

Confronting Europe, Pivot to East & Nuclear War

Professor Sergey Karaganov is an Honorary Chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense and has been an advisor of Russia's political elites for decades. Prof. Karaganov wrote speeches for Brezhnev and advised Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> 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 to the program. Today we are joined by Professor Sergey Karaganov, honorary chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy. Thank you for coming on. You've, of course, been an advisor to Russia's political elites for decades — you wrote speeches for Brezhnev and advised Gorbachev.

#Sergey Karaganov

Pieces of speeches. Pieces of them.

#Glenn

You also advised different presidents — from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, and of course President Putin as well. One could add that you've had a lot of influence in recent years in advancing the ideas behind the Greater Eurasian Partnership. You've also been an advocate for lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, something that has, well, influenced policy changes. So, as always, thank you very much for coming back on the program.

#Sergey Karaganov

It's my pleasure — all the more because I'm a fan of yours and always read your articles.

#Glenn

Thank you. Well, I saw a recent interview you did with the German media, and I had a few additional questions I wanted to ask. I thought a good place to start might be how you assess

Russia's security these days — where do you see the main threats coming from to the Russian Federation?

#Sergey Karaganov

Well, the main threats at this juncture are not purely external. The main threat for Russia, per se, is making wrong decisions within the country, because we need to invest much more in our eastern lands. As you know, I'm also one of the chief proponents of the idea of the cyberization of Russia, which will start in several years, just as the first turn to the East started 17 years ago. But that would be a lost opportunity. As for immediate threats — waiting too long and being unable to take decisive steps — that is seriously threatening the mad Europeans with nuclear migration. Not total, of course. The debate is ongoing. And, as you know, unfortunately, I used to be a specialist in nuclear strategy, deterrence, and nuclear history.

In the last several years, I've had to return to my earlier profession. They've been pushing the idea of lowering nuclear thresholds and also the need to strengthen, or bring back, nuclear deterrence — which had largely disappeared, or the threat of nuclear weapons had vanished in many places, especially in Europe. But since the future seemed too far away, people got complacent and tired. Now, the immediate challenge would be to have a peace deal and then a restart of the war. The only way to avoid that is to strengthen our reliance on the nuclear threat. And I'm not talking about deterrence, but about the threat itself, because our European neighbors, unfortunately, have lost their minds. As I say and write, both in open and closed circles, they can be sobered up only by a physical threat.

#Glenn

So, you're referring to the actual use of nuclear weapons?

#Sergey Karaganov

Hopefully not an actual use, but getting very close to that. In principle, if the war continues and Europeans keep waging it — and yes, it is a war, because Europeans are fighting against Russia — then the danger grows. The Americans started to withdraw about a year and a half ago, even before Trump, because they understood there was a risk of nuclear escalation, and that escalation could reach American territory. So they stopped their active support, even during the Biden administration. And the Biden administration never said — and I stress this — that they would even consider using nuclear weapons if Russia used them, or to punish Europeans with nuclear weapons.

So they've been withdrawing. This tendency grew stronger during Trump's time, and they're pulling back even further now, though the situation is still open. If the war continues — sooner or later, and preferably sooner — we'll have to climb the ladder of escalation, all the way to the final point. And if the war resumes, we will use nuclear weapons. There's no question about that. By the way, very few

people have noticed a very significant change in Russian policy: President Putin has said two or three times already that if Europe attacks, or if there's a war against us, there will be no Europe — no one left to talk to in Europe. He said it two or three times, and that was the right step. Unfortunately, these insane people keep going.

#Glenn

Yeah, I recently did an interview with Professor John Mearsheimer because he'd just come back from giving a speech at the EU Parliament, and he was making a similar point — that many Europeans don't seem to understand they've crossed the line between a proxy war and a direct war. He argued that we — well, the Europeans — are now fighting a direct war, and for that reason the escalation is very dangerous and could get out of control. But do you see the threat of an actual nuclear war growing as well? Because, you know, Russia has the "Oreshnik" and other middle steps if it wants to move up this escalation ladder.

#Sergey Karaganov

Well, we're already taking small steps. We've deployed additional tactical, or sub-strategic, nuclear weapons in Belarus. We've started deploying this well-known Russian system, which is hypersonic and equipped with MIRVs, and it could be extremely effective. But at this point, we're moving toward crossing the threshold. Of course, even people like myself hope and pray we won't have to do that, because it would be a moral sin — a lot of innocent people would die. And crossing the nuclear threshold, not only by Russia but by any country, would open up Pandora's box. Now, according to the mythologies I helped create, if nuclear weapons are used, it would almost immediately, or automatically, escalate into a global war.

That is a myth. But again, for moral reasons, I hope that Europeans — European "leaders," quote unquote, because I couldn't really call them leaders — will be sobered up, either by themselves or by their populations. But at this juncture, we see that the population of most European countries is increasingly poisoned by virulent anti-Russian propaganda. I mean, to the extent that Europeans are being brainwashed daily — told that the war will start immediately, inevitably, in five years or four years, whatever. That means that, in principle, they understand very well that we wouldn't start a war. There's no interest on the Russian side in trying to conquer a piece of the junkyard.

We don't need that at all. I mean, we want to distance ourselves from that threat. But most European leaders — though, of course, some are leaving all this behind — are telling their populations that war is almost inevitable, that it will start by the end of the decade, or around 2030. They're preparing their populations for war, and that's dangerous. So that's the main threat for the time being. But the challenge is that we might not use this great opportunity to return to where our strength — moral, economic, military, and political — has been since the 16th century. I mean, moving toward Siberia, which is the land of the future.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, I know you're—yeah. I mean, people assume that Russia's pivot to the East is a pivot to China, but you make the point that it's really a pivot back to Russia — to the heart of Russia. Which would be, first of all, I mean, the first pivot to the chain— to the East.

#Sergey Karaganov

As you know, what I pioneered with some of our mutual colleagues was about turning to Asia — a kind of semi-turn to Siberia. Now we're devising plans to move the spiritual, intellectual, and then economic center of Russia closer to Siberia. Siberia is already one of the world's most sparsely populated areas. I travel there more often now, and it's fantastic. The cities are great, the intellectual life is booming. The problem is that they need more people, and we have to devise a complex strategy for returning to Siberia. We also have to redefine our identity. Russia, spiritually, was born — or was politically influenced — by the South, not by the West.

We got our allegiance back — Christianity, Judaism, Islam from the South, and Buddhism, also a popular religion here from the Southeast. Our political system, while developing at its own pace, has been a prodigal son — or daughter, whatever — of the empire of Chinggis Khan. And now we have to acknowledge that, because it was the greatest empire ever in the world. They robbed Russia, but they didn't destroy it; they left this vertical political system, and they left an unbelievable cultural and religious openness. That, I think, is one of the main traits of the Russian national character and national identity. We are, culturally, religiously, and in terms of race, extremely open.

I think we are the most open country in the world, and that's the source of our great strength. When we went back to Siberia — we started our Siberian journey in the 16th century and gained full speed in the 17th and 18th — it saved Russia. Because Russia probably wouldn't have survived on the Eastern European plain, constantly attacked from the south — the Ottomans and others — and from the west. But when we gained the resources of Siberia, we became stronger. And the Siberians, as we say, represent the best of the Russian character: persistent, strong, culturally open, indigenous, and entrepreneurial. So that's what we mean when we talk about returning home — the notion of the Siberization of Russia.

#Glenn

It's an interesting development that both the United States and Russia now seek to pivot away from Europe. But I wanted to shift a bit back to the security issue, because there are a lot of sanctions. Often we see that with economic coercion, it tends to spill over into Europe — the possibility of escalating into military conflict, for example, with Russian ships, which seem to be attacked as an extension of this energy competition or conflict. Do you see the possibility of all these economic sanctions and economic warfare escalating into a direct military conflict?

#Glenn

Sorry, you're frozen.

#Sergey Karaganov

Again, the pirates on the open sea.

#Glenn

Sorry, just one second. You froze after I asked the question. Is it okay if I cut that part and you start over? The image and voice froze.

#Sergey Karaganov

Yeah, so, I mean, Europeans are back to their age-old habit of massive piracy. And the pirates should be punished. Many people I know are saying that if they continue, we should start to punish them — attack their vessels and their ports. And if they steal our reserves, the best way would be nukes — just one salvo — and then demand the return of the stolen assets, with interest of, say, 200%. They would do that, but we don't want that, because, again, that means the possibility of using nuclear weapons, and that is a sin.

#Glenn

Well, there's a lot of focus in Russia right now on restoring its deterrence, which has been chipped away during this proxy war. Is there a lot of pressure in Moscow these days to respond more forcefully toward the Europeans?

#Sergey Karaganov

Yes.

#Glenn

There's no question.

#Sergey Karaganov

When I started the debate about three years ago — or a bit less — I was in the minority. Now I'm in the absolute majority, the overwhelming majority.

#Glenn

Well, a lot of the crisis we have today seems to come from the decisions made in the 1990s — mainly the failure to develop a common European security architecture. Do you see any hope left? Because now the U.S., in its most recent national security strategy, talks about the end of NATO expansion, and many are doubting the future of NATO itself, as this post–Cold War security architecture appears to be faltering. Do you think there’s any chance of restoring or correcting some of the mistakes from the 1990s — maybe reviving the idea of a common European home — or are those days completely gone?

#Sergey Karaganov

I was one of the authors of the idea of a common European home and an all-European security architecture. I also persuaded President Yeltsin to apply for NATO membership. He didn’t apply formally, but he talked about it with American and European leaders, and the plea was rejected. But when NATO expansion started — I mean, the Rubicon had been crossed. It was finally crossed after the rape of Yugoslavia in 1999. Since then, we’ve been going down this slippery slope. Unfortunately, we waited too long, and that’s why we have this blood-letting war. We should have started earlier and more decisively. As for the return to a European architecture — I’m sorry, but only when, and if, Europeans are able to change their elites. That is the endgame of this war, which they unleashed on us.

Probably something. But Europe is not an interesting partner anymore. Culturally, who has kept the best of European culture? The market, of course. Why not? Selling steel, athletes... uh, the European market — and participating in leading the European economy together with the United States. I mean, they’re doing that very effectively. We do not participate in this process. But, I’m sorry, I do not believe that Europe could become a partner again. Because which Europe? The European Union has degenerated into something very strange. NATO is now crossing criminal lines. Why should we? And by the way, at a certain point, Europe, for many Russians, was a kind of beacon of high culture, decency, and morality. You know what has been happening here — on most of the western part of the Eurasian landmass.

We do not need to poison ourselves with this rot. So, better relations with some European countries — trade, the resumption of some human exchanges that are now forbidden on the Western side. We are not forbidding exchanges or contacts with European countries, friends, or whomever they were. Because, as you know, I’ve had a long history of good relations with many European elites and many scholars — now they’re forbidden. They can’t talk to them, except sometimes over the internet. So, no way. If and when we start to resume something in terms of architecture, it should be a Eurasian one, with possible participation of Americans. But it will be nothing like a common European home. I mean, having a common home with this rot would be a disaster.

#Glenn

In terms of bringing this current conflict in Ukraine to an end, what do you think is necessary for Russia to feel secure in whatever outcome ends it — whether through diplomatic or military means? What do you think the Kremlin is looking for in terms of what's non-negotiable and where it might be flexible?

#Sergey Karaganov

Well, as you know, the ideal solution would have been total demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine. But at this juncture, because of the peaceful interference of President Trump, we're not likely to reach that goal within the next year. Probably there will be a piecemeal solution — an armistice — we'll return some of our Russian territories, but then the war will soon resume, this time with a very strong nuclear potential. Hopefully, of course, it wouldn't actually involve nuclear weapons because of the moral problem. But the ideal solution is that the east and south of Ukraine — what is called Ukraine — would be returned to Russia, though not all of Ukraine, God forbid, because it has been, as you know, a sub-moral, political, and economic problem. It was costly, by the way, even for the Russian Empire, and especially for the Soviet Union.

Now, there is Central and Western Ukraine — we don't need that. It would be too costly and would divert our attention from the right path of development, which is in the east and south. Hopefully, without the use of nukes, we'll arrange some kind of peace deal. But peace can't come until the Europeans decide to get rid of this strange group of people who call themselves the European elites. It's not official — it's the endgame, a change of regimes. Because now most European countries are governed by what I call mad hyenas, and they are absolutely insane. They've lost, I mean, a sense of history, a sense of security, a sense of love for their people, a sense of dignity.

It's better for all Europeans to throw them out, but it will take time. Hopefully, when that happens, Europe will return to its normal place in world history — when they were fighting each other, which was a problem for the rest of the world — but at least we'll be able to protect ourselves from this European disease. And actually, as you know, I've been writing for years that we have to acknowledge, for ourselves, that Europe is the source of the worst in human history: racism, colonialism, serial genocides, and all wars. Three Napoleonic wars — those were world wars at that time, because the world was different — and then two world wars, which were European and British. They should be put under strict control, or fenced off from the rest of the world, so they don't poison it anymore.

#Glenn

So, if in Ukraine it requires restoring neutrality, territorial concessions, and regime change, you also see the necessity for an eventual regime change in Europe.

#Sergey Karaganov

Yes. It's not, of course, our task, but it should happen for the sake of world peace and for the fate of the European people, whom we don't consider hostile. But they're run by, as I said, mad hyenas.

#Glenn

What you're saying now almost resembles the U.S. national security strategy, because they also blame the European leadership for pushing Europe toward civilizational erasure. It advocates cultivating opposition to get rid of many of the current governments. But let me ask one last question, because it seems we're in a very dangerous phase at the end of this war. The Ukrainian army appears to be falling apart, and the Europeans essentially have two options: they can either accept a humiliating defeat or escalate. It seems they might even consider entering the war directly. Meanwhile, as you suggest, Russia now sees a need to restore its deterrent as well. So, do you think we're heading toward a major war — I mean, a direct war between the Europeans and the Russians?

#Sergey Karaganov

Well, first of all, I mean, there will be, as I've said, a piecemeal solution for the time being, because President Trump wants peace — and I applaud him for that — but he actually stops us short of a final or decisive victory. So there will be a piecemeal solution, that's all we'll see. If the Europeans join the war, the problem will be solved. We'll be at war with the Europeans.

#Glenn

So you believe a peace agreement is coming, but it won't address all the underlying causes?

#Sergey Karaganov

Absolutely. As I've said, it will be a peaceful solution. The real core of the problem has been Western policies, and recently, mostly European policies of endless expansion and growing hostility. And now, I mean, I'm blue with Russophobia. I'm partly a historian, as you know, and I believe that even in Hitler's Germany there was nothing like this — the Russophobia didn't reach these levels. So, I mean, it's really dangerous, because when they keep pumping up this anti-Russian hysteria, people start to believe what they're saying. Though, of course, we all know that this anti-Russian hysteria and war fever are mostly driven by the need to cover up their own mistakes, failures, and crimes.

And this elite is a complete failure on all counts — moral, economic, political. Even the infamous Green Revolution is now being thrown away. That was one of the main driving forces of the European project. It's in bad shape, so the sooner we help to end it, the better. But of course, we don't want to waste our men, so hopefully we'll find a way without continuing direct combat. Otherwise, we'll escalate to the nuclear level and finish this problem. That is what's called the European problem. You remember there was a German problem — now it's European. And Germany is returning, by the way, for the time being, to its romanticist history.

#Glenn

Yeah, I was gonna ask about that as well, actually, if I can squeeze in one last question. The German posture — it's changed, I mean, almost beyond recognition in the past four years. How do you see this relationship between Russia and Germany now?

#Sergey Karaganov

I hope they come to their senses. But right now, it seems Germany is once again in that same German mood — the one that led to tens of millions of deaths in Europe during the First World War, and then again in the Second.

#Sergey Karaganov

But if they start again...

#Sergey Karaganov

Actually, I think Stalin made a few geopolitical mistakes. He was a strong-willed and clever man, but a very weak geopolitician. And he made a huge mistake when he blocked, I think it was the Morgenthau Plan — the idea of dividing Germany into many small states. That would have been a better solution. Maybe we'll return to that, because Germany is again becoming a problem for Europe, and also for the world.

#Glenn

Professor Karaganov, thank you so much for taking the time. It's extraordinary how we ended up in such a situation in such a short period of time. So, thank you very much.

#Sergey Karaganov

Well, as you know, it's been predicted for quite some time. But even with all those predictions, I'm amazed at the speed of deterioration — especially the moral and intellectual deterioration. And of course, we Russians also made a few mistakes. One was complacency, and the second was that we allowed the weakening of nuclear deterrence. It was an objective process, but we didn't have an active policy of propping it up. That's our sin too, because nuclear deterrence has been saving the world for sixty or seventy years. But then people became complacent — they forgot about it. There were also serious efforts by the Americans and some Europeans to undermine deterrence, to undermine it morally, because the Americans didn't need nuclear deterrence for a while; they had deterrence through overwhelming economic and conventional military power — for some time, not anymore, but for a while. And the Europeans simply, I mean, lost their minds.

#Glenn

Well, thank you again for your time.

#Sergey Karaganov

But not all Europeans, Mr. President. As I know, there are still a lot of people of goodwill and brilliant Europeans. I think some countries in Europe, especially in southern and central Europe, will come to their senses soon—or are already coming to their senses—and join the greater Eurasia.

#Glenn

Hopefully, the Eurasian arrangement will work.

#Sergey Karaganov

If Norway joins, you're welcome. By the way, about 15 years ago, we were having a series of conversations with our Asian friends and some Norwegians about Greater Eurasia. That's when this term was born. No.

#Glenn

Well, thank you, Glenn.

#Sergey Karaganov

Bye-bye. Bye. Have a good evening.