Chaos After Ukraine Collapses

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#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Nicolai Petro, a professor of political science at the University of Rhode Island and a former U.S. State Department special assistant for policy on the Soviet Union. Thank you very much for coming back. I've been dying to ask you what to expect over the next months or years. If Ukraine now collapses and the war comes to an end, what can we expect to happen in Ukraine afterward? We know that Ukraine and Russia will both face some common problems. When you have hundreds of thousands of soldiers coming back from war, there will always be social challenges. But the Russians seem to be coming out of this situation victorious, and Ukraine was already quite divided at the beginning of the war. It looks as if much could happen when this whole thing falls apart. Maybe we should start at the beginning. Do you think Ukraine is collapsing at the moment, or is it coming to an end?

#Nicolai Petro

There are a number of analysts who believe that the negotiations themselves are an indication that the military side of the war is winding down. I've been listening over the last week or so to the Italian classicist Luciano Canfora, who is a great specialist on the Peloponnesian Wars and the Athenian Civil War that followed. He points out a lot of things that I think are worth noting and relevant to this present conflict. Assuming, for example, that the parties involved—Russia and Ukraine—can, very broadly, be compared to Sparta and Athens, one of the things he notes is that peace was anticipated many, many times over the course of the 27-year war, but it never actually came to a conclusion, even though there were temporary peace settlements.

And it was common at that time to view war as the normal state of affairs. Heraclitus famously refers to war as the father of all, which divides slaves and free people and creates both. But it's always in flux, and war itself has periods of peace that then descend again into armed conflict. I think there may be much to that with regard to the present conflict as well. Regardless of what the people involved in the negotiations say they want, they're only negotiating for their political lifetime,

not necessarily for successive generations. If one wants a longer-lasting peace, that involves more than just a negotiation among political leaders.

That involves a transformation of society with respect to the enemy—the other. And I'll speak mostly about Ukraine, although I'm happy to comment on Russia as well. I know Ukraine a little better now because I've spent more time there than I have in Russia over the last decade, decade and a half. In Ukraine, the enemy other is sometimes Russia, sometimes Poland historically, sometimes other countries. But it is also always the other Ukrainians—namely, those who, from the perspective of one group, which I'll call broadly the Galician heartland, the western part of Ukraine—those who do not share their cultural matrix in the West are not considered Ukrainian enough. And as such, their loyalties are viewed as suspect.

And we have seen this throughout the history of modern Ukraine since 1991. Even in this time of great trial, of a major war with Russia, we've seen the government accept the interpretation of its most radical nationalist supporters—indicting, a priori, those who prefer not to speak Ukrainian but prefer to speak Russian; those who would rather attend the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church than the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was set up with the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople but at the insistence of former President Petro Poroshenko. It now constitutes, in effect, a state church that supports the war effort rather than peace efforts.

And finally, those who would like to have a peaceful, stable, profitable, and friendly relationship with Ukraine's neighbors—specifically Russia. Whereas the nationalists see themselves, by and large, in a conflict to the death with Russia—Russia, which they also tend to define as the Russian Empire—by virtue of the existence of modern Russia, it constitutes a threat to the existence of Ukraine. That's why, from the very start of the war, the singular hope of the Ukrainian government was not to fight successfully against Russia alone, but the recognition that it could only do so if it involved Europe directly in that conflict—at the time, the West generally, meaning the United States, NATO, and Europe.

And that effort bore fruit in the rejection of the peace initiatives undertaken by Russia and Ukraine, which had led to a tentative agreement in Istanbul in April 2022. At that point, as we know, Boris Johnson, with the support—no doubt—of the United States, flew to Kyiv and said, "We, Europe, are not ready to concede this fight. You must go on and fight, and we will provide you with anything you need to continue." That did not prove to be the case. Europe did not fulfill its promises and continues not to fulfill them. The most notable recent example is the failure to come up with an adequate financial aid package for the survival of the Ukrainian war effort, not to mention reconstruction and everything that would follow.

But the amount ostensibly agreed to by the European Commission—roughly $105 billion—is over two years, which does not cover the actual budget deficit of the Ukrainian state itself, not to mention the war effort. That would be a separate category. It wouldn't even cover the actual budget deficit for that amount of time. Most of that sum would be taken up by covering the current budget—the

deficit for this coming year. So we, Europeans and Americans, are still keeping Ukraine on life support, but not allowing it to heal. And it's this healing that I think is so desperately needed, but that very few people outside Ukraine itself are actually talking about.

Because when the military part of the war ends against the external aggressor, it's not clear what the government's attitude will be toward those other Ukrainians it has consistently labeled—even during this war—as potential traitors. A phrase, by the way, that Petro Poroshenko, the former president, used very often. He typically referred to Russian speakers and people from the East as a fifth column in Ukraine, and in that he followed his predecessor, Viktor Yushchenko. That rhetoric has not been as common for Volodymyr Zelensky, but in effect he has continued and even extended the same restrictive legislation on religion, language, and historical memory that led to this internal hostility, which has yet to be dealt with by Ukrainian society.

#Glenn

But when things fall apart—and they will—people will, of course, look for someone to blame. You mentioned those who can be seen as traitors, who didn't commit themselves properly, and that's one thing. And, of course, there are external actors you can also look at. I mean, there will be, I'm assuming, anger toward Russia for decades to come. But as you said, there's also this idea that the West sold them out—and there's some truth to that. When the US and UK convinced Zelensky to walk out of the Istanbul talks, the deal was more or less, "We'll support you till the end, until Russia's defeated." That's not the case. And I also hear voices in Ukraine asking why the Europeans are trying to keep them in the fight after the war is lost.

And many more or less suggest, well, Ukraine is being left to fight so Europe can prepare itself. But some would also say they might go after their own leadership. Of course, there's a lot of anger—especially now, with the corruption scandals—perhaps even toward Zelensky himself. I know Arestovych, his former advisor, once said that Zelensky would have to be brought home in a cage after the war was over, assuming he would flee. There could be anger. Russian speakers could be seen as traitors. Some might direct their anger toward the nationalists. But also, what about all the Ukrainians who have been hiding or dodging? It's a lot. How many people have actually been on the front lines fighting?

#Nicolai Petro

That's a lot of people. There's a member of parliament who actually floated the idea of depriving Ukrainians abroad of political rights—of citizenship—because they are not, as you put it, politically Ukrainian. So, in addition to any cultural, religious, or ethnic attributes, there's also the idea, at least being floated, of having political criteria for being a proper Ukrainian. The common theme in what you just described is hate. Hate. Yeah. And one cannot build a society—a benevolent society—on

hate for others. It doesn't yield good fruit that you can share with your neighbors, with your children. People who grow up in environments of hate—of course, at first as children—I've seen this myself in the émigré community I grew up in during the Cold War.

There were many people who retained a sense of hatred—be it against Germans for invading them or against other nations. But I, being of the successor generation and young, having grown up in Europe and in different countries, couldn't share that hate. I couldn't see the reason for it, because it wasn't my experience. So when I met others my age at the time—in their twenties—young descendants of émigrés from the Baltic states, or from Ukraine, or other places where we would occasionally meet, the rhetoric would begin with them repeating what their parents had told them. And then, very quickly, I could see it shift: "You know, I like you. You're not like them." And it becomes easier.

It's just so much harder to sustain hate than it is to leave hate behind and begin to encourage calmness, understanding, and eventually what the Bible calls love—which is simply a feeling of sympathy and compassion for others. And I think that is, I hope that is, the natural state of affairs. Because every time I've encountered hatred through a generation or two, as a memory, it's a bad copy of what the parents and perhaps even grandparents experienced. And there's an ambivalence even in the parents and grandparents, because many of those I've spoken to over my lifetime regret that their lives turned out to be focused on a hatred they didn't want their children to be burdened with.

They wanted their children and grandchildren to have opportunities, but they couldn't let go. The hate had suffused them so deeply that they couldn't really see beyond it. And at the end of their lives, I sensed in some people a great deal of ambivalence about whether it was so important to hang on to ephemeral ideals—part of holding on to mythical constructions like nations, patriotism, and ideals rooted in contemporary affairs and specific political leaders. All of that passes away. And in the end, you ask yourself, what was actually worth holding on to?

What longer values, deeper significance does life have? And that, of course, leads you back to compassion, I think, and a broad historical perspective. As I remember the great British historian Sir Herbert Butterfield saying, we should all look at history—and ourselves as actors in history—and feel a little bit embarrassed about what we did. And that applies to everyone in the historical drama. Of course, the immediate impulse is to lay blame. But when we pay attention to our better natures, we understand that we are all somewhat to blame when bad things, when tragedies, happen.

#Glenn

You also see this from foreign actors. Trump seems to be already building a case that he did everything he could, but Zelensky didn't want peace, and the Europeans were sabotaging it. He promised to do anything, sell any weapons, blah, blah, blah. You know, they denied him this. Meanwhile, the Europeans, when the whole thing falls apart, will say, "Well, you know, the

Americans sold you out. This is Trump who abandoned it." So everyone is getting ready to point fingers. And yeah, it just... it doesn't lead anywhere good, I think—the whole idea of learning something from this.

#Nicolai Petro

The word the Greeks used to describe what needs to happen after a war is *catharsis*—an emptying of the soul of all passions so that different ones can enter, namely compassion, the sense that others suffered perhaps as much, perhaps even more than I did during this war, on the other side. You know, we all think of Erich Maria Remarque's great World War I novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the meaningless sacrifice of the hero, who was killed, I think, on the very last day of the war. He was already beginning to suspect that there was little value in what was being fought for. And of course, after World War I, we have the entire palette of anti-war British poets—Owen, Sassoon, and others—who called into question the meaning of patriotism.

I... I see value in patriotism. I like the idea of patriotism, but I see it as a patriotism—the kind of... The only patriotism I think has value is a patriotism written small, that is to say, a local patriotism, the kind that was typical of city-states. And once it grows, expands, metastasizes to the level of nations, it becomes something very different—it becomes nationalism, which is an ideology that's no better than any other ideology, because it subsumes every value, every good thing, unto itself and perverts it, so that your sacrifice of everything you hold dear for the sake of the survival of the nation becomes the only good thing.

And that's a very dangerous proposition, because it does lead, in fact, directly to warfare. One cannot stop and think about such things as the national interest. What is truly in the national interest? How do the nation's interests and mine coincide? What reason do I have—what is a good reason—to defend the national interest? We were all told to stop thinking about those things, because it's not appropriate for people at our station to think about them. Let the officials decide and think about it; they know better than we do. And we are in a period of time—perhaps not that unusual, probably more typical than unusual in human history—when, in fact, we don't tend to think about those things.

And we suffer the consequences of the decisions our leaders make, over which we have very little control—especially in the EU and the European Commission, which, as political scientists know, has suffered for decades from what they call the "democracy deficit," the fact that there is no direct popular control over the institutions of the European Union. But now it has gone completely off the rails, and the lack of any institutional constraints on the actions of the EU, combined with the expanded authority it now demands from national governments, has created, I think, a rapacious monster in our midst. And I'm not sure what mechanisms exist that are easily accessible for Europeans to reverse that.

#Glenn

I'm thinking there's not just going to be a lot of blame within Ukraine, as you suggested, but also among the Europeans. The EU has seemingly taken advantage of this conflict by centralizing a lot of power. As you said, von der Leyen, Kallas—all of them—should not have the kind of power they have now. But of course, you never let a good crisis go to waste. I'm thinking once this war comes to an end and it's clear that the Russians aren't going to march on Paris, there won't be any restoration of the Soviet Union. I'm assuming they'll try to lean into the idea that "we won, we won because Russia wanted all of Ukraine."

But overall, I think with all the lies that have been told over the years now, you know, many people will probably ask: why didn't we have any diplomacy? Why did we just sit on the sidelines while all those hundreds of thousands of young men died? When our leaders pretended there were only 31,000 deaths in Ukraine instead of hundreds of thousands? Why did they keep saying that Ukraine was winning month after month when it was obvious it wasn't? How can they explain the economic collapse, the growing irrelevance of Europe? I mean, there are going to be a lot of questions—excellent reasons, apparently, to continue the war. Well, that seems to be it.

And it's hardly even a conspiracy theory. You hear this coming from leaders here, from Finland. It's quite problematic for a bad peace, because then Russia would be right at the Finnish border. We hear it from the Baltic states, and even the former prime minister of Denmark said it's better to keep the war going than to have peace—peace might be more dangerous than war. You have the current intelligence chief of Germany saying we should keep the Ukrainians fighting for at least five more years to prepare ourselves. They're afraid that if peace breaks out, the Ukrainian distraction will be gone and they might face Russia alone, especially now that the U.S. is pulling back a bit.

#Nicolai Petro

There's a blogger who writes sporadically—I think his name is Mark Chapman. He writes under the title *The Kremlin Stooge*. I was looking through some of his articles that I hadn't had a chance to read carefully before, ones I'd collected over the last six months. And he has a very intelligent and intriguing title. He says, "Well, from our perspective, millions of Slavs are dying—what's not to love, essentially?" You know, I think from a Western intelligence and strategic perspective, Ukraine in the long run poses no fewer problems to European identity politics and European unity than Russia does. It's just on a slightly smaller scale, but the same problems.

The problems of integrating an Orthodox country—the problems of a nation that will always have a substantial minority of people who feel some sympathy for Russia. If Russia is designated the enemy, that means there's an internal fifth column. One of the reasons NATO leadership in the 1970s, as I recall, was very suspicious of Italy was the high percentage of communists in local governments. As a result, the Italian military wasn't entirely trusted with the same level of military secrets as other NATO members that were considered more reliable. That problem will be even greater in the case of Ukraine.

Of course, it seems very unlikely at this point that Ukraine will become a member of NATO. And to add a controversial thesis—if NATO still exists by the time it would be willing to accept Ukraine—the same problem exists for the EU. I've read carefully the points made in the EU–Ukrainian plan and the Russian–American plan. They have some areas of overlap, but there are also significant differences. Some of the points the Ukrainian government wants to make are very much detached from reality, and EU membership is one of them.

The expectation is that there could be an expedited, even unique, process for Ukraine—ending as early as 2027 with Ukraine becoming a member of the EU. In fact, there's no precedent for that, no mechanism for it. And it would take only one nation—there are several right now in the EU—that would object to this kind of expedited process. Not to mention the financial difficulties, not to mention the social ones, but even the procedure itself, as the Ukrainians are imagining it and putting down on paper what they want, doesn't correspond to any reality that exists within the European Union. And when you see that kind of detachment from the reality that exists in Europe, you have to wonder in what other areas the negotiators are similarly detached from reality.

#Glenn

This comment of yours about Slavs killing Slavs—it's almost a Cold War fantasy. You have the two largest republics of the Soviet Union, Russians and Ukrainians, killing each other in the hundreds of thousands. You push NATO expansion, which very predictably triggers a war, block all peace initiatives, suspend all diplomacy, send weapons, and fight to the last Ukrainian. I mean, this is more or less what we've done. It does seem... but what you said before about this catharsis or purification—I've spoken before with Alistair Crook about the idea that perhaps, in defeat, this is something Europeans have to go through, because we've drifted very far. If you look at the European security architecture today—not just how it's falling apart, but the reluctance to even discuss it in a sensible way.

It's just that either you hail everything NATO does, or you're an agent of Putin, pretty much. But political leaders in Europe now seem convinced that peace can only be achieved by defeating Russia. Their mentality seems to be that the world consists of good guys and bad guys—so peace is created when the forces of light triumph over the forces of darkness. But at some point, if we're to survive, I think reality and common sense have to return. Less fanatical leaders would then begin to ask the questions that have always been asked: What creates security between states competing for security? We might start to discuss again the value of diplomacy—recognizing mutual security concerns, empathy, reducing security competition, indivisible security.

In an inclusive security architecture, I haven't heard any of these issues being discussed over the years—just that Russia is very evil. And this leads to an excessive reliance on deterrence and containment. That's the only language we hear. We see this now in the security world—sorry, in the peace proposals pushed by the Europeans. Peace, in their view, means we have to have NATO there, European troops, security guarantees, an 800,000-strong peacetime army. I mean, this is

their approach, but that's not the only recipe for peace. Surely, Mexico should have security from any future American attacks, but it can't be based on China filling the country with missiles aimed at Washington. That doesn't really make much sense. Do you see the same excessive reliance on deterrence and containment?

#Nicolai Petro

Well, ultimately, military buildups do not prevent conflict—they sustain it at a lower level. They never allow the conflict to actually die. It's like putting a pot on a very low flame but never turning the flame off. And that's what the Cold War was: an effort to convince the other side not to attack by maintaining a sufficiently high level of military capability to deter them.

On the other hand, what was supposed to be a deterrent for peace—the existence of that deterrence—was then pointed to as the reason why we couldn't be friends, why we couldn't actually have mutually beneficial relations with Russia, with the Soviet Union at the time. Détente was an intriguing sales pitch in the West to try to reconcile profitability in our commercial relations between the United States and the Soviet Union with the preservation of deterrence, but with less emphasis on deterrence and more on building a network of relations between the two superpowers that might lead to something even better.

That was the idea. And if you want, you could see analogies to what Trump is currently arguing needs to be the shift in America's thinking toward Russia—namely, that in order to establish a new relationship, we need to strengthen these alternative networks and not simply rely on military deterrence, which we already have enough of. So the argument, I think, goes. All of this, I think, makes sense. But the problem is Europe. And Europe, as I've said elsewhere, is the spoiler here, to its own detriment. I don't see any way, even if Ukraine is somehow victorious or defiant—it really isn't that important whether it is victorious or defiant.

If that narrative of being victorious in this conflict becomes the accepted one in Europe, it won't change how the rest of the world sees Europe—as having lost by virtue of not preventing the conflict. One of the stronger points, I think, in Trump's approach is his argument—which, I know, sounds silly and self-serving—but there may be a deeper meaning to it when Trump says this conflict would not have happened had it begun under his watch. Well, we don't know; that's highly speculative. But the argument, I think, is that he would have foreseen the longer-term difficulties that would arise in areas we thought were unrelated, because we assumed Russia was weaker than it was. And this is a lack of strategic foresight that Europe suffers from.

They predicted Russia's weakness—how quickly it would capitulate to NATO and Europe's demands on Ukraine. They assumed Russia would sacrifice what it defined as its strategic interest in Ukraine, withdraw, and accept defeat. But when that didn't happen, Europe was left holding a strategically empty vision, with no way out. Even if, as I said, Ukraine were declared victorious by the mainstream European press, it wouldn't be seen that way around the world. And I think most people

looking at Europe's current situation can see it's only going to get worse for Europeans—for the EU and NATO specifically—financially, and in terms of the inability to sustain both a social welfare state and a war state.

And diplomatically, the irrelevance of the EU—always coming late to the table, never, throughout the four years of war, having a peace proposal of its own, never leading toward a resolution or showing a way forward for ending this conflict—only arguing for a military victory, but not actually deploying or being willing to provide the resources necessary for a real change on the front lines, which would have involved European troops, NATO troops on the front line, as well as more generous military support. They basically wanted a Ukrainian victory at the cost of Ukrainian lives. And they were willing to spend a little bit more money, but not too much more, so as not to inconvenience European taxpayers. And that, I think, was always a recipe for disaster—one that could have been foreseen already by the end of 2022 and certainly by 2023.

#Glenn

Seems like we fell a bit for our own propaganda, because for so many years everyone repeated the same thing: Russia's more or less a gas station masquerading as a country—this kind of rhetoric. And anyone who said, "Well, actually, it's kind of a strong country. It has a lot of technological sovereignty, blah, blah, blah," was criticized. It's not as dependent on energy as many tend to exaggerate.

This would be seen as pro-Russian, which means it doesn't get any attention or airtime in the media. So it seems like we walked into this—but the Europeans had to get pulled into it as well. Viktor Orbán actually made this comment in front of Trump, saying that the Europeans were initially somewhat reluctant to go into this war. But the US and the UK sold this war to continental Europeans as, you know, "We'll send the weapons, impose the sanctions, Russia will falter on the battlefield, its economy will fall apart, the ruble will be rubble"—that kind of rhetoric. And of course, Russia would be isolated in the international system. So it was assumed that the Russians would have to essentially bow down and accept that it was the collective hegemon of NATO that would have the final say in what happens in Ukraine.

#Nicolai Petro

It's remarkable how engaged and assertive the United Kingdom is in this narrative, because it's not even a member of the EU, yet it's trying to position itself as the leader of the European war faction. And it's doing so thanks to the willingness of France and Germany to accept this role. I think Britain is playing its traditional role of pitting various forces—potential allies, allies, and even potential enemies—against each other to come out on top. If, for the EU as a whole, the conflict in Ukraine is seen as a way to diminish Russia's power and weaken the East in general, then from Great Britain's perspective, the island nation of Great Britain, Europe has always played that role.

And Europe is indeed the buffer that, to some extent, needs to be weakened—or can be weakened. And if it is weakened, then the prospects of the United Kingdom as a global power, hopefully allied with the United States, rise in correspondence with the weakening of Europe. This is, again, not an unusual situation when one looks at the Peloponnesian Wars. There were two great rivals, Athens and Sparta. But around each of them were smaller nations, smaller city-states that had shifting allegiances throughout the entire war, depending on which set of alliances they felt was more beneficial to them and which side was up or down at a particular time in the war.

So we should probably think of the entire global matrix centered around Europe itself in much the same way, and recognize that all the nations in and around the EU are jockeying for benefits and position in a post-war world. One of the most interesting interviews to come out of Ukraine in a long time was the one earlier this week—or maybe at the end of last week—with the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov. He keeps coming back to the theory of realism in politics, emphasizing that there must be negotiations. He strongly hints at the idea that Ukraine and Russia must negotiate directly with each other to resolve things to their mutual benefit, which may not necessarily align with the interests of their neighbors.

And he comes back to one word that he repeats time and again: geopolitics. He said everything will ultimately boil down to geopolitics. And he acknowledges, very candidly, that he doesn't use the word "propaganda." The interviewer asks, "What about propaganda? Isn't that false? But ours is news." And he says, "You know, we all have our information policies, and I'd just like to leave it at that." He doesn't go out of his way to defend the rhetoric of the Ukrainian media, or, for that matter, the office of the president. But he is pursuing what I think most political realists would recognize as a policy fine-tuned to what he sees as the long-term interests of Ukraine. I think it's a very worthwhile interview in Suspilne, the outlet where it appears.

#Glenn

Well, I praise Budanov for his honesty on this, because so much has been at stake—not just Russia and Ukraine, but also the Western countries. Everything has been thrown into this: military power, economic power, and of course, the efforts to control narratives by manipulating media and information. This has been a key issue—the assumption you're pushing that somehow this principle of trustworthy news has been elevated above the propaganda war. It's kind of naive to think this wouldn't be a tool for all actors involved. I just assumed from day one that the Americans, Europeans, Russians, and Ukrainians would all lean heavily on propaganda. But let me just ask you one last question, because you wrote an article back in August, in *Responsible Statecraft*, where you said that for peace in Ukraine, Russia also needs security guarantees.

Now, I thought this was interesting, because I think it was Lavrov who made the point recently—two or three weeks ago—that they're not opposed to having security guarantees in a peace deal, but that Russia also needs security guarantees. This goes back to what the Russians were asking for in 2021. However, the Europeans were quick to respond that Russia doesn't need security guarantees:

Ukraine is the victim, Russia is the aggressor. One is the good guy, one is the bad guy. And you only need security guarantees for the victim. It's as if that's just common sense—that this is how the world works. But again, it reflects a certain view of security. I was wondering if you could flesh out that idea in terms of what's required.

#Nicolai Petro

Yeah, the conflict—the war now in Ukraine—has nothing to do with the basic need countries have for security. That's a permanent feature. The need for security is a constant in international relations. All countries that exist strive for security guarantees for themselves. So what Russia is talking about is an elemental part of the international system and should be treated as such, regardless of whatever conflicts countries are involved in with each other or with third parties. That much should be obvious, because if a country does not feel secure, it will still try to establish that security on its own terms, by whatever means are necessary.

And it is in order to avoid pushing countries into that situation that you negotiate longer-term pacts, treaties, and security agreements. So it just doesn't make sense to link those two at all. I think there' s a sense that when we abstract ourselves from the current war itself to the conduct of international relations—which continues and persists even during the war, but will no doubt resume with even greater intensity after the military conflict—Russia will begin to establish those security arrangements, and it will need to do so with Europe as well.

There's, I think, no question that Russia would like to see with Europe the kind of relations it has established with China, with Vietnam, with India—confidential, privileged relationships of mutual benefit that leave aside, or do not engage at all, issues of ideology and values, which are axiological issues not well suited to any form of negotiation. After all, if I know that you are evil, why should I even tolerate your existence? I shouldn't. And that is the antithesis of diplomacy. But again, I take comfort in the fact that no one lasts forever, and political—political dynasties that exist do not last forever.

We've had in Germany a political dynasty—this dynasty known as the Große Koalition, the Great Coalition—SPD and CDU. What, three, four decades, essentially, with minor parties sort of revolving around them. But now, by the end of 2025, the most popular party in Germany is the AfD. It's no longer either the CDU, the Christian Democratic Union, or the Social Democrats. In a democracy, which Germany considers itself, this has to have political consequences. And while we cannot speculate very knowledgeably about the nature of those political consequences, it will be a departure from the status quo we have today. Other analysts of Europe look at major actors—France in particular, and Germany. One could include Italy because of some influential members of the coalition who are much more skeptical of the EU's Ukraine policy than the current prime minister, Giorgia Meloni.

In Britain, you hear different things. I'm not—I don't follow domestic British politics that much—but apparently Starmer is not all that popular. And the nature of parliamentary systems is that they can change much more rapidly than the kind of static republican institutions the United States has. So, whereas in the United States we're stuck with the Trump administration for several more years, even if the House should fall to the Democrats, the executive power—particularly as exercised by this president—has shown itself to be very aggressive and very assertive. So I have no doubt he will continue to advance Trump's isolationist political agenda of making America first in his priorities. In Europe, we could have a sudden cascade, I think, of political changes, at which point the issue of what to do with Ukraine will be secondary to many.

At the end of this process, it will become much easier than it has been to date—and we've already seen the pattern—shifting toward an abandonment of Ukraine, financially as well as militarily. It's another recurrence of the famous "Ukraine fatigue" that Western leaders constantly referred to in the early 2000s: the hope that Ukraine would transform itself, and yet the disappointment that it has not succeeded in doing so and falls back into its usual patterns. I think we're likely to see Europe come to that point as well, although at what point, I don't know. But I anticipate that, given the shortfall of funds in Europe, it's likely to be not in the distant future but in the next year or two that we'll see significant shifts in European policy toward Ukraine.

#Glenn

Well, thanks for sharing your insights. Yeah, I don't see any good scenarios after Ukraine begins to fall apart—either in Ukraine or in wider Europe. Of course, if there were some lessons to be learned, then something good could come from this. But to assume that the conflict will be over when the war ends, I think that's an assumption worth challenging. So thank you very much for taking the time.

#Nicolai Petro

And Happy New Year to you and all your listeners. Happy New Year!