

Economic Collapse Will End the U.S. Empire

Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. Colonel Wilkerson discusses how the pending economic collapse in the US will end its empire. Washington know what is happening and is making preparations. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@GDiesen1> Support the research: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: <https://buyameacoffee.com/gdieseng> Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We're here today with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of State, to discuss what's going on with the peace negotiations—exactly what Europe's aim is, and how it perceives what peace would actually look like. Thank you, as always, for taking the time, especially during the holidays.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Thanks for having me on. My holidays don't start until noon tomorrow.

#Glenn

Well, I see there have been references now to the U.S.–Russia meeting in Miami. That's coming from the American side, who seem to be expressing great optimism. They're not claiming we're close to a deal, but that significant progress is being made. I get a lot of conflicting messages, because my impression was that the U.S. was starting to lean again toward the European and Ukrainian position—which would mean there's been no progress with the Russians. But these days, with all the focus on narrative control, you never really know what's actually happening in those secret talks. Do you share this optimism from your colleagues in Washington?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't know what to make of it, because the bigger tapestry is developing so fast now that I've even been stunned by its velocity. And what I mean by that is, you know, I've talked about the massive, inexorable shift of power from the West to the East. I had no idea that in fiscal terms alone—and perhaps Trump is hastening this in other physical terms, like taking other people's oil

tankers—but in fiscal terms, it's coming to a crescendo of debt, if you will, that is staggering. Scott Besant, the Secretary of the Treasury right now—and he can't not know this—is looking at having to borrow three trillion dollars in the very immediate future, or we default.

Now, think about that for a minute—three trillion dollars, when most of the world, even our Japanese allies, because they're having so many fiscal difficulties right now, aren't going to buy those notes. There's only one country in the world, bar none, that can even begin to help us with our debt—and you know who that is. So we're in a really significant, empire-ending pickle right now, and it's come much more swiftly than I thought it would. I kind of thought it would sneak up on us over the next three to five years. It's coming in a crescendo of debt that Besant is going to have to deal with—and he, I suspect, knows it. He's not stupid.

And I'm just wondering how much of this is getting through to Trump, because these moves we've been making are all indicative of our knowing—but not knowing how to get out. In other words, I think the administration, from Vance to Besant, from Nome to whomever, is somewhat aware, if not deeply aware, of the crisis we're headed into. But they don't know what to do about it. And so they're floundering around mostly, which seems to be pretty characteristic of this administration. But these other things—like Ukraine, Venezuela—while indicative of the crisis, very much so, show that we need that oil desperately in order for Besant to have any chance of getting some kind of relief in terms of the immediate crisis of debt facing us. And that's the reason we're really there.

I knew that was a big part of the reason, but I couldn't fathom just how big a part of it it was until I started looking at the refining process—what we can do, what others can do, how the global oil markets are operating right now, how so many sales are now being denominated in renminbi, rupees, rubles, even the South American—South African—I forget their currency right now. And how much that means for what was keeping the empire relatively stable in a fiscal sense. That was the global oil sales being denominated, by force majeure if nothing else, in the dollar. That's not happening anymore. That tanker we confiscated—the one we seized and took into our custody—that tanker was going to a place where that oil was going to be turned into other people's currencies, not dollars. As much an act of piracy as it was, it was also an act of desperation.

So, all to come back to earth, if you will—but the earth is what I just described, I'm afraid. We're going to start making deals you won't believe, because we've got to. And to a certain extent, we've got to make sure that the key leaders in Europe understand what's happening too. Because if they don't, they're going to be an anchor on our doing what we need to do, and they're going to go down with us, big time, because they're not doing that well economically either. So this could be a tsunami that takes out the Western Hemisphere virtually—minus those in the South who've got their act together now. And when I say that, I mean everyone from Venezuela and Colombia down through Brazil and on to Argentina and Chile, to lesser degrees.

In an interesting way, it's the only part of the Western Hemisphere that looks healthy right now, in some respects—certainly Brazil, and certainly some of the other countries in the northern part of

South America. So, all that to say, I have no idea what's going to happen, but I'll guarantee it's going to surprise the world, because we are going to cut ourselves away from the Ukraine war as fast as we possibly can. And we're going to pull back from some of the things we've done to punish Russia. Because not only do we understand that, in order to get Xi Jinping to do what he must do to save the American empire—I don't mean save it as an empire, I mean save it as an intact entity that doesn't fall apart and begin to disintegrate.

And he doesn't want that. He doesn't want that either. So, in order to get him to do that, we've got to be a lot more accommodating—particularly with Russia, and with India to a certain extent, and with China. A lot more accommodating. He's not going to sit down and write out a list saying, "This is what you've got to do," because he knows Donald wouldn't understand a thing on the list, probably. He does understand, I think, that there are some people in the administration who are going to understand what they have to do, and the speed and alacrity with which they have to do it.

And so I look for one of two eventualities. We're going to go smashing our way through this, trying to, and get roundly defeated on a number of fronts, have to back up, and then collapse—really collapse, physically and otherwise. Or we're going to read—and I think this is what we're doing right now, especially the Secretary of the Treasury—we're going to read the tea leaves and understand that we have to deal with Xi Jinping on an entirely different basis. And I'm not saying we're going to come hat in hand and beg, but we're going to let him know, through other channels if you will, that we are desperate and we need his help.

And that's going to tone and tint and color all these other things too, I think. It's going to make a deal with Venezuela. All those military forces out there notwithstanding, there's going to be a deal. And the deal is going to be good for Maduro, good for Venezuela, and good for the United States. And Trump can paint it any way he wants to, with whatever paintbrush and whatever oils he wants to paint it with. Or he can be an idiot and go off and rumble and pee in his pants over it. It's going to have to be made, and it's going to have to take place, because otherwise what I described is going to happen to us. And it's going to happen much faster and much more profoundly in that fashion than I ever thought.

#Glenn

So you have this creeping economic collapse coming, or a massive crisis. I think this is becoming quite evident to many. I also made the point before that a lot of the billionaires appear to be cashing out and preparing for what's happening. So, of course, behind all the nice media headlines, something horrible is building up. But I thought this could go two ways in terms of how the U.S. responds. Because on one hand, yes, it could be forced to make some deal with countries like Venezuela. On the other hand, if they really want to shore up their ability to loan money—to lend it against something, something hard, some hard assets—it would make sense as well to, this is not

advocacy of course, but to try to conquer Venezuela. Obviously, I don't think this is going to play out as they would hope. But if one is in such dire straits and needs money from other countries, while teetering on the brink of collapse, wouldn't this be problematic?

I mean, who would lend to a country that might collapse? And also, one that's now seizing money from its adversaries. And this is, of course, not just about the United States. The Europeans are also in very deep trouble. They couldn't come to an agreement to steal the Russian assets; instead, they're lending more money. But they've nonetheless permanently frozen the Russian assets, and they'll demand reparations—which basically means, "Give us money, pay our bills." So my point is, when a country is in this deep trouble and it's showing that it's prepared to freeze or steal the assets of other countries, do you think it's likely that a country like China would come through and try to bail out the United States?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't think they have any choice, really. Now, they could be given a situation—a predicament—and this administration could be the one to give it to them. I'm not trying to say it isn't; it's just so incompetent. They don't want that to happen because it would mess up the entire world trade and economic system for them. And they don't want that either. They don't want to have to pick up the pieces when that happens, and they don't want to deal with the devastation that's going to cause. So they would rather see, to put it in mild terms—the terms international relations scholars of all kinds have been using since the post-Cold War era—that we've got to live in a world composed of, instead of two parties, a lot of parties.

In fact, quite a few parties—countries that more or less have to be treated as equals in the world trade system, the economic system, the fiscal system. We've got to get rid of things like SWIFT and S&P, oil denominated in dollars, and using that tool in one country to fix its fiscal problems year after year as it gets deeper and deeper into debt. It's got to be repaired, but in a very strategic and calculated way. And Xi Jinping, I think, is just the guy to present that proposition to. If you're serious about it, and you're serious about accepting this new world of multipoles—I don't like "poles," maybe "multi-nodes"—will he accept it?

That's a huge question. I think it's in his interest to do so, and he will. But will the other side—and I don't necessarily exclude the Europeans in this, but certainly Washington—be smart enough and willing enough to? They can camouflage it. They don't have to eat crow in front of their domestic audiences in any significant way. You camouflage it much the way we camouflaged Bretton Woods at the end of World War II and afterward, when we essentially took over the world financial system and dictated terms to everybody. Now, we weren't a tyrant about it—not in the beginning, at least—and so the world kind of accepted it.

A lot of them didn't have much of a choice. They were lying prostrate—even our allies were lying prostrate in ruins after World War II. We're sort of at that point again now, except no one's lying

prostrate yet, but could be very soon. The problem is that the world will be infected by that situation, and Xi Jinping does not want to be infected by it. I don't think Putin does either. Another point—listening to Putin's four-hour interview—I think Putin understands this, too. He and Xi Jinping have probably talked about it and discussed the various scenarios.

The two stark options are: let the sons of bitches rot in their own piss, or no, we can't—because some of that stink will get on us. We need to help this new transition from power in the West to power in the East—or better put, maybe power shared across the globe. We need to help it. After all, what's the BRI all about? It's touted that way, anyway. The strategies I saw at the Central Party School reflected this. Granted, those people aren't necessarily the hubristic Chinese we try to portray as out there trying to take over the world. They're people who actually think in a very Confucian sort of way about the future—years out—and plan for that future, everything from industrial planning to military planning. So they have the capacity, and they certainly have the coin right now, to do this.

Why not do it? You're going to come out, at the end of the day, triumphant. You're going to replace America as the power to be reckoned with in the world. But you have no desire to be that kind of power that ultimately uses physical might and military force to dominate and dictate to the rest of the world. You're going to do a little of that, but you'll do it in the interest of the Chinese people, in the interest of your friends and allies, and ultimately in the interest of the globe—because the globe is what's going to keep you profitable. And that's the way they're looking at it. That's the way the Chinese look at it. Take all the propaganda that Israel, the United States, and Europe put out, and throw it in the trash can.

That's the way they look at it. I'm not saying it couldn't become tainted in there—history shows that happens from time to time, when they get a little too big for their britches. But at the moment, they're the only country in the world that can save the West—the only one. And by "the West," I mean primarily the United States of America and the empire we've created. So we need to start accommodating that as best we can, recognizing it, and dealing with it. One of the most heinous acts we committed, which probably did as much as anything to start this process and to be recognized by our "enemies" in the world—especially Russia and China—was what we did to Russia with regard to sanctions, starting with Biden. A crucial mistake. The world looked at that and said, "Man, out of control."

They're out of control. This is insanity. We've got to protect ourselves from this. And so that started a lot of the momentum within the BRICS in particular, but in the Global South in general—thinking about the empire and the system everyone's been living under for, you know, 60 or 70 years—and thinking, well, it's moldering. It's moldering in its grave. We've got to have something to replace it. And they're moving to do just that, in a rough consortium at first. But now I think there's a lot of coordination going on. The coordination is being directed essentially by that genius, in some respects, in Moscow and his counterpart in Beijing, who is, you know, richer in terms of current accounts.

So, the only country in the world with the money to bail us out—to put us back in some kind of physical equilibrium—and the only country in the world to deal with in terms of ending the most dangerous conflict going on right now outside of the Levant: Ukraine. And I'm trying to figure out, right now, this morning from about 4 a.m. on, what this means for the Levant. I'm not sure. But I think it does mean I'm going to have to revise my view that Israel is going to be stupid enough to take us into another war with Iran and try to get Trump to come along. Although, that's coming out of Jerusalem right now—that message is coming out of Jerusalem.

Netanyahu just doesn't know exactly how to phrase his request to Trump, because he wants Trump to finish Iran off while he handles Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank, and Syria. That's what's coming out of the buildings, if you will, in Washington. That's nonsense, because this is a much bigger situation I'm describing—a much more serious situation for both Europe and the United States. Something's got to be figured out: if we're dealing with Ukraine, and we're dealing with it wisely and sanely, and the Europeans are forced into doing that too, then how are we going to deal with Southwest Asia? How are we going to deal with Iran? How are we going to deal with the Arabs? How are we going to deal with a country like Saudi Arabia that's rapidly being replaced?

And I think MBS knows this, and I think his 20-year plan is designed to deal with it as much as possible. They're rapidly running out of their black gold and their capacity to control the oil markets the way they have in the past. That's going to become the province of probably a global consortium as we move forward. Otherwise, we're not going to make it on the most important energy source in the world—and it will be for some time to come. So I'm just going on and on here, kind of stream of consciousness. But I realize—helped, I think, by John Mearsheimer and some of his lectures, which I've been watching assiduously of late—we're at a moment of peril unparalleled in this century so far, and for America, unparalleled since 1914 or 1915. And we've got some really hard decisions to make, just as we did then.

#Glenn

Well, if a pending economic crisis is pushing the United States to transition away from empire and back to a republic, then I think that will be the foundation of a great-power partnership with Beijing and Moscow. I think they would welcome this, and they would see the possibility of the U.S. not being an inherent adversary, but rather a U.S. that's much more capable of working with others—one with more modest objectives in the international system. So I agree with you.

I think that Beijing and Moscow would like to see the gradual decline of the U.S. empire into a stable republic. They've seen the debt getting slowly out of hand, and I think they were hoping for a gradual decline and then a chance to find a new role. A collapse of the United States—a massive crack—would be extremely disruptive, and it wouldn't give the Chinese or the Russians much time to adjust either. So none of that, I think, would be good for the international system. Also, when you have these rapid shifts in international power, it's usually difficult for the system to reform. But I...

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I'll interrupt just for a second. I've spent probably 16 or 17 hours over the last three days listening to all these different people who I think are worth listening to, including a couple of your interviews. And what I see is people—I'm guilty too, totally guilty—kind of dealing in the weeds right now, when these huge changes are getting ready to envelop us. I mean, the fiscal crisis alone in this country, even if it's handled well—and I don't, for a moment, think it will be by this group—but even if Xi Jinping tacitly agrees and Scott Besson gets what he wants, I wouldn't be surprised to see him go on bended knee to Beijing and beg.

That's the nature of his challenge. We're messing around with so many little things, especially Trump's proclivity, that we could put all manner of obstacles in the way of a smooth transition, if you will. And that really troubles me. Not the least of those obstacles could be someone who, as I've pointed out before, gets really angry and irritated at the whole process and starts threatening with nuclear weapons. That could be an outcome of this. And there are people in this administration, and people behind it in the shadows, who have those kinds of inclinations. You listen to someone like Lindsey Graham, and you hear the foremost voice in that regard.

Or you listen to Marco Rubio, a member of the administration, and you hear a strident voice in that regard. I don't, for a moment, put it past them to think it's better to go out in a mushroom cloud—or a series of them—than to go out being saved by a handout from Xi Jinping, which is probably how they'd put it. So, I'm not saying it's a safe time. I'm not saying it's a positive time. I'm saying there are all kinds of obstacles that could get in the way. But I am saying that I think the Secretary of the Treasury, who is number one right now—and I go back to the housing crisis, when even my president at that time was looking at the Secretary of the Treasury and saying, "Help me. Save me."

That was a minor example of what was to come. This is big—really big. This is earth-shaking. How are you going to deal with three trillion dollars of debt instantly in the new year? How are you going to do that? There's only one way. There's only one guy in the world with pockets that deep. But will we do it right? That's a huge question—a huge question. We could really make a mess of it. And in making a mess of it, we'll make a mess of it for others, too. And they know that. That's probably the greatest pressure on them—to try to keep us sane as we do this.

#Glenn

Well, I've spoken to Ambassador Jack Matlock, and he warns about the lessons from a fake history. For example, by claiming that the Cold War was won, he said this created a very dangerous military culture in the U.S.—the assumption that we didn't end the Cold War through compromise, but that we stared down the Russians and they just, you know, collapsed. He also made the point that it's comparable to the Cuban Missile Crisis, because we leave out all the diplomacy and compromises and turn it into, you know, like some Western—stand toe-to-toe, and the other guy blinked first, so we won.

So I guess my point is that this kind of militaristic view of history could maybe incentivize some grand standoff in the end—some attempt to regain former glory. I don't know, I just see it happening. I'm watching... Venezuela is starting to look like an actual attack soon. We're watching Iran—it looks like they might go after Iran. And I'm not sure if you saw this prank call where someone fooled Amanda Sloat, who was one of Biden's top advisors. She was sitting there in this—well, we'll call it an interview—saying that the Minsk Agreement wasn't really a mistake, that it gave many years for Western intelligence agencies to, not embroil, that's not the right word, but to embed themselves properly within Ukraine.

It could pump the country full of weapons and train a big army. And also now, you know, she more or less recommended—she and another Biden advisor—that this was the time to find a peace agreement that could make Russia believe they'd won, and then, of course, begin to change realities on the ground. So it just looks like there's a powerful force within Washington that thinks, you know, if we just stand up to our opponents, we can win back former glory. But the problem is the economics of it, because there are no real capabilities or intentions—it's just that the foundation seems to be melting away.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I'm told there was someone—I want to think it was Susie Wiles, but I don't know, especially after that interview she did. But there was someone in the administration who actually presented the little quip that we came up with—Thousand Hour Media Network and the other guys—to Trump. And it was that the United States is going to sell weapons it doesn't have to the Europeans for money they don't have, to the Ukrainians for soldiers they don't have. That's where we are in the reality of Ukraine. And I think the White House understands that now. I think that's one of the incentives behind Trump wanting a deal. The much larger incentive is what I described earlier. I think Glenn Diesen has made sure he sees that he's presiding over the empire at a very, very dangerous time.

And that... some of the things you might have to do are going to go against Trump's character—if there's any character there at all. But I think it's going to be persuasive. I hope it will be persuasive. If it's not, you're right—we're going to have a situation of such chaos that I'd think the positive side of that chaos would be Trump being impeached successfully, thrown out, and replaced by a president who's a much more pragmatic man, in my view. And having to deal with this, and having to deal with it in a very pragmatic way. And Congress is going to come along like a sheepdog, because the situation is going to be quite serious. That's one eventuality.

Another one, of course, is, like I said, we could make such a hogwash mess of it that we wind up actually having a big war, thinking that big war will somehow refresh us and get us out. It won't do anything but finish us off a lot more quickly than we would have otherwise, and it'll do a lot of damage to the world. And if it's new weapons we resort to in the end—which it well could be—that's lots of damage to the rest of the world. I think both Putin and Xi Jinping are aware of that, and they

realize it. So they'll have that out there as a red-letter-day event: don't go there. Do everything you can to possibly prevent that. At the same time, they're not going to sacrifice their position in the world to save us if we won't cooperate. That sounds ridiculous, but it isn't.

It's a serious situation we're confronting today. I go back about twenty years, when we had a really good discussion—was it twenty years? I guess it was—on the Policy Planning Staff at State. We floated an idea, a straw man if you will, about having a consortium in the world. We realized—I think the smarter people in Policy Planning did—that it's about the only smart place in the U.S. government when it comes to looking at the future, strategic thinking, and so forth. Which is why it's so often downplayed by U.S. presidents. Condi—we wrote the first National Security Strategy in 2000. We wrote it and sent it over to her. She didn't like it. So Richard Haass said, "Okay, fine." What did she wind up doing eventually? Contracting it out to a think tank.

So what we were talking about was, what if there were a consortium—call it a consortium for the world—and the consortium heads were China, Beijing, Washington, Moscow, and Tokyo. Oh, don't you want to throw Brazil in there? Maybe Delhi? Well, let's just start with this and see what we get. We were drawing up a kind of straw man of what that consortium would look like. How would you handle it politically? How would you sell it to the world? You know, it sounds like a global government or something like that.

But that's really what we're talking about when we talk about peer powers—three or four, maybe five—in a world of near-peer powers at the next level. And there might be as many as twenty of those. Think about the G20, the G8, and all those old formulations. And then the rest of the world. How do you make that not a trickle-down economic structure, but one that shares wealth in a reasonably fair and equitable way? It's doable, we thought. But no one wanted to talk about it. Certainly no one in George W. Bush's White House wanted to talk about it. And my own boss, Colin Powell, didn't want to talk about it.

But that's where we're headed, if we're smart. We're headed toward running the world, if you will—not from the national level, like David Rothkopf's book **Running the World**, about the National Security Council—not from Washington's National Security Council, but from the combined strength and money of the major powers in the world, and with a fair and equitable foundation underneath, if you will. Better by far than what we presently have: more distribution of wealth, more equitable distribution of wealth. It'll never be perfect, certainly. It won't even be close to perfect. There'll never be justice in the world. There never has been.

But you've got to figure out some way to accommodate these power shifts in a way that doesn't destroy one side and elevate the other in the old traditional fashion, but balances it across a lot of countries, a lot of people, and tackles things like the climate crisis and nuclear weapons. I thought at the time, and I told my boss, you need to look at this. This is not bad thinking. And, you know, he wouldn't. He told Richard Haass, "How would you operationalize this?" Typical military guy, you know—"How would you operationalize this?" Well, the first thing you'd have to do is have real

diplomacy. You'd have to go to the White House and talk to that guy and tell him, "Ever thought about becoming a diplomat yourself?" I mean, you know, it sounds simple. It sounds pie in the sky—too simple. But something like that is probably going to have to be developed.

#Glenn

Well, I've already seen some reports. Sorry?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You re-energize or get rid of the UN. You create a new entity that's actually serious because you've energized it with money and troops. That's what the UN Charter said to do—remember, the Charter still has that section. It says you will provide, you being the Permanent Five and any other countries that want to contribute, a standing military force for the UN Secretary-General that will go out and do things like peacekeeping and peace enforcement. We have never, never made that paragraph operational. You'd have to do that with some kind of new organization. I'd say replace the whole damn kit and caboodle, and move the headquarters of that kit and caboodle someplace else—like Delhi or Shanghai or wherever. Get it out of New York. Make a dramatic change in your international mechanism and make it more effective. It'll never be totally effective, but make it more effective.

#Glenn

Yeah, what's crazy, though, is that these kinds of massive changes you're talking about usually only happen after a great war. There are some exceptions, of course—the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, when the international system changed fundamentally. But if we do see a massive... well, the collapse of the American Empire—yeah, that would create one of those crises. Anyway, what I was going to say before is that there have been reports from the Trump administration that some people there are now favoring replacing the G7 with what they call the Core Five, or the C5, which would be the U.S., China, Russia, India, and Japan.

Again, as for grand strategy, I think it's in the right direction, because the key institutions have to reflect the existing distribution of power. But no European countries are on that list, of course, besides Russia. It does beg the question, though—what do you see in this new shift? Because obviously, economic hardship will now force changes upon the United States, and we've already seen the new national security strategy begin to pivot away from the past. There are no harsh words about Russia; meanwhile, there are almost plans for coups in Europe—or at least efforts to cultivate opposition. So things are changing. What do you see as the role of Europe in this new world that the U.S. has to adjust to?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, that five is already flawed—and it's flawed because Donald Trump doesn't like Lula da Silva in Brazil. Brazil ought to be in there. By the way, in our little group, when we started this off in the consortium, Brazil was there. And that was... two decades in Africa. I think you have to include them—population-wise, resource-wise, and because of the potential for enormous damage to the climate if it's not managed right—rainforests and all that. I was also trying to think of the other country we had in there. We had another one at the time—oh, that was Indonesia, simply because of what we were doing then. Anyway, I think it needs to be a little bit bigger, and it needs to include countries that are struggling to some extent, not just the chieftains. I'd say the same thing about this.

#Glenn

I was just going to say Indonesia. I think that's one of the most underestimated countries in terms of where it's heading. It's going to be a massive player in the future, and it doesn't really show up on the radar—at least here in Europe—which is kind of strange, because it's of immense importance, especially as a fellow maritime power.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Of all people for me to quote—and I can't remember the exact words—but one of our ambassadors, when I was a lieutenant colonel and executive assistant to one of the Navy admirals at the U.S. Pacific Command, was in Jakarta at that time. And he made a statement just like the one you just made. This was 1985. He said we needed to pay attention to Indonesia, to the potential there, and so forth. Anyway, that's a typical ambassador thing to say, you'd think. But no—we even thought in J-5, the strategic and policy part of Pacific Command, that he was right. His name was Al B. Wolfowitz. And of the 35 ambassadors in the Pacific theater that we sort of managed—and that's the way the United States looked at it—we managed them; they didn't manage us.

He was probably one of the better ambassadors—and we had some good ones. We had a lot of good ambassadors during those years. But, got off subject there. Basically, you need a better representation of the planet, one that doesn't reflect post-World War II realities, because they're gone. As the Europeans, in spades, are demonstrating to us—not in a positive way, in a negative way—they don't understand. They don't understand what the war meant. They don't understand what the war delivered to them. They don't understand the years of peace and joy and great social programs and such that it delivered to them. It's over. It's done. And you need some replacement. And you need to step into that replacement with as much candor, honesty, straightforwardness, and competence as you can muster.

Because if you don't, you're not going to make it work right. And you're going to fall into what always happens when that occurs—internecine wars bubbling up, ultimately. I mean, that's still a prospect. It's still a prospect. No matter how much we try to salvage what remains of the empire—

and China participates in that with Russia alongside, and India as a partner, and the rest—no matter how much we do that is positive, smart, strategic, capable, it could still fall apart in a heartbeat. And we wind up with, what, 75 years of internecine warfare across the face of the planet that might even be nuclear in some places. All at the same time that we reach the end of the 21st century and 99% of the world says, “Hey, those guys were right about climate change.”

#Glenn

What’s interesting, though, is when you talk to different academics or officials from Beijing—or from China in general—they make the point that, in the past, Europe had such a high standing in their foreign ambitions, in terms of who they wanted to partner with and work with. But these days, the Europeans have just... well, they’ve walked away from that completely. They don’t see as much value in it as they did before. And the United States and Russia also share this idea that they both want to pivot away from Europe now. So it does seem that this continent is going to go through a lot of hardship. I don’t think that’s really dawned on these leaders. Of course, we’re not blessed with the best of leaders here. But I want to just...

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It’d be really—I just think it’d be impossible to pivot away from... what are we looking at now? Even if we don’t count Ukraine or some of the other countries we seem to want to count now, what are we looking at? About 400 million people who had a GDP last year of somewhere around the equivalent of ours—\$22, \$23 trillion. That’s falling apart now, of course. But still, we can’t deny that vast array of, heretofore, very troublesome groups. I mean, the whole history of Europe is a history of war.

#Glenn

I think we’re going back to that—the time of a cohesive Europe as one entity. I think that was an unusual part of history, and it’s also coming to an end. You already see the internal fragmentation of Europe. So again, to what extent do you want to keep it united at the expense of national interests, and the dependence on the “Russian boogeyman” in order to keep the whole thing together? I think it will begin to split, especially as economic hardship sets in. But as a last question—how do you see this? Because you mentioned the economic crisis that’s about to sweep the U.S. and maybe wash away the empire. How do you see this playing out? Is this in the near future, do you think, that this \$3 trillion will begin to really create some massive problems?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think it’s much closer than I thought it was, Glenn—much closer. I wasn’t even sure. I’m 81 in January, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to—or that I was going to—live to see the real, black-and-white demise of the American empire. I think I might. I think I might. And it’s going to start, and the

unraveling will become apparent to every citizen from west to east, north to south, because of the fiscal crisis. It's almost to the point where you have to say everything's going to come crashing down—from the housing market to the stock market, which is so inflated it's just pitiful right now—to interest rates climbing through the sky, to a barrel of oil quadrupling in price in terms of what you can pay for it and do with it.

We're going to have to change a lot about the way we live in this country. We've been very hedonistic, very—uh—sloppy, selfish, all across the country. I can't pick a single state and tell you that the majority of people there don't fit that description. Some are worse than others, of course, and some are consequently better, but none of them are where they should be—or even reasonably close to where they should be. So Americans are going to have to hitch up their pants and take a real beating. And they're not used to that. They haven't done that in ages—generations. They just haven't. But they're going to have to. You know, they talk about the oil crisis in the '70s, when you had to stop and get in line for gas. Oh, that was terrible.

Those damn Arabs and all that—they did that to us. Or you talk about the hostages in Iran for 444 days. Those were tempests in a teapot. They're going to have something equivalent to the Civil War to live through. Only, that's not even a good metaphor or example, because west of the Mississippi the war almost didn't touch. And even east of the Mississippi, it didn't touch a lot. It hit specific areas really dramatically—casualties were high, and it put brother against sister and so forth. But that's the only thing I could compare, even remotely, in our history as a nation with what's coming. I certainly wouldn't compare World War II or World War I—they were insignificant to America in the sense of what is coming now. So, you know, that's going to be a big test of the American people.

#Glenn

Well, when Obama took over, when you were in the White House, I think the debt was about \$9 trillion. And now, of course, it's \$38—soon to go to \$39. The way the can has been kicked down the road, it's going to be a very difficult time ahead. I think most of the world is exposed in a very big way—or really, all of the world. It's going to be very troubling. And usually, this kind of crisis, you know, I'd like to think it would help build some character, restore the ability to prioritize, begin again with strategic thinking—all that. But in reality, I do fear that it's going to be war, that at least a few wars will start because of this.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

And the sad thing, Glenn, about what you say is, if I check my history closely, I'd say, OK, let's transport some of that history into the modern age—into the present day. Who's going to get that idea first? The Pentagon. Because they're going to see the handwriting on the wall: "I got a trillion dollars this year, I'm going to get 200 billion next year. Ooh, what can I do to stave that off?"

#Glenn

It all reminds me of something Senator Rand Paul said once. He said, you know, it's not about keeping the empire going. It's either we roll back the empire in a controlled way, or we face an uncontrolled collapse. And I think that was very spot on, because people always think the alternative to scaling back the empire is somehow to keep it. But no, I think, yeah, this is going to be an awful mess. But yeah—on that very happy note, I wish you a Merry Christmas, and I hope you have a great holiday. It is a shame, though. I do think it's time to have some readjustments in the international system. We have to reflect the new realities, but the big shocks—and, of course, the cost it will have on the population—are going to be quite an awful price to pay.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's the shame of any transition like this—the little people on the street pay the price.

#Glenn

It's like, in the U.S., they saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as a positive development. But if you look at the human cost—what happened there in the 1990s—it was truly, yeah, truly awful. Yeah.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Which is what fired Putin up. I'm convinced of that. He said to himself, if I get into a position of power, this is not going to happen. It's going to get better and better and better. And from all my friends in Russia, and Americans who've lived in Russia or go there a lot, that is exactly what he's done—with imperfections and problems and warts here and warts there. But he has given the Russian people something they certainly didn't have at the transition point. They were in a disaster at that time. And I know even then, we were helping with that disaster. I'm so happy to see Larry Summers finally getting his comeuppance, because he was a big participant in that—not just the Epstein files, but he was a big participant, along with Anatoly Chubais and others, in the fire sales in Moscow from which their companies made enormous fees.

#Glenn

Well, as I said before, thank you very much for taking the time. And yeah, have a great Christmas—you and your family.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Thank you. You too. Take care.