

Alastair Crooke: Ukraine Proxy War Enters Dangerous New Phase

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#Glenn

Hi, everyone, and welcome back. Today, we are joined again by Alistair Crooke, a former British diplomat and renowned expert on the Middle East. And as always, I can't recommend his Substack enough, the Conflicts Forum, for the best insights into what is happening around the world, especially the Middle East, but also the conflicts we have in Europe. So make sure to check it out. It's in the description. So thank you for coming back on the program.

#Alastair Crooke

My pleasure. Always good to talk with you.

#Glenn

So you are a former diplomat and a negotiator, and you travel not just to the Middle East a lot. You travel between Europe and Russia as well. Indeed, you just got back from Moscow a few days ago, or a week ago. And I've been looking forward to getting your take on what is happening now. That is, how do you assess what's happening in Europe first? There seems to be somewhat of a panic about the direction of the war with Russia, but also their place in the world. And then, I guess, what do you see in Europe? And also, what do you see in Russia? Because the situation now appears to have changed, or the mood appears to have changed, at least, on both sides of this conflict.

#Alastair Crooke

Okay, well, I'll flesh it out a bit, if I may. I'd like to just say, first of all, because as I mentioned to you just before we started, we went to Siberia, first of all. I think this wasn't just a tourist trip. It was basically because, you know, I realized that, to many of us, myself included, we've tended to

sort of see Russia through the prism of Moscow and St. Petersburg. But beyond that, there's this huge expanse to the east. Not only is there a huge and very different landscape, but it's a different world in many respects. People speak different languages. They were speaking Buryat, Altai languages, which are not just, if you like, forms of Russian, like Ukrainian is a sort of derivative of Russian. These are derived more from Turkic-Mongol languages.

So they speak different languages, and also the culture is quite different. The nomadic culture stays on. The impact of the Mongols is still very present today. I mean, many of the people there still admire him and believe he is the founder of Russia or China and Iraq, and that he founded these states and he implemented the administrative structures that finally, if you like, Russia sort of took over from the 18th century. But, you know, the culture is very strong, and so is the religion coming in from Tibet, Buddhism from Tibet. It's very pronounced. But paradoxically, the Buddhism from Tibet seems to have largely been absorbed by shamanism. Shamanism is present. You see shamanic flags across the area. Yes, there are Russians there, there's Orthodox Christianity, but overall, it's a different world.

And I say that because, you know, you have to—we have to understand Russia in this way, that it is—it's no coincidence that the Russian eagle faces east and west. And it's in a process of transition. And the work is still in progress to, I think, to really bring these other cultures and other ethnicities together, fully into being, or see to it that they see themselves fully as Russian. Because I don't want to suggest an antagonism or a tension. It's not like the tension that there has been with parts of Islam from the Chechen wars. It's nothing like that. But it is another dimension. And Russia as a whole is their policy, and that is that: to try and bring in these elements into Russia as a whole, to sort of feed and enlarge and to provide nourishment to what it is to be a Russian today. So that was very interesting.

In practical terms, I should just say, you know, that traveling around from those three extremes, because it's a far distance from, you know, I don't know, several—you know, just to fly to the end of Siberia is, you know, sort of something like a six-hour flight and five hours' difference from Moscow. But I would say that, having done a lot of driving in the practical sense, you've seen all these attacks on refineries in Russia by Ukraine, and the West talks about the queues and problems, and I would say that's just not true. I mean, having been across the country, I would say there were no queues at petrol stations except in one place, Novosibirsk. And there we did come across quite large queues to fill up cars. But I think there was more of a distribution problem. It wasn't a sort of strategic problem. It was just because everywhere else there was no problem.

There were no queues. There was no waiting. You just went and filled the car. But in Novosibirsk there were problems. I think it was very much a local problem. But you don't see that. And, yes, I mean, prices are rising, but the economy is really stable. As you know, elections have just been held, and they turned out more or less probably as you and many of us would have expected. I mean, in the sense that the size and proportions of the various parties were fairly predictable from what we know about those parties and what we know about the sort of popularity of those parties

on the ground. No one disruption, no one protest, except, of course, Ukraine itself fired 2,000 missiles in the last day of the elections—missiles and drones, a combination, mostly drones, a few, two, I think, missiles included in it—in an attempt to disrupt the elections.

And in fact, it failed completely. I don't think Larry Johnson was there and didn't even notice anything. I mean, he slept through it, and I don't think anyone noticed it. And equally, we were there when drones were being fired on the first day I arrived. Going back to Moscow from Siberia, there were drones being fired from Ukraine. But it's almost become routine. What happened was, you know, they said, well, temporarily the airport is just shut. And I asked the crew what happens, and they said, oh, look, all we do is we go into a holding pattern. And we'll be in a holding pattern for an hour or perhaps a bit longer.

And then when the airport gives us the green light, we'll land. We, in fact, actually landed at Kazan and stayed there on the ground for about an hour, and then flew and landed in Moscow without problem. There was no—I mean, it wasn't really—it didn't feel much different from congestion. You know, when you try and land at Heathrow or something like that, you're put in a holding pattern for quite a long time before you're allowed to land. And it was treated more or less like that. They weren't the slightest bit—because it wasn't, you know, this was an internal airline, not a big airline—and they just handled it as very normal. So I would say, you know, the country's stable. You ask, what is the mood like? I think the mood has changed quite considerably.

And we also were given dinner by Sergey Lavrov, our minister, at his residence, just a private dinner of about three hours, which was very interesting and very informative. Of course, Lavrov is the consummate diplomat, absolutely a model of diplomacy, professional diplomacy. So he doesn't usually sort of completely break confidences and talk about things like that with no restrictions, but you can read quite a lot into what he says. And I think one of the things that came very clearly across was the sense that there's not really much—there is really no point in talking or having discussions with the United States, Americans, and absolutely no point in talking to the Europeans. He was very clear about that. I think that this has changed particularly this sort of sense, changing the whole sort of idea of BRICS and multipolarity.

I did write a bit about that. In fact, I was writing about it just recently. I don't know if it's up yet on the Substack, but it will be if it isn't. But in the sense, you know, the reading of the United States—and this is not Lavrov that I'm quoting, but just sort of generally—the reading of the United States is, you know, that the whole, you know, common element of some sort of legal basis, norms, morality, moral values, civilizational inheritance, the reference of a head of a civilization, has all disappeared. Trumpism is coercion. Coercion, whether it's in sanctions and tariffs, coercion whether it is in terms of sustaining the dollar hegemony, or whether it is just overt coercion by striking countries such as Iran with annihilation.

So that all the values, all of the basis of a multipolar world have really been subsumed by a Trumpism that really condones destroying countries economically, destroying them by an air assault,

or even going further and annihilating them altogether. And so there is a difficulty here about—therefore it imposes, you know—there's, I mean, that sort of... that world order is gone. So what is the role of multipolarity? Well, it seems to me, from current reckoning, that multipolarity cannot exist where there is such a hostile atmosphere towards civilizational sovereign states, which are dismissed or, if you like, met with extreme hostility. There isn't very much conversation, and therefore, if you like, if there is a sort of concept of a more civilizational path, it's largely going to be defensive, and it's largely going to be a structure which is deterrent and defensive.

I mean, the immediate obvious one, it is very easy to create a bypass to the dollar hegemony and a sort of payment system and a structure there. And that is what I think we're seeing, and probably, for the moment, the most one can expect of multipolarity. I don't think multipolarity is going to become a sort of a very active political structure on the ground. I mean, in the sense to be proactive, taking strong positions, partly because, you know, there are different states involved in them, and they are trying to sort of, I think rather awkwardly at the moment, try and keep a foot in all camps. And we know who those are, but I mean, that's the reality of this moment. So how do we move on to a new world order?

I think with great difficulty. I don't think we can just slip across to it as easily as that. I think it's going to be very fraught and probably quite destructive. And so, I don't see a huge evolution taking place until either a financial crisis changes the paradigm in the West or a political crisis changes the paradigm in the West. Maybe that's going to happen sooner than we expect. I mean, we've all seen the elections in Germany recently. I mean, certainly it seems that things are happening. We all understand that there are forces and thoughts in play in America that may change, in the aftermath of the election, the American political scenario. But I don't think until something like that happens, we're going to see a big change.

Otherwise, you know, what would be the message coming out of Russia? I would think stability. They will continue with the special military operation. It's moving ahead. I think the elections there bear out that the idea of a failing, and that there's a reaction of the public against Putin or the government, is completely unfounded by those results and by everything you see on the ground. So I think stability and consolidation, continuance of the Russian transition. And that transition I'm talking about is the sort of sense of bringing together and continuing to bring together all of the components, parts, not because they are fractured and at odds, but it's just because, as I say, it has to be a continuing work in progress for any state to sort of bring the components of it back together.

Someone used a very good phrase for what Russia's posture is now. And he was suggesting the posture is one of actually a restraint, of trying to stop things deteriorating badly and suddenly. A posture largely shared with China about understanding the dangers of the present situation, and thinking of this as a *katechon*, that word which implies a sort of restraint on the possibility of a severe negative force taking control of the world. So I'm sorry to take so long, but that's the best I can describe it. I mean, there's lots more details, but that's the overall pattern.

#Glenn

Yeah, I did have a comment on what you said about Genghis Khan. That is, you know, from the '90s, when the Russians kept developing and they were looking to— all their main strategic objective was to integrate into this common European home, or Greater Europe. They found themselves on the dual periphery of both Europe and East Asia, which were the two main economic centers on the Eurasian continent. And this was seen as problematic. But after 2014, when it became obvious that there would be no common Europe, that it would be redivided, this Greater Eurasian project began to get more steam. And it is interesting then, because then they saw Russia's role essentially as connecting Greater Eurasia.

And from this view, historical figures like Genghis Khan, they kind of changed a bit in the Russian narrative as well, because... you know, if you listen to some of the Ukrainian nationalists, this is essentially what's different between the Ukrainians and the Russians: that they lived under Genghis Khan, that they're not really European, that they're Asiatics, you know, these kind of things. And in the past, I think you could hear some of this in the Russian rhetoric, you know, distancing themselves from that history. But now it's interesting. Now you hear more arguments that Russia should be seen as the successor, right? Because they are essentially reconnecting the Eurasian landmass.

They are much like the Mongols administered the ancient Silk Road. This is the destiny for Russia as well. So it is interesting how that rhetoric has shifted there. I don't want to get sidetracked, but I just want to ask about the issue you said about morals, because you said the Russians, or you can add the Chinese in that same category, have been taken a little bit aback by the rhetoric about destroying entire nations, the eagerness for war. Again, you can put Europeans in this category too, but how do you make sense of this? Because, you know, from the 1990s on, especially, we saw that the political West was defined very much by common values.

The idea was also to implement more morality in politics. But at the same time, I think we saw when morality is linked to certain politics, it made the positions more uncompromising, and where the understanding for perspectives of the opponent, which is the immoral one, would be then more difficult. I was just wondering, well, not to overcomplicate the question, but how do you see this shift in morals? How we went from defining ourselves, our common identity being liberal democracy, to now calling for the destruction of nations, criminalizing diplomacy, just dehumanizing opponents. How do you make sense of this? Because it happened very quickly.

#Alastair Crooke

Yeah, I just want to quickly make a comment. I don't think there was, you know, there was not an overemphasis, because we were spending time with people whose grandfathers were nomads and, you know, were very familiar. I don't think Genghis Khan is sort of seen in the way Westerners see him. He is seen as an administrator. He was a great success administratively in creating states. And

so they don't see him in that sort of aggressive, negative thing. And also because they take from the fact that he was a shaman and that he brought him an advisor from China, a Taoist advisor, for most of the time. So they have quite a different sort of leaning on that. Some in the West, you know, find it a big difficulty, or Asianism. There's still, I mean, you know, St. Petersburg is no longer part of the West.

I mean, it's the journey. You know, it is the two-headed eagle facing both ways. So, and I think that's working, and they are putting a lot of effort into it. So I don't think this identity, either in the East or West, was a great issue. The identity is not completely resolved, but it's getting there. It's in a state of resolution. What's happened to the West is, I mean, this is something that is very hard to see. I mean, I think there have been various influences that have changed it. I did a talk in which I really pointed out that we in the West have lost so much of our founding narratives, the narratives by which we live and by which we understand moral questions. You know, if you like, the Homeric world has gone completely.

And at the same time, something has happened. And I think it'll be for historians to try and sort it out. But, you know, I mean, originally, America was a millennial project. I mean, a messianic almost performance, you know, a light to other nations, the city on the hill, all of this to try and sort of bring about a new paradigm for humanity. And then sometime, I don't know exactly, but around 9 /11-ish, I'm not committing it to that, but around about that time, it became very Manichaeism. It lost that sort of redemptive element to it. And we would see Biden sort of standing, you know, in front of Liberty Hall with a sort of red background, talking about light and dark, good and evil, and that Russia was just evil and America was good.

And it has become an intolerant Manichaeism, so that people who don't observe our definition of the good, which is no longer the good as would have been understood by a pre-Socratic or an ancient as being what is the good, which would be much more in terms of light and dark, and not absolute evil and good. I think that has brought about this change. Exactly why it suddenly became so Manichaeism, where these influences came from, I don't know. But I'd like to just say the other thing that came across very much from the Prime Minister's discussion, which was something I raised many times during this visit, was about the Europeans and their continual talk of war, war, war. I mean, I come back and I find it's gone much further than before I left, so that you have, it's obviously following some sort of meeting or something, a concerted messaging going around Europe.

You've probably heard it. I mean, the British people have been told to stock up in bottled water and tins for the war that's coming. There are messages out there, videos sort of suggesting they need to, you know, prepare, and the pictures in Europe of young people dressed in military uniform and suggesting that this is where they need to look. There are talk shows that come on that are saying, "Very shortly, we will be at war, and you need to prepare for this. And many of you are going to die in this. And this is the duty. This is your duty. You're going to have to be ready to die to preserve our freedoms." And I'm just so astonished by this.

I mean, really astonished. And I wonder who is behind it. I mean, because it makes no sense, no sense at all. Europe doesn't have the manpower mobilized. It doesn't have the military means. It doesn't even have the beginnings of a supply line. I mean, just because Volkswagen is going to switch to turning out tanks, old tanks that have proved to be ineffective, and to fill up that, to make some sort of employment with the large numbers that have been sacked, doesn't constitute a military buildup. I mean, it takes a decade to do that. And I don't think there's a culture, and I don't think there's a political will amongst the people. So what is going on? Who is pushing us?

And I mean, it could be—you can explain it, or I suggested that it could be thought of that actually, because the European elites have made so many wrong decisions in this period, and now... they have not prepared anyone. It's been off the headlines in the newspapers. You don't hear about the economic, the energy crisis that's coming. They've left it until it's here. And it's no longer coming. It's come. And diesel is in short supply. The French are now having to queue up to get their cars and their trucks filled. It's clearly going to come. And the prices of diesel and of gasoline are going up, as it is everywhere. And no one's been prepared for it. So it's coming as, you know, a cliff. You know, suddenly you go off the cliff.

And prices are there, and there may be some sort of rush for gasoline or diesel, because it's going to get worse, I believe, much worse, and perhaps last right through next year, the shortage, because it's a sort of structural shortage now. It's not just a, oh, you know, oh, the flow is shut off. Let's turn on the tap, and then the flow will be back and everything will be normal. It has now become a structural question. And I ask myself, you know, it hasn't happened out of the blue. I mean, literally, the Europeans have all together, all at once, stuck to the same talking notes, the talking point.

And you see that group of eight, I forget what they're called, the European Eight, suddenly being photographed appearing after their conference all wearing camouflage jackets. Well, they look very stupid. Someone is behind this, or some force or some political impulse is behind it, and Trump is not doing anything to stop it. On the contrary, I mean, first of all, he goes and then he complains, "Well, actually, the diesel crisis has nothing to do with Iran and the war on Iran or Hormuz or the Red Sea. It's all about Putin and the refineries in Ukraine." And so what does he say? "Well, listen, I told Zelensky, you know, these are the targets, but not the refineries."

That's hardly telling the Europeans to pull back. That says, go on attacking other targets, but don't hit the refineries so much because it could affect my standing in the midterm elections. So who is pushing us so hard and pushing Europeans to talk war when they don't have the capacity for war? And I don't find there's any answer to this. It seems that the Americans are not going to stop it, as they could. I don't believe you have all these European nations suddenly coming up with the same talking points. You know, you must go and buy water and things. It's obviously a scare project. But to what end? Just simply to divert from the crisis the European elites are passing through? Or is it something else?

I think we have to look very carefully behind the scenes, and we'll try and work out what exactly it is. But the Russians have to take it seriously. I mean, they're aware of the shit coming today. But they hear this endlessness and all these people talking about war, war, war. And so, you know, they can't say, well, we're just paying attention, and ignore it. So they're preparing, and they're preparing for it. And I think if this continues, these attacks, I mean, before the attacks on Moscow this last week, I mean, Zelensky actually listed all the drones and the missiles he'd been given by the Europeans. You know, Storm Shadow, and I would recognize most of the names of the drones and missiles that were used in this.

#Alastair Crooke

But that opens some other questions.

#Alastair Crooke

Why is it in either the American or the European interest to attempt to disrupt the election in Russia? What was the point of that? Why do they want to disrupt it? Did they think that this would somehow be damaging to Putin? Why disrupt an election? What is this? How does this fit in, in the general sort of plans of the other elements of pressure being put on Russia now? As you can see, it escalated across the board. Trump received from Congress the sanctions-from-hell bill, and he signed it the same day. You know, I thought maybe that would be, you know, put aside and say, well, you know, if something doesn't happen, then maybe I'll sign that bill.

No, he signed it straight away, and shortly after, a major Russian bank was sanctioned. Now, Russia is being threatened because you allow an Iranian plane to land. You and China and everyone else will then face secondary sanctions also. So, attacks on the elections, attacks on the financial system, attacks on Putin personally. I was just listening a little bit earlier to the language coming from the British representative at the UN General Assembly. And they were saying, and he was saying, you know, tell Putin the war has failed. He's failed. We can all see it's failed. There's no doubt that it's failed. And, I mean, this was, you know, extraordinary language that was being used at the General Assembly.

So my question really to you, and just put out there, is: something is going on, and it's not clear what or who or what sort of power is necessarily behind it, but it's clearly one that is concerted. I mean, it's not really in Trump's interest to escalate the war against Russia, I don't think, ahead of elections. I don't think it is particularly in Trump's interest to really heat up the financial war against the world by more sanctions and more pressure. All of these are coercive measures, which goes back to my point about what's the point of a global order? Because there's no point in having a global order if you can't even reach the most basic rules of law. If all the rules are overthrown, can there be a global order? And so I think, looking at all of this, Russia can only prepare for escalation and further conflict.

#Glenn

Well, I was a bit taken aback, as you said, about these changes in the media and the rhetoric from the politicians. Because not that long ago, the talking point which all the European leaders were reading from was essentially, well, this isn't our war. This is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Now, a few days ago, I saw this video, let's call it a propaganda video by NATO, where they went on about what this alliance is. So it's about freedom and stability for all these decades, kept us safe. And "Slava Ukraini," they started to chant. And I was like, whoa, has this been integrated now, these OUN slogans, into NATO? And it suddenly takes on a very warlike posture. And then you look in the British media. I thought the best example would be this video posted by Jacob Rees-Mogg, where he essentially says, well, no, well.

Now it's, you know, dying for Russia and dying to fight the Russians. Well, he did mention Russia, but dying for Britain is now your duty. And also Robert Fico, he, you know, because he said, is this simply to divert attention away from everything that's going wrong? And that was his explicit argument. That is the prime minister of Slovakia. Fico was saying, well, the European leaders want to distract from the disasters at home by provoking war with Russia. I mean, when you hear this language from a prime minister, you should be concerned. But also, the narrative in other areas is shifting. For so long, we've told them that the Ukrainians are hardly losing men. You know, they have lost like 30,000 people in the first four years. It's something ridiculous. I can't remember what it was.

Now we saw the Prime Minister of Poland, Tusk, went out and said, oh, the Ukrainians are taking 27,000 casualties a month. So just something is happening, as you say. They're building up. This is not coincidence. They're all starting now, chanting the same things, identical. But just as a last question, though, how are the Russians responding to this? Because I've seen some comments from Lavrov and Putin where they say, listen, we don't have any plans to go to war with Europe, but if you attack us, that will be a very short and different kind of war. So they're kind of putting that out there, that we will hit back in a big way, but we're not the ones going on the offensive here. But are they, besides the rhetoric, are they preparing for war? I mean, are they bringing out the Oreshniks from storage? I mean, what are you seeing here?

#Alastair Crooke

Well, I think two things. And one of the messages that I think Lavrov wanted to give to our group at the dinner, he was very adamant about saying how much they respected Mr. Trump's efforts to bring about peace in the conflict, that they were always ready to talk, and that they, you know, were always ready to deal with it. No, I think that was, you know, window dressing from a consummate diplomat. I mean, I don't think he thinks that there's any point in talking to the Americans at all at this point. So what was the point he had been making? I mean, what he's trying to convey, I think, is Russia is no threat to America or to Europe.

It has no ambitions. It is not threatening them in any way. And so I think it was not to be taken sort of literally that, you know, he expects a solution to emerge from talks with Witkoff or Kushner, quite the converse. But it was a message to say very clearly, you know, multipolarity is no threat. Russia is not threatening. If there is a threat, it is one that is coming out of Europe and is being propounded by European leaders for their own self-serving interests, whatever they may be. And yes, Russia is preparing against the expectation that there will be some escalation after November or before it or whatever.

And that's why this sort of expression in the Pentagon sort of came, the sort of Russia's willingness to sort of, or Putin's willingness to find the ways to sort of hold back, to pull these destructive forces that seem to be being unleashed that could become very dangerous. Indeed, how to modify it, how to keep it under control. And so, I mean, there's a limit to what you can do with that. I mean, don't misunderstand it. I think they understand there is a limit to what they're doing. They're seeing everything heating up at once, you know, the Ukraine conflict. And then, you know, I mean, what I just described, you should watch what—I mean, here we are at this stage, and the British representative to the General Assembly said, "You failed. You need to understand. Everyone knows you failed."

You failed. You failed. I mean, something is directing us to make such absurd statements because, of course, everyone understands. Everyone who follows these things understands. At the moment, it's Ukraine on the cusp of the precipice with all that Russia has been doing in these last months. Not Russia. Russia is prosperous and stable and not harboring any sort of hostile ambitions against anyone. So, you know, again, I just keep coming back to this question that there is, um, behind it all, because it does seem that the two things are being pushed by the same people: war on Iran, war on Russia. Why are we, you know, the war on Iran again seems, you know, absurd unless looked at through one particular vision, the vision coming from Israel. Let's call the rest.

It doesn't seem that the war on Iran was either a sensible or morally correct action to have taken. And now the escalation against Russia, sanctions from hell, more pressure, all of these actions—and just the language against Putin. I mean, you know, the loss of all those sort of diplomatic standards. You don't expect language like that in the General Assembly, addressing all the other states from a representative of a medium-sized power. You don't expect them to go, you know, insulting President Xi or Putin like that. This is the language of the gutter, really, not the language of diplomacy. Again, it underlines all this seems to be being pushed aside at the moment for other objectives.

#Glenn

Well, if you think the war is—well, at least here I see in Scandinavia that the rhetoric in the media now and from some politicians is that war could be coming because Russia is losing. And because they're losing, they might do something crazy. But of course, that is nonsense. Anyone who's following the war knows that this is nonsense. But on the other hand, if they would admit that Russia's winning the war, then the logical policy for the Russians would be to keep NATO calm as

Ukraine falls apart. And this would be consistent with some of the rhetoric coming from the likes of Lavrov and Putin. But again, if it's going wrong for NATO and Ukraine, it would make sense if they would do something crazy, but then blame it on Russian hybrid war or something. Last question: do you see this, though, something cracking on NATO's front line or in Ukraine?

#Glenn

Is something going wrong here? Because, well, certainly the relative benefit of Russia's strength keeps on growing. But do you see the Ukrainians being able to hold on for much longer? And, you know, let's call it the handlers in the West, the ones who are financing all of this.

#Alastair Crooke

No, I don't. And I mean, I think, you know, the fractures are very clearly there. I mean, winter is coming, and it's not just the energy. It's also the destruction of gasoline, gas stations. It's also the 50 locomotives that have been destroyed, the trains, the logistics, the energy, the structures, the warehouses. The 90% of the former head of Ukrainian intelligence and 90% of the logistics in Kiev is gone. So I think it is serious. And I think the other aspect which we haven't touched on and haven't time for, but nonetheless is very important, is the economy—the economy, that the bond market is cracking. And I think that, you know, Western leaders are getting desperate. They tried to avoid allowing this even to appear in the press, to be taken seriously.

No preparations done, no psychological preparation for the people to say, you know, this is coming. But this is—I mean, nothing has been prepared, so it's going to hit much, much harder than it need be, if a little preparation, psychological preparation, had been done beforehand. But it hasn't. So I think, yes, it's possible someone will do something stupid, whether it's about Iran or whether it's about Russia. And it seems that we have no visible control over that. I mean, nor does Congress seemingly have any ability to really define that. What are American interests and what is American foreign policy? It seems to be defined somewhere else. And that is a very worrying sort of conclusion to come to, because you can't see exactly what the end game is. If you claim what the end game is for Iran, where is this leading? Big questions.

#Glenn

Well, thank you for taking the time and sharing your insights from your trip to Russia. Very much appreciated, and I hope to see you again soon.

#Alastair Crooke

Thank you very much. All the best to you.

#Alastair Crooke

Thank you.