

# Alexander Mercouris: Germany & Russia Vote — Europe's War Fever Intensifies

Alexander Mercouris discusses German and Russian elections, and the intensification of Europe's war enthusiasm \* The Duran: <https://www.youtube.com/@TheDuran> \* Alexander Mercouris: <https://www.youtube.com/@AlexMercouris> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: [https://x.com/Glenn\\_Diesen](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](https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## #Glenn

Welcome back. Today is September 23rd, 2026, and we have the pleasure of being joined again by Alexander Mercouris, the host of the very popular Duran podcast, and I have left a link in the description. So thank you for coming on the program.

## #Alexander Mercouris

Delighted, as always, to be here, Glenn.

## #Glenn

So I did want to discuss the elections and the Ukraine war. And I guess elections are a good place to start because we've had elections in Germany, Russia. And yeah, the contrast is quite interesting. We saw this victory for the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt.

## #Glenn

But now in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania—sorry, I probably butchered that name—we saw that AfD pulled in 38%, while the CDU, the party of Merz, ended up below 5% at 4.9%. I was wondering, how do you see this development, and also not just where it's coming from, but what is the significance of it?

## #Alexander Mercouris

I think these are very significant elections indeed. And we've had three elections. In fact, we've had those two, Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. And we also had Berlin. And the

outcome of the elections in Berlin was different in some respects, but the message, the underlying message, is the same. Now, these are three very different regions of the former East Germany. Saxony-Anhalt: conservative, Christian, mostly rural electorate that is more elderly, a place that is fairly good territory for the CDU. It has been the dominant party in Saxony-Anhalt basically since reunification, and it imploded. It completely collapsed in Saxony-Anhalt.

In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, this is northern East Germany, much more left-wing, placed near the Baltic. As I said, very different culture. It's got connections to the sea. It was where the Nord Stream pipeline, one of the Nord Stream 2 pipelines, was supposed to go. It was Angela Merkel's home state for a while, by the way, just saying. And here the SPD is the dominant party. You would not expect the AfD, which is a right-wing party, to be doing well in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. And yet they topped the vote. They came first. They got 38%. The SPD, led by a very popular and very capable, apparently, minister-president, fell to second place.

And the CDU, which has always had some kind of a position in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, has crashed. I mean, it has seen an enormous plunge in its support, and it's now, of course, outside the regional parliament. It is not even represented in the regional parliament. And in Berlin, one of the most complicated cities, places in Germany, it's of course the capital, it's young, it's the place where German counterculture is at its strongest, it's got a large immigrant community. Well, even there, the AfD doubles its vote to 16%, so it's rising. But the runaway victor is Die Linke, which is, of course, the lineal descendant of the Socialist Unity Party that used to govern the former East Germany.

In other words, the East German Communist Party, the party, in other words, which built the Berlin Wall. And it is now the government of the whole of Berlin, including West Berlin. So, I mean, this is an astonishing development. And again, you see the CDU fall, and the SPD, which historically has been the dominant party in West Berlin, is now in deep eclipse. So what does this tell us? Firstly, it tells us that the CDU is toxic across the whole territory of the former East Germany. But secondly, when you drill into the polling reasons, the reasons why people are voting in the way they are in Berlin, in Sachsen-Anhalt, in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, even though they might be voting slightly different ways, one thing is constant.

Yes, there are concerns about immigration, but the issue of war and peace is very important indeed, maybe even paramount. And people are turning away from the parties, especially the CDU, which they see as the party of war, the party of endless confrontation with Russia, the party which, through pursuing this path of war, has also presided over the collapse of German industry and a profound crisis in German society and economy. And we are starting to see—I was in Germany a few weeks ago—we're starting to see the same trends in Western Germany as well. I was in Rheinland-Pfalz. I was finding that even in this rather left-wing state in the Rhineland, people on the left are starting to think about voting for Die Linke. And some people, because they oppose war, are even floating for the first time the possibility of voting for the AfD. So this tells us about the mood in Germany. And I suspect it is true about the mood right across Europe.

## **#Glenn**

I wonder if the German firewall they set up—that is, that no one should essentially boycott AfD, not incorporate them—if this is kind of counterproductive, because if you recognize that AfD is largely a populist party that sees the political elites drifting away from the public sphere, you know, if you're a populist party, this is like a dream, almost, that the political elites distance themselves from the public, and then they essentially won't even deal with the new alternative, pretending it doesn't exist. I saw that after the elections, now you have the NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte saying, "How will this impact the policies?"

Because the public there obviously has different views now. Oh, well, it's several years to the next federal election. It doesn't matter. So again, and you heard the same from Chancellor Merz. That was, well, we're going to be steadfast. We're going to stick in there. In other words, we're going to more or less ignore where the public sentiment has shifted and just continue. But to what extent is it possible, though? Is it possible to just continue the same course, or will there be more disruptions now because of this, well, at the state levels, having these new elections?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

I think there will be more and more disruptions, and I completely agree with all the points you've made about the firewall. I mean, that policy should be abandoned. It is profoundly undemocratic. And, of course, what it does is exactly what you said. It gives the AfD, electorally speaking, the best of all worlds. They become more popular. They can say that we are the people who speak what you think, and so vote for us. But at the same time, the AfD is not given the responsibility and the test of power. So they are not either shown to be competent or incompetent. They don't have to make the compromises that power inevitably brings with it. So they're able to maintain their message and grow their support. You're absolutely correct in everything that you have just said about it. I don't think this is sustainable.

I think the groundswell of opinion that I saw when I was in Germany a few weeks ago, even in Western Germany, is now so strong that it is becoming irresistible. I found, for the first time—and I've been travelling to Germany since the 1970s—for the first time ever, I heard people talk about the Chancellor of Germany in terms of ridicule. I mean, that he's a clown-like, comical figure. Which, I mean, if you know anything about Germany, has never been true before, at least when talking to an outsider. I mean, there's always been enormous respect for the office of chancellor, even if there might be opposition to the person who holds that office. But beyond that, there's something I would also add about Germany: it is a country which has been extremely stable for a very, very long time.

When stability is upset in a place like that, then instability becomes chronic. And that is absolutely something we're going to see. We are in a period of transition now from an exhausted, discredited political system. It has a population that wants peace. It's pressing for war. It has a population that

is not convinced that this confrontation with Russia is a good idea. It is redoubling on its confrontation with Russia. It's got a population that takes enormous pride in Germany's status as an industrial country. It presses forward the process of de-industrialization. You can't go on doing this indefinitely without this provoking a backlash. We've already started to see that backlash. If these policies continue the same way, then that backlash is going to get stronger. And before long, we're going to see the CDU break up and fracture, and the SPD swept away.

## **#Glenn**

No, well, that's a good point. Usually, when the opposition rises, it will be tested in some form of bringing it into government, but before it gets too big. I think that would be actually a good way if you wanted to deal with AfD, because they do have an internal cohesion problem as well. They consist of, you know, if you look at the Israel policies, how to deal with the US, they're very divided on many issues. But instead, they're kept on the outside.

They can, you know, enjoy the position of being in opposition and grow so powerful that once they are going to power, they could essentially take power. That's not necessarily what you want when that option has never been tested before. And if you add to the very negative attitude towards the current status quo—that is how the people view the government and its policies—you'll see people are willing to gamble on something vastly different. Just throw a wrench into the system and see what happens. And again, none of this seems like a good idea. Again, it goes back to your criticism of the firewall. Sorry.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Absolutely. Well, you see, the interesting thing about the AfD is that it is both very different and, in some ways, rather familiar, because an awful lot of what the AfD is saying once upon a time was commonplace within the German political system: good relations with Russia being one, a certain type of approach to the economy. The AfD, in many, many ways, sounds and talks at times like the party that the CDU was in the days of Helmut Kohl, or even more, perhaps, in the days of Konrad Adenauer. And so it's both different and familiar. And I think that is part of its attraction. That is not, of course, to deny the radical break that it would also cause. I mean, its foreign policy ideas for the European political class, not just the German—reconciliation with Russia, an end to this war hysteria that we are seeing—this is absolute heresy, completely taboo, and of course profoundly shocking.

## **#Glenn**

It's interesting to see how the European media and politicians around Europe respond to the AfD, that, oh, they want to settle relations with Russia, as if this will be the worst of all worlds at the time when we're losing this proxy war. But I did want to pivot to Russia because, of course, they also had their elections. And for anyone who's been following the Russian commentary and media, they expected a huge attack on Election Day as a disruption. So it didn't come as a surprise. This is what

they've been discussing over the past week. But again, many were nonetheless surprised by the size of the attack. Again, this strike on Moscow was the largest in the entire war. How did you interpret the purpose and also, I guess, outcome of the whole thing?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

When I went to Russia in June—and bear in mind, I haven't been very much to Russia in recent years—I was there last year for a short time. I was there for a much longer time this year in June. The thing that really struck me about Russia is how normal it is, the extent to which ordinary life continues, the sense that the war obviously is there in the background, but it is not an immediate issue for most people. The economy is stable, living standards have been rising. The basic pattern of ordinary life continues much as it has, except that since I was last there properly, which was in 2019, there has been a very definite and very significant increase in living standards, much greater than I'd been led to expect, by the way.

And I'm not just talking about Moscow, because I was also in a place like Pskov, which is a very different city from Moscow. So I describe this condition as normalcy. And I think that this is what we have seen: a sustained attempt over the last few months, with all these drone attacks on refineries and other drone attacks all over Russia, an attempt to disrupt it in the run-up to the election itself. The idea is, if you can shatter this internal sense of normalcy and stability, if you can create a sense of crisis around the time of the elections, if you can affect the economy around that time, then in some mysterious way that is never properly explained, that is going to put pressure on the Kremlin and on Putin himself to change course.

I think this is very much what we have seen. And by the way, when I was in June, after I came back from Russia, in June I said that is exactly what I expected to see happen, and sure enough, it's turned out exactly in that way. And of course, if you're going to disrupt the normalcy, then the place, the time to try hardest is on election day. So we had thousands of drones hurtling towards Moscow. We had apparently all kinds of attempts to disrupt the voting through cyber attacks. We had vivid pictures of smoke in the sky and all of those things. But ultimately, like the entire drone offensive since the spring, it has basically failed. It's caused a certain amount of inconvenience.

There have been queues at some gasoline stations at some times in the summer, and probably there will be again following the attack on the recent refinery. But not to the extent that would be needed to disrupt that overall sense of stability that Russia today has and which gives the Russians the confidence that they can see the war through. So this is what was attempted, and it failed. And the proof of its failure was the election results, however you want to interpret them. If you interpret them, as I do, as a reasonably good reflection of Russian public opinion, you see that the drone attacks, the war, all of that has resulted in a strengthening of the position of the government.

If you want to believe, as some people do — I don't, by the way — that this whole election was a sham and everything has been manipulated and fiddled and all of that, then the incredibly smooth

and orderly way that it was done shows that all of this is invisible to any outsider like me. Well, what that also shows is that the government is in full and confident control of the country and that any expectations of a political crisis are completely mistaken. I am facetious about making the second point because, straightforwardly, I believe the first one. I believe this was an election where the actual political opinions of the country were properly expressed, and they pointed to the underlying stability that is there.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, that is all this effort to bring pressure or bring the war to Russia, as the Finnish president points out, to make the population feel the war. This is putting this as an objective, which then includes hitting civilian infrastructure, again, all the oil refineries, which is a strange measurement of success. All of this is premised on the idea that this is how we get an end to the war. If you make the Russians feel the war, they will pressure the Kremlin. But it kind of always begs the question: pressure the Kremlin to do what?

Because, you know, if you recognize that the Russians, the public as well as the government, see this as an existential threat—and it's not unreasonable if you see what NATO's been doing over the past years and currently is doing—then what they would want pressure on the government for would be to put an end to the war, but through victory, not capitulation. And I thought that perhaps the election would kind of get this point across, but if everything is a sham, it's all a rigged election. Actually, everyone hates the government. They want them removed. They really just want to get out and capitulate because they also think that NATO is just bringing democracy and freedom. It feels like by rejecting the election, you also can't learn a lesson from these pressure tactics.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Well, of course, you're absolutely correct. Now, nobody, as I've discussed before from previous programs that we've done, has chronicled the pressure tactics that have been followed by the West over many years towards Russia better than yourself. Just go to the various books you've written, the various articles you've written about this. It's all there. It's all set out in painstaking detail. But in the West, it is unacceptable to believe that. You're not allowed to say that. You're not even allowed to think it. Now it's becoming increasingly difficult to do that, especially if you hold political office or indeed any position in government.

So if you can't accept that the West bears any possible responsibility for this crisis that we are in, then, of course, all the blame has to be shifted onto the Russians, and specifically onto one individual, who is Vladimir Putin. And in that case, if you really want to think that, if that's all you are able to think of, then it makes a kind of upside-down sense, a kind of inverse logic, to say, well, the Russian people are obviously being led along by Putin. If we can just increase the pressure on them

in some way, then they will turn on him. It shows no ability, exactly as you said now, to understand or learn, because understanding and learning has now become forbidden. It is prohibited. Anybody who follows what happens in the West today can see this.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, well, if the war isn't going well, and I think this is becoming increasingly obvious, and I think there's more admission of this in the West as well, given how fearful they are of what's going to happen this winter. We see that the economic war isn't going well. I mean, if you have to discuss your 21st sanctions package, then I think it's reasonable to say that it's failed. But also, as you discussed now, the political pressures aren't going well either, or the political support. That is, the Russians seem to vote for the status quo or to support the government, while in Germany you see, yeah, collapse, collapse.

Literally, when the ruling government can't even get representation in the regional parliament. But all of this, though, would suggest that if reality begins to sink in, that the Europeans will begin to panic. And I'm sure you've been watching the same panics across these different news channels seen in Britain, but also across continental Europe, that they're very worried that they're losing hold on their war. How are you seeing this? Is this because they're realizing what's actually happening? Is the narrative breaking? Or how do you see this?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

They do realise what is happening. I mean, they may tell themselves all sorts of stories about how Ukraine is regaining the initiative, how there's been a successful offensive in Lyman, all those sorts of things.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

But, I mean, they don't... By now, they are...

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Sufficiently aware of reality that they can't escape what they are seeing. I mean, they know that the Black Sea ports are closed. They know that Ukraine has a massive budget crisis. They must know what the long-term—in fact, not the long-term—the fairly short-term economic consequences of a budget crisis of that scale would be, unless that budget crisis is plugged in some way, which it is difficult—well, it's difficult to see how it can be easily done. So they are aware that there is this crisis. And, of course, this is not where they expect it to be.

They expected to be back in 2022 in a situation where the sanctions had worked, or they expected in 2023, when the offensive towards Crimea and the Black Sea was launched, they expected that

that would work instead. Probably they expected too much of this drone offensive that they waged against the Russians over the last few months. So now they find themselves exposed as events start to close in around them. They cannot provide Ukraine with air defence on anything like the kind of scale that Ukraine would need to turn the situation around. They have emptied the barrel effectively in terms of weapons that they can supply.

Giving Ukraine more funds, more money, is probably still possible. But then, of course, what does the money by itself do if it can't buy weapons or conjure up soldiers? So it can help to hold things together for a little while, but you can't do much more than that. And, of course, the more money you give at a time of financial and economic stress for your own populations, the more you're going to deepen your problems internally as well. So everything is going wrong, and when people can see that and they don't have a ready solution to any of this, which they don't, then, of course, they panic and they get angry and they become hysterical. And that's why we have all this war talk and all these stories about the Russians marching to the Channel and preparing to water their horses on the Rhine, or whatever it is that the Russians are going to do.

## **#Glenn**

But given the limited military capabilities, this discrepancy doesn't match up with the intentions which are being expressed. That is, with people like this Jacob Rees-Mogg, who now thinks that the British should be locked up unless they back the war, and they should all be prepared, you know, dying fighting Russia is their duty. If they don't, I mean, how widespread is this sentiment? Are they willing to—do you think the British political elites are willing to go to war, given that they don't actually have the capabilities? Or do they assume the Americans will, you know, come and save the day?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Those comments of Jacob Rees-Mogg have gone down very badly, by the way, with the wider British population. I mean, he talks this way, you know, while sitting in his armchair in a perfectly, you know, tailored suit and all of that, with a very refined aristocratic accent. Everybody can see that he's not the person who's going to face the battle if the battle comes. And as I said, that didn't go down well at all. There is a massive disconnect here, I think, between the wider sentiments of people in Europe, as we're seeing with the elections in Germany, and with a part of the elites that—the elites have been pursuing this policy of pushing Russia very hard for, well, 30 years. As I said, you've chronicled it.

Now, sensing that this thing is—that this is about to become bankrupt, this whole policy and strategy is bankrupt—it is shattering for them. So, of course, they are talking about war, and of course, they're talking about their militaries. But as you absolutely rightly say, the militaries in Europe are in no condition to sustain a war against Russia. The peoples of Europe do not believe in the threat from Russia and do not want to be drawn into a war with Russia. But if you reject the option—the

actually, the only serious option—of negotiations, real negotiations, not sham negotiations, but actual negotiations in which finally you start listening to what the Russians are saying and start understanding that they have actual serious concerns, and concerns which can be addressed without calling into question the entire security of Europe.

Well, if you continue to refuse to do that, what can you do? You panic, you become frightened, and of course, in the process, you frighten your own populations, and you press down on them even harder, as we see people like Jacob Rees-Mogg saying we should do. So I think perhaps we've left behind us now, if you want to understand European elites, we've left behind now, you know, the time of political analysis. Psychology is perhaps what explains the situation better now than politics. You know, hard-headed and rational analysis can help one to do.

## **#Glenn**

Well, that's a good point, because when times get hard, you can go two ways. That is, you can either put an end to the whole thing, start to make compromises, return to diplomacy, or you can go for war. I was kind of hoping that once the situation becomes obvious that we're losing the proxy war, the Ukrainians can't continue this fight on our behalf and we can't really join in, then the only option is peace. But not everyone is of this opinion, it seems. That is Robert Fico, the Slovakian prime minister. He was making the point that—well, he made a lot of videos and interviews, and he was arguing that not only are many of the European leaders seeking to provoke a war with the Russians, but his reasoning was to distract from their failures at home, which is kind of not the direction you were hoping they would go when things go bad, that you double down even though you can't win this war. But yeah, I was wondering what your thoughts were on the comments of Fico.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Well, Fico's absolutely right. But of course, the reason they double down is because if they don't, if they start negotiations with the Russians, then in effect, they're telling everybody that, you know, everything that we've been doing for the last 30 years, it was a terrible mistake. And it's the mistake which has brought us to this point of crisis and defeat. Now, that's not a very, very good message to bring to your voters if you are the political elite that is associated with these policies, which has led us to this disaster. Now, if we're talking about the economic problems of Europe, they have many causes. The war is only one of those causes. But having said that, the war is nonetheless an important reason why the economic crisis is as bad as it is.

If you want to do something quickly that will cause the economic crisis to abate, if you want to address cost of living problems, for example, then achieving peace means that you don't have to cut welfare spending or raise taxes in order to fund an unaffordable rearmament. And you can start importing cheaper energy from Russia again. Well, that is an obvious course to take. But as I said, doing that is in effect an admission that you are wrong. Now, here I'm going to say my own thing. I

think that sooner or later, once we've got over this panic and hysteria, which may take a while—it's not going to be over tomorrow—but once we are over this panic and hysteria, once it becomes impossible to deny the realities in Ukraine, then calls for negotiations are going to get stronger.

I mean, there were some mumbled calls, as no doubt you remember. Last year, they had an EU Council meeting. In December, they agreed that they would appoint a representative to negotiate with the Russians. They could never agree who that would be, and they've never come up with any set of proposals that they could take to the Russians. But talk of that kind of thing is going to restart, and sooner or later it is going to happen. But probably, in order for us to get there, we will have to see political changes in Europe. Some of the current leaders go, and other leaders take their place. And those leaders who are perhaps less implicated in this disaster will be able to start to get the diplomatic process moving in ways that the current lot simply can't.

## **#Glenn**

That's a good point. I think if we want a diplomatic settlement here, there has to be some progress in these elections because the current elite has really dug itself in. But what do you expect to see this winter, though? Because the theme is whether or not the Europeans will overcome the panic or, if you will, intensify. This winter looks dire at many levels. That is, things are going poorly for the Ukrainians, but also the Europeans. That is, not only are they short on energy and their economies aren't doing well, but the other wars in the Middle East also have an impact. From what I see, the Saudis are now stopping all oil exports to Europe. That can't be a good addition to their current problems with the Russians. Where will the energy to the Europeans come from now?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Indeed, and the Americans are now talking about an export ban on diesel oil, which is in very short supply. I was a few days ago in the United States, and everybody there was talking about the rising cost of diesel oil. And, you know, the proposal to ban exports is going to be a popular one with many people in the United States. And of course, that is also going to increase pressure on Europe. And the natural gas reserves in Europe are very low this year. We don't know how cold the winter is going to be. Some people think it's going to be relatively mild. But one way or the other, we are going to face a very, very difficult winter. Now, this is where developments in the war begin to become very important.

If the Russians continue their advance westwards, if we are seeing a major military crisis for the Ukrainians over the winter, all of this happening in conjunction with a major economic collapse in Ukraine and severe economic problems in Europe, in part connected with this energy crisis, and who knows, a financial crisis too. In other words, if everything goes bad all at the same time, then I'm afraid there will be some people who will say, "We've got to go for broke. This is a situation where the whole future of the West, or at least Western Europe, or at least Europe, is in peril. So we have to actually consider the possibility of direct intervention in the war." And those voices do exist.

They're very strong in London, by the way, probably more so than in other European capitals, but in London and, I suspect, to some extent in Paris. There are people who say we should try to impose no-fly zones on the Russians. We should try to send troops into western Ukraine, not to fight the Russians, but to try to ease the pressure so that the Ukrainians can redeploy forces from western Ukraine eastwards to fight the Russians there. We could have all of these very, very dangerous, very reckless things being proposed. I think there would be an enormous amount of political opposition. But if I was to say that they won't happen at all, I would be saying more than I know.

I think this winter is going to be a moment of very great danger. Just to say, if things turn out a little better, if people are a little bit more sensible, if elections continue to roll out in the way that they have in Germany and perhaps next year in France, if the Russians take it perhaps a bit more slowly than some people on the Russian side would like to see, then I think we might get through the winter all intact, at which point I suspect that the mood will begin to change and we could start to see diplomacy begin to kick in. But as I said, you know, it's going to be nervous and difficult. And people who follow it and discuss it, like us, will get very strong nerves.

## **#Glenn**

I hear the calls for war. That is, we have to intervene. It's time to take action. You know, the Russians only respect force. I'm a bit confused how they think this war is actually going to play out, the one they want to start or join in on, because as the Russians keep warning, it will be a war which will look very different, and it will be very short. And I think the Europeans are often assuming that they can just enter, tip the scales in favor of the Ukrainians, but still keep the war limited to Ukraine and Russia.

I think it's going to—this idea that once we go to war with Russia, that we will have escalation control, that we can choose to what extent we escalate, what territories can be struck, what weapons the Russians will use. I mean, and if it doesn't work, if we can put an end to it. I mean, the Iran war should surely be a lesson that escalation control is a dangerous solution. But still, you know, we survived the Cold War based on real issues, and this is the hill we're going to die on. We have to expand NATO. I mean, there's no room for compromise. This is very strange, that we're seeking war with the Russians over this.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

You're absolutely correct in every single point you made. I mean, the idea that we can control escalation, that the Russians have no word on the question, is extraordinary. But, you know, you have people talking this way. I mean, Macron himself, for example, says that the Russians have no right to object if European troops go to Ukraine. Have they no right to object? But what happens if they do object? What happens if they do take action? I mean, it is not clear, but I think you're absolutely right. There is still a sort of governing assumption that somehow our mere presence, the

mere presence of our armies, such as they are, is going to be enough by itself to frighten and intimidate the Russians and to cause them to back off, despite everything that we have seen up to now over the last four years, which points in the diametrically opposite direction, and everything that we've seen from the Middle East about the limits of our military power.

If the United States cannot achieve air supremacy over Iran, what possibility is there of us in Europe achieving air supremacy over the Russians, given that we would have to achieve air supremacy if all of this talk of a no-fly zone is ever to become real? So, I mean, it is a fantasy. It is an absurd idea. But as I said, there are some people who cling to it and who continue to agitate for it. And there is never enough pushback from people who say, "Enough. This kind of wild and reckless talk must stop."

## **#Glenn**

Well, it was Machiavelli. He wrote 500 years ago that men tend to see the world as they wish it was rather than what it's actually like, and that's how they fall or perish. And when you have people like Macron saying, "Hey, we have the right, you know, Ukraine decides who gets to march in on this territory," it's... yeah, I think this is the danger of the bubble we're seeing. That is, everyone in Europe has to agree on everything, and they tell themselves these stories and they assume that the Russians will somehow agree.

And no, but I think they're looking for how to escalate, but go up that escalation ladder while controlling it. And there's no nice incrementalism of marching in on Ukrainian territory without making themselves targets. Just a last question, though: what do you see happening now on the battlefield? Because we can see the economic problems, we can see the political support in terms of elections, but the front lines—I mean, if you want to argue that it could be cracking, it does seem like it is cracking now. We haven't seen this before.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

No, I think that's exactly right. I think it is cracking now. The war up to now has been fought as a succession of sieges. We've had this very dense region, the Donbas, very built up. As I said, I've often compared it to the Ruhr in Germany, very, very built up, lots of urban sprawl, lots of little rivers, lots of coal mines with slag heaps and things like that, factories all over the place, all obvious fortified positions. So the Russians have had to fight through all of that, and it's like they've had to undertake one siege of one place after another. But they've now come close to the point when that process ends.

There's just one line of cities left, the Slavyansk-Kramatorsk line, you know, strip, that is crumbling on its flanks. It's probably not going to hold for very, very much longer. And my sense is that once it falls, the entire dynamic of the war is going to change. We're going to start to see things happen much more quickly, because it won't be a siege war, a war of sieges anymore. It will revert to being

a war of manoeuvre and movement and battles. I am more sceptical about the whole idea that drones have made large movements impossible. I think war constantly evolves. The technology of war constantly evolves.

And I think that we will see that the Russians have developed answers to this issue of the drones. But this is probably more next year than this year. We're going to see the last of the big sieges, the cracking, the breaking of Donbas. Next year, it'll probably be battles for Zaporozhye, for the Dnieper, you know, the central reaches of the Dnieper. And who knows, if we are still refusing to negotiate, and the Ukrainians are refusing to negotiate, and everything remains in the same impasse as we see now, we could start even to see the Russians begin to make moves towards Kiev again, which, if that happens, that really is going to be the moment, I think, when the panic, the really big panic, is going to set in.

## **#Glenn**

I see that Donbas could fall over the next few months, given the encirclement we're seeing. In the north, you have the Kharkov region, and in the south, you have Zaporozhye. This is the fall of Orekhov—not yet, but I assume within the next week or two—that this will put immense pressure on that important city in the south, that is Zaporozhye. Just as a last question, what is the significance of Dobropillia? Because this one looks like it could fall not in a week or two, but in days even. Again, it could be a week or two. But the Ukrainians, of course—we can't predict this because the Ukrainians, of course, are doing their counteroffensive because they don't want to see the city lost. Why is this so significant, though?

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

I think it is significant. I think Putin has explained it, which is that it is in some ways the city at the western edge of the Donbas. So it's actually located southwest of this line of fortified towns I was talking about: Slovyansk, Kramatorsk. The Russians have captured the southernmost towns of this line. Konstantinovka has now fallen. Pokrovsk, in some ways, was part of that line too. So Pokrovsk has gone, Mirnograd has gone, Konstantinovka has gone. The two Druzhkivkas, which are to the north of Konstantinovka, Alekseyevo-Druzhkivka, they're also apparently now being fought over. But Dobropillia is to the southwest of all of these places.

So if Dobropillia falls, there are no big towns or cities nearby that the Ukrainians can retreat to and set up fortifications there and make that their next place where they're going to hold out and where the next siege is going to come. It's open fields for tens of kilometres in every direction. So what the Russians could do, and perhaps will do, is that they could use Dobropillia to advance northwards and cut off the supply lines to Kramatorsk and Slovyansk from the west. And at that point, we start to see not just a cauldron, but a strategic encirclement of the remaining Ukrainian forces in Donbas. So

Dobropillia is very important. And the Ukrainians are committed to do everything they possibly can to cling on to it for as long as they can. I mean, logically, given the situation on the front lines now, they ought to be planning a retreat from the Donbas.

## **#Glenn**

But I doubt they are. I'm not sure if the Western calculation is, let's wait until they take Donbas by force, at least because Ukraine can't walk away from any territory. That's not acceptable. But I just feel like, because the Russians do not trust that NATO will live up to whatever deal it signs, they would be afraid that any seeming political settlement, much like in Iran, will just be used as a temporary ceasefire. And if that is the case, I think the Russians would demand a big buy-in, that is, okay, we'll sign this political settlement, but because it might be a deception, you have to leave this and this territory. Otherwise, you know, we're not going to accept this ceasefire. I think... if Donbas falls to the Russians' hands, they will look for a different buy-in. They will want Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, for example. So I think, and if not that, you know, Sumy or something else. I wish they had some diplomacy so the expectations were clear, because I don't think we know the game rules here yet, but...

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

I think you're absolutely right. If Donbas falls, then the major card that Ukraine and the West had on the table has been basically thrown away. The Russians are in control of Donbas. They have the major fortified lines behind them. It's open fields, basically, all the way to the deeper central places. The Russians are in an extraordinarily strong position at that point, and absolutely they can demand more. I'm going to say something else. I mean, assuming that the West is saying to itself, well, you know, let's wait for the Russians to take Donbas.

And that's the main moment when we're going to make our big diplomatic pitch. I'm afraid, listening to Western leaders, Macron, Ursula von der Leyen, all of these, I think that is more sophisticated thinking than they are capable of anyway. I doubt that they are even thinking in those terms. But if they were thinking in those terms, it would be reckless for exactly the reason that you said, that by that point, the Russians would be in such a strong position that their demands would almost certainly increase, and they would increase in ways that are not to Ukraine's or the West's advantage.

## **#Glenn**

Alexander, always a great pleasure. Thank you so much.

## **#Alexander Mercouris**

Thank you. Thank you very much, Glenn. Let's do this again.

