks on the 28th of February, the Pentagon relocated it to its original headquarters, Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. So it's back in the United States as well. But that AFCENT base, what was called the CAOC, the Combined Air Operations Center, that was—boy, that had been active for over 20 years and played a major role in deconflicting, you know, air operations with Russia in Syria, as an example. But it was all run from Al Udeid in Qatar, no longer.

#Pascal

So in a sense, Iran already achieved quite a part of its goal of, like, pushing the United States back. Even before the war started, stuff had to be relocated back.

#Larry C. Johnson

Right, right. And I think even the Iranians were surprised that they were as effective at this. But the two major headquarters were Bahrain for the Fifth Fleet and Al Udeid for the Air Force. And then both of those have been decimated and are no longer operating or used as they were previously.

#Pascal

And the best answer the U.S. has at the moment, at least according to Donald Trump, is to try to build a Golden Dome. The dome idea has collapsed spectacularly in front of our eyes because the stuff just doesn't work.

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, or you don't have the key rare earth minerals that China controls, whether it's tungsten or—I forget. There are at least five major categories of rare earth minerals, some that are used to produce magnets that are essential for the guidance systems. The U.S. does have the raw materials, but we haven't put the processing to produce those. That's what China does, and China controls that.

#Pascal

The longer we talk about this, the bleaker the picture seems to look to me for the United States. Yet there seems to be no appreciation for the weak hand that it has. So either our analysis must lack an important component, or the other side is just playing blind.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah. No, I think they're plain blind. There have been a few that have come out and tried to warn about the shortages and the problems, and they keep getting shouted down. You know, look, I first wrote about this on April 3rd, the shortage of the PAC-3 missiles. I didn't have access to classified information. Hell, I could just add and subtract. And you could look it up in public records, how many PAC-3 missiles the U.S. started producing from 2015 on. And by the end of 2025, the maximum number was 4,420. And then you just start doing the subtraction. How many were sold to foreign allies or given to the South Koreans, the Japanese, the Saudis, the Qataris?

Well, take 1,500 off that. So you go from 4,400 to 1,500. Now you're down to about 2,900. Then how many did we use in Ukraine? Well, take another 1,000 off that. Okay, now you're down to 1,900. How many did they use in the 12-day war? About 800? So all of a sudden, now you're down to 1,000. How many did they use in the first 45 days of the war with Iran? And now you see, now you're into the hundreds, and perhaps even less than that, which is now why, when you're seeing in Kiev, there's no air defense. There are no PAC-3 missiles to fire because they don't exist anymore.

#Pascal

That just leaves us with this point that the other side now basically has to come to terms with how to end these things, right? The problem is, of course, you cannot finish everything. You cannot keep the Russians, too. They cannot keep the Ukrainians from sending all of these drones, or cannot keep NATO from sending all of these drones into Ukraine. And Iran tomorrow, if the United States decide

to bomb Tehran again, they can do it. It is possible. So you're left in this quagmire that neither side can win, like can have a total victory, but neither side will have a total defeat either. So we are probably locked in for quite a bit of fighting for the years to come. Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

I would say the Iranians are better positioned to inflict harm on the United States, as opposed to the opposite. If this was eight years ago, when Iran didn't have the full backing of Russia and China, yeah, they were much more vulnerable economically then than they are now.

#Pascal

Although, like, structurally speaking, we are at the point where Tehran and Moscow must expect to get something blown up any day. Washington, I mean, that's still unthinkable, right? That something blows up and suddenly, you know, the Washington Monument is no more. We are far away from that, right? So structurally speaking, the U.S. is still top dog.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, well, the U.S. has not yet suffered physical damage to its continental United States. We've been protected by oceans and distance. One of these days, that's going to end, and that'll be a wake-up call for America.

#Pascal

Yeah, if the neocons are crazy enough to start a third theater with China, then they might be closer than we think. But let's pray that even they are not that dumb. Although, yeah, it's a far shot. Larry, thank you so much for all of your time. People want to follow you and listen to more of what you have to say about Russia and so on. Where should they go?

#Larry C. Johnson

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#Pascal

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They can support with either Patreon, Buy Me a Coffee, PayPal. I have a Substack too. It's Larry C. Johnson. The Substack people can... Again, if you just want to read, I don't charge for that. If you want to comment on Substack, you need to pay a small fee. That helps sort out all the trolls and the bots.

#Pascal

No, it really does. Everybody, I too, I'm buying a coffee for Larry once a month. Please go and buy him a coffee as well. Go to Sonar21 and read about his analysis there, and we'll certainly have him back soon. Larry Johnson, thank you so much for your time today.

#Larry C. Johnson

Thanks, Pascal. Always good to be with you, my friend.