

Trump's Russia Strategy Will Soon Be Obvious

Ray McGovern was a CIA officer for 27, he chaired the National Intelligence Estimates and prepared the CIA's Presidential Daily Briefs. McGovern discusses why the strategic ambiguity of Trump will soon come to an end. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X /Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back to the program. Today we're joined by our dear friend Ray McGovern, who was a CIA officer for 27 years. He prepared the President's Daily Briefs and chaired the National Intelligence Estimates. So thank you, as always, for taking the time. Thank you, Glenn. So, there's been a huge development that changes the entire dynamic between Ukraine, Russia, the EU, and the United States. It seems like the new year is getting off to a pretty rocky start, and this may mean the whole war could be heading in a different direction. We might learn more about the real possibility of changing relations between the United States and Russia. I was wondering—what do you make of all this news coming in?

#Ray McGovern

Well, Glenn, you know Russian, and you probably remember that Lenin himself said, "Революция проходит зигзагами." I don't know where they got the instrumental plural there for "zigzag." But not only does the revolution proceed in zigzags—President Putin's, I'm sorry, President Trump's policies and actions proceed in zigzags to a fault. Now, maybe it's good to go back to the beginning since we're starting a new year. This time last year, the Biden regime had been pretty much put aside by the Russians. Not only was it—well, you know the word договор, it's an agreement, or more formally, a treaty, okay? Способный means "able." So the Russians were saying that Biden's regime is недоговороспособный—unable to come to an agreement on anything. And that was, of course, true in spades.

They were also saying—and you saw this less frequently—разговор means "conversation." So, no разговороспособный: they weren't even capable of carrying on a discussion. There were no contacts between our diplomats. It was really pretty bad. And we had Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, just last week saying we were damn close—the closest we've been in a while—to nuclear war in the last months of the Biden administration. So it's not just people like us or Scott Ritter; the

Russians were afraid of that too. So here comes a new president. Would he be president? Would he be able to take on a conference? Oh yeah, he is. As a matter of fact, he'll talk forever. He's talked to Putin, I think, nine times now. And Ryabkov has talked to him for several hours, several times as well.

So he's willing to talk, but here's the big thing—this is what I'm trying to get at. Is he able to make an agreement? Let's assume he wants to make one. Is he able? Is he his own man? Now, for the last several months, it's been zigzagging par excellence. First he's his own man, and then General Kellogg tells him, "No, the Ukrainians can still win, and the Russian economy has fallen apart." So President Trump says that, then it takes him a couple of months to realize he's been really poorly informed. He pushes Kellogg aside and opts for negotiators he trusts. And, you know, if you just take the month of October, it's really interesting, because they talk—that is, Trump and Putin talk—on October 16th.

And Zelensky is due in Washington the next day. And clearly, Putin says, "Look, forget about those Tomahawks. Don't give him those Tomahawks. That would be really bad." So the next day, Trump says, "Hey, Zelensky, no Tomahawks. You understand that? No Tomahawks." Whoa. Then Trump says, "And we're going to talk—my secretary of state, Rubio, is going to talk with Lavrov on Monday." Well, what happens on Monday? They seem to have a fairly decent conversation. But then, all of a sudden, out of the blue, Trump imposes those bone-crushing sanctions on Lukoil and Rosneft, the major Russian oil companies. And there's hell to pay, you know. And then Trump says, "Look, I talked about a new summit in Budapest. Forget about it."

We're not going to do that. So what was the reason for all that—for that zig or zag? It was the really strong heat that Trump took for denying Zelensky those weapons, those Tomahawks, and also for saying, "Yeah, we're going to have another summit." So the summit was postponed. Now, on the same day—and this is illustrative—on the same day that the new sanctions were put in against Russian oil and other things, Putin was asked what he thought. Actually, it was two days later, and he said, "Well, you know, the Europeans are putting in sanctions now, and, you know, they sell us toilet bowls, and we sell them toilet bowls, and, you know, it's going to be an awfully dumb move for them, because if they don't change their policy, they're going to need every toilet bowl that we can sell them, okay?"

Sort of a little laughter there. And then what happens? He sends one of his right-hand men, Dmitriev, to Florida to work with Witkoff and Jared Kushner and come up with some kind of reasonable deal—which we know was really drafted by Dmitriev in Florida. We know that from an intercepted conversation, for God's sake. And that was what—there were some amendments. Umerov, the Ukrainian, was there as well. That's what was taken to that five-hour-plus meeting with Putin by Witkoff and Jared Kushner. Now, Putin himself was asked, "Five hours?" He said, "Yeah, that was—oh, this is a quote—oh, that was much too long. Yeah. But it was worth it." So again, this is a quote, because we addressed most of those 28 points individually.

It took a long time, but we made some progress. Okay, so it was really worth it. So now what happens? Well, these guys come home, and there's a reaction again. And what next? Well, then we have Putin saying, "Well, look, maybe I ought to appear in uniform, in my fatigues, and tell the president—tell the world—that we have 10,500 Ukrainian soldiers surrounded on the front line. We don't want to kill them all. Don't kill them all. Make sure you give them a chance to surrender. And also, we have this new weapon." "Now, tell me about this new weapon," he says to the chief of staff. So Gerasimov says, "Oh, well, this is really something, you know."

It can fly forever. It's a cruise missile, and it can go to the South Pole. And how long can it stay up there? I suppose you know what it is. So what Putin was saying is, look, don't fool around here—we've got the strategic advantages as well as all the other things. So next thing you know, Ushakov is making comments. But the most recent set of events here is this drone swarm against the president's place near Valdai, which is about halfway between—well, you know this, Glenn, you've been there—between Moscow and, I was going to say Leningrad, St. Petersburg. And there's no doubt now that there was a volley of Ukrainian drones, because the CIA admits it.

But the CIA says, very oddly, "Oh yeah, but it wasn't aimed at the president's residence. No, it was aimed at something else, some military thing in it." Whoa! So it was real enough, okay? And now the Russians have given us parts of these missiles. Big ceremony yesterday—it was on Russian TV. They're probably in Washington now, having been transported by the defense attaché. And if Trump is given solid intelligence, I think it's 90% sure that these parts from these drones will show not only that they contained NATO-sophisticated components, but that they were targeted on the House of Putin. Now, here comes the nexus—this is the denouement.

Here's Putin. I'm trying to put myself in Putin's place. Oh, so—do the Americans know what happened? I mean, with all their sophisticated systems, do they have the technical means? Do they know what happened? Yes, sir, of course they do. Oh. So why did Trump sort of renege on saying, "Well, he believed me when I talked to him," says Putin. We don't know. Okay, well, will the Americans take these parts and be able to give them to honest analysts so they can say what was in them? That was sophisticated technology that the U.S. and NATO have—or maybe just the U.S., my God, or NATO. Will they be able to do that? Well, we don't know, Mr. Trump, because the CIA is also feeding the New York Times, as they usually do, with CIA assessments that don't agree with what we have in the coordinates.

So let me rehash, says Putin. The Americans know what really happened, right? Yes, sir. The Americans now have proof of how these things were guided, and that they were guided on the House. Yes, sir. But you don't know whether the Americans will tell Trump the truth. No, we don't know that. And if they tell Trump the truth, we don't know whether Trump will be honest, right? Yes, we don't know. So, if I'm Putin and I see all these zigzags, okay, I say, well, all right, we thought we had something good going. Even after the attack on the house near Valdai, I asked Lavrov to get up and bemoan it, but he also said—because I told him to—despite this attack, we have no intention of withdrawing from negotiations with the United States.

So, this is the main point here. The Russians, all throughout this past year, have shown that they—at least in my view, not everyone agrees—say and act in ways that indicate to me their main objective, their big umbrella goal, is to get a better relationship with the United States. Now, why? Well, some things are pretty simple. I look at Putin—he's brought his country back from disaster. What he inherited was disaster, plunder, and everything else from the West. He got them back on track, and his armed forces are second to none. Is he going to risk a nuclear war and have all this destroyed? No. Is he a sensible guy? In my opinion, yes. Does he want to take over the rest of the world?

No. Rest of Western Europe? No. Rest of Europe? No. Okay. So here he is with this priority objective—not to bother Trump to the point where he might irascibly go off and do something stupid. Handle him with kid gloves because, well, because he's a delusional narcissist, for God's sake. You're dealing with somebody—you have to deal with Trump, says Putin, the way porcupines mate in the forest: very, very carefully, okay? And that's what he's been doing. But now comes the crunch. And I agree with those who say that Putin has to be under considerable pressure from those within the Kremlin and elsewhere who are saying, how much of this stuff are you going to take from NATO and from the United States?

I think—it's just a guess—that as this thing comes out, it will reveal that there was NATO technology involved in these drones, that it wasn't necessarily U.S. proprietary technology, and that Putin will once again try to separate relations between the United States and Russia, and negotiations themselves between the United States and Russia, from the hapless Europeans who will finally have to realize they have no cards in this game. They have no money. They have no troops. And waiting for U.S. weaponry, which they can't even pay for, is a fool's errand. So I think that Putin—and this is a guess—will continue to say, well, we don't have to do anything drastic. We'll retaliate. We'll do a one-for-one in Ukraine.

We have these Oreshniks. But let's keep in mind that our priority is to avoid anything that might lead to a nuclear war, which we came to the verge of today, at the end of Biden's regime. So, with all these hints that Trump is not his own man, let's hope—if we can't have an expectation—let's just hope that this will move him to act against the people he knows tried to sabotage his last term in office, the ones who did sabotage it. And that's the last thing I'll say. We have people like James Comey, who resorted to all kinds of illegal and extralegal things to stop Trump from becoming president, and then, after he became president, was responsible for this whole Russiagate thing. Okay. Now, what about James Comey?

Well, Trump—I mean, his lawyer—she's very pretty, very, very pretty. I don't deny that. But she doesn't have a brain in her head, because she screwed up with the grand jury. And now it looks like Comey is going to go free. How does Putin look at that? How about John Brennan? Will he ever be brought to justice? So Putin is looking at all this and saying, these guys are still around. Are they still powerful enough to make Trump know that he's not his own man? And let's say this will be the acid

test. And I cheated—this is the last thing I’m going to say right now. On September 22nd of last year, 2025, Putin personally made an overture to the United States—a very simple one. We have the New START treaty expiring on February 5th, so exactly one month from now, almost, okay?

Back in September, he said, “We Russians would be willing to keep the quantitative limits on offensive missiles if you do the same for another year. A yes or no—simple, no more negotiations. New START is dead. You can’t renew it, but at least we can keep the same quantitative limits.” I think it’s 1,550 on these weapons. Well, that was September 22nd. What has Trump said? Two weeks later, he’s asked by a journalist, “What do you think of that?” He said, “It sounds like a good idea to me.” The Russians have been pressing publicly as well as through their private channels: “Could you give us something a little more official, Mr. Trump? I mean, it’s really easy—we just need a yes or no.” One Russian official even said, “Yeah, we’ll take an oral promise, as long as you don’t…”

We can verify these things as long as you stick to the quantitative limits. Trump can’t do that—he’s got a month left. That’s as much an acid test, or a litmus test, I’d say, as anything else. And if I were Putin, I’d look at this and say, well, you know, if he can’t give me a yes or no on this crucial arms control issue—the only treaty we have left, for God’s sake—and it expires in February, if he can’t say more than “sounds like a good idea to me,” if he can’t agree to it by simply saying yes, well, that shows nothing. That shows, among other things, that he’s not his own man, and that we’ll just have to develop accordingly—do our thing in Ukraine, finish that job off—without any real expectation that Trump, or Witkoff, or even Jared Kushner could, as we’d hoped, deliver the goods.

#Glenn

I wanted to ask you, though—how do you see the likelihood of how Trump will act from here on? Because, as you suggested, Putin will be watching Trump’s actions. But overall, the main objective, as is quite obvious now for Zelensky and the European leaders, is to try to pull the United States deeper back into this war. Now, if we listen to the U.S. rhetoric, it’s more or less that the war is over. This is what Trump is saying: it can’t be won. So at this point, you want to count your losses, move on, and maybe find a settlement with Russia instead of pushing it toward China. So for Zelensky and the Europeans, the solution to getting America back on board is essentially to prove that the war is still winnable—if you just commit.

And this approach is very transparent. If you read any European newspaper, no matter which country it’s from, it’s always the same headlines: Ukraine’s spectacular attack, look how deep they’ve struck into Russia, the Russians are just a paper tiger. And of course, the Russians are supposedly losing hundreds of thousands of troops a year. I mean, all this spectacular—let’s call it doubtful—reporting. They’re not reporting; they’re selling a war. They’re not reporting on the war, which is an important distinction. But in terms of actions that have to be taken, it’s important that they make some dramatic moves—that is, to escalate—to show that Russia can still be bled dry.

Now, this seems like a crucial point where Trump will have to make a decision. Is he going to stand behind the Europeans and Zelensky and celebrate further escalations, or will he start to call this out? As you said, when there was that attempted strike on the residence of Zelensky—or Putin—it looked like he was leaning toward taking some distance from it. But again, a common criticism is that Trump is simply handing over the war, outsourcing it to the Europeans—essentially applauding them, but wanting to wash America's hands of it. So how are you assessing what Trump will do here? Because I always see quite a convincing thesis on both sides.

One view is that Trump recognizes there's a new balance of power, and it makes no sense to keep confronting Russia as if it were still the Soviet Union. But he has to deal with his own hawks. On the other side, the argument is that he does what every other American leader has done—talk about change, but eventually stab the Russians in the back. Essentially, he's not playing the hawks; he's playing the Russians. So how are you—well, I think in Moscow they're asking the same question, because he's very ambiguous in both his speech and his actions. So where do you think we're going from here?

#Ray McGovern

Glenn, let me pick up on European public opinion first, because there was a very, very interesting article in the most widely circulated German newspaper, **Die Welt**, okay? It talked about **schmerzhaftes Wahrheiten**—painful truths. It was quite amazing. Now, this is the largest-circulation newspaper in Germany. Here it is: "Ukraine will lose the war against Russia. Europeans have to admit this, even if it hurts. The only thing that matters now is preventing something even worse from happening. It's time to face the facts—**die Wahrheiten**—soberly and painfully. Ukraine will lose the war against Russia. The country is embroiled in a war of attrition against the Russian aggressor, which is slowly but surely sapping its strength."

And it goes on to talk about, well, you know, the Russians say they fear Ukraine and NATO. Well, of course, we don't believe that, but that's what they say. They seem really... So, all I'm saying here is that this is not—it's more than a straw in the wind, I think. It's a harbinger of things to come. Now, NATO, in my view—fini. Finished. Kaput. I mean, it took Putin himself, in one of those long speeches, to say, "Look, NATO is nothing without the United States. NATO was set up against Russia, the enemy. Oh, Russia's no longer the enemy of the United States." And then, when he saw puzzled expressions, he said, "Don't you read? Have you not read the new national security strategy? It says that we're partners. It says that we can deal with each other. We're not any longer the main enemy, okay?"

Now, if that's the case, what is NATO? NATO is—this is paraphrasing now—but NATO is nothing. And the EU, for God's sake, this whole caper with the attempt to seize Russian assets was totally discredited and torn apart by the various people who stood up for what was right under the law. And people like Ursula von der Leyen were lying about it all and tried to push it through. So here's Putin

sitting back and saying, "My God, we too are surprised by that national security strategy, but the U. S. is pretty tough on the Europeans and not so tough on us." And I think I mentioned before, Glenn, this is related—public opinion polls last year showed that the United States lost its place on the list of Russian *glavnye vragi*, okay? *Glavnye vragi* means "main enemies." We've been the main enemy since I entered the CIA in 1963, okay?

And vice versa. Now, guess who, according to very good opinion polls in Russia, is the main enemy of Russia according to Russian citizens? Not by a small margin—by a large margin—Germany. Now, nobody should like that. I mean, we know a little bit about history, but that speaks volumes. And so it's not only Putin and his administration; the Russian people have come to see Trump in different terms from his predecessor. And that helps. It doesn't help, on the other side, that because of the false allegations in Russiagate, the American people have been subjected to six, seven, eight years of—well, brainwashing may be a little too strong—but indoctrination that Putin is the devil incarnate, that the Russians want to take over the rest of the world just like they did when the Soviets were in charge.

They're going to take over Europe. And even though that's easily disputed, the Americans aren't getting that, because—well, I love it that some Americans will see us today, but it's a very small segment of the population. So why is that important? Because it has consequences. If Trump, in his wisdom, or in his unpredictability, or his mercurial personality, decides whether he's going to send some U.S. troops there to monitor the ceasefire—if there's a ceasefire in Ukraine—most Americans would say, "Well, you've got to do that, with those bad Russians. Sure, we're going to do that." So on our side, there's a lot of education that has to happen, okay?

The war against Ukraine was not unprovoked. I don't like to use double negatives, but it was provoked. As a matter of fact, here on my notes, I have a Foreign Affairs article by John Mearsheimer, who's been on your show. I don't know if you can see it here, but it says, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Delusions That Provoked Putin." Provoked, okay? What's the date on this? Eleven years ago—eleven years ago. He predicts in this that if NATO keeps trying to get Ukraine as a member, Ukraine will be destroyed. John Mearsheimer—a direct quote right out of this piece. Now, he couldn't get anything like that published again, but he was right then, and he's right now.

And the sad thing, Glenn, is that people like Lindsey Graham and others were just happy as pie to have the Ukrainians fight to the last Ukrainian, whereas Lindsey Graham bragged that we shouldn't lose one soldier in uniform—you know, we'll have them do the fighting for us. It was a fool's errand from the beginning. The generals should have known that. I mean, as a second lieutenant, for God's sake, I learned that you don't embark on any kind of adventure or operation without an estimate of the situation. Now, that sounds corny, right? Well, no—not if you memorize what you have to do.

What's the enemy like? How is he armed? How many are there? Where are they, okay? And not least, LOCs—try to remember that term, LOCs. It's short for "lines of communication and supply,"

not like lox and bagels. Now, General Milley or General or Admiral whoever—if they thought they could weaken Russia by starting a war and encouraging Ukrainians to fight the Russians, given the imbalance between the two countries in terms of population and ability to sustain a war—well, that's crazy. So what they did was resort to lies. I remember one lie in particular. It was in December 2022, the first year of the war, when the Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, told President Biden that the Russians were running out of ammunition.

The weapons they're leaving helter-skelter on the front lines—they can't replace them because they've got no indigenous capability to do so. We've got it made. Then, in July 2023, Biden was told to say the same thing by his CIA director, Bill Burns, at the time: "Putin has already lost." Well, OK, so they're getting really bad intelligence. Whether Trump has fixed that now depends on whether he's listening to Tulsi Gabbard, who is the new national intelligence director with purview over all the other directors, including the CIA director—titular purview, anyway. So Trump has a way to get sensible advice if he wants it, but not from the CIA, because if the New York Times is still representing what they hear from the CIA, it's a fool's errand.

What's going to happen now is really interesting. But getting back to your point about Europe—Europe is out of it. Europe has discredited itself. The Russians say Europe has excluded itself. And not only Europe, but people who fancy Europe, like Rubio and others. Rubio's been shunted off to the side; he's not doing any of the negotiations. As a matter of fact, at Mar-a-Lago a week or so ago, when Trump was boasting about what a great job his negotiators are doing, he said, "Witkoff and Jerry—oh, Jared, Jared Kushner, my son-in-law. Oh, yeah, Secretary Rubio too." And when Zelensky thanked the people who were helping out, he mentioned Witkoff and Kushner but forgot to mention Rubio. So that's the other thing.

#Glenn

If I can interrupt, he also called General Keith Kellogg an idiot—which is a good indication, if you're cheering for peace, I guess. I forget.

#Ray McGovern

Who was that who called?

#Glenn

Trump called General Keith Kellogg an idiot.

#Ray McGovern

Oh, I missed that. Yeah. Well, he can be right every now and then. I think he's right on that one. So, you know, it's very complicated, but it's been very bizarre. And to explain the behavior of the

European leaders, you have to look at who they are. They're party apparatchiks, kind of moving up to take top posts without much real experience. They're political hacks. And they were sucked into this thing by Biden. Now it's become their war. They've spent billions of whatever—euros or pounds—to support a war that should have gone into social services, the National Health Service, and other things. So they're very vulnerable now if they come back to their populace and say, "Well, you know, we lost."

We thought it would be a good idea, but we spent \$50 billion and it's gone. Sorry, your safety net's got real holes in it. We'll try to do our best. These guys are going to get thrown out of office within the next year or year and a half, because there'll be elections in that time frame. And that's what they're most concerned about—not only losing power, but being shown up as the foolish idiots they are. I hate to say it, but these people have a lot of blood on their hands for supporting this thing, even when the battles are lost and when Putin really just has to kind of wait it out and attrit, attrit, attrit.

And next year—well, this year—I think we'll see the final denouement, when the Ukrainians run out of troops. And Putin's twin objective will be half achieved: that is, demilitarization. The other half, denazification, that's a tougher row to hoe. But, you know, without troops, what is the Azov Battalion, or what are the real neo-Nazis there in Kyiv—what are they going to do? So I think the thing is—well, the question is whether Trump can give the Russians the kind of—well, I'll finish with this. The Russian objective here is not only to get rid of the Ukrainian army, but to get some sort of agreement that will prevent this from happening again, okay? And that probably will include some sort of buffer zone, right?

And it will also include some sort of agreement to limit the forces on each side. It will have to forbid Ukraine—what's left of it—from joining NATO, and the rest should just be negotiated. Now, that sounds easy. It's not as easy as that. But the outlines are clear, and that's what's inevitably going to happen. Now, could worse happen? Yeah. So what's the good news? The good news, as I see it, is that Putin is a very gradual, very careful, very perspicacious person. He's a statesman. He knows he's in charge of this—he's in the catbird seat. He doesn't have to do anything rash. And there's a possibility that Trump will do what's necessary so that, with some lipstick on this pig of defeat, Trump can come away and say, "Well, this was Biden's war."

I want to stop the killing, and I've made the best deal I can. The Russians are in control. We're out of there. And I think that's inevitable. We're sort of out of there already, since we're not providing any more weapons or money. Apparently, we're still supplying intelligence, and that's a fly in the ointment. Out of this new deal, where the Valdai residence was struck—if it turns out that was NATO intelligence guiding those things toward the house—well, I think there'll be a really good argument for Putin to say, "OK, Mr. Trump, for God's sake, now stop supplying them with any kind of intelligence that allows them to target us so specifically and so drastically."

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I've seen over the past 24 hours a lot of newspaper articles, also in this country, where they're starting to recognize that the war isn't going as they'd hoped. And they're trying to explain it—well, again, there has to be some narrative control. So essentially, the argument is that all the experts, all the leading experts, maybe got it wrong. And to explain why, they say it's because they've been victims of wishful thinking, which is a nice way of saying vile war propaganda and censorship. But yeah, I guess they have to put some lipstick on that pig as well. And on the topic of never allowing it to happen again—again, that's been the argument all along, including the 2014 Mearsheimer article you referred to.

The Russians can never allow this to happen. But by refusing to make any agreements with the Russians—agreements in which they feel NATO isn't going to try to use Ukraine as a proxy—that guarantee that it will never happen again will have to come through hard power. That means stripping Ukraine of a lot of territory, destroying its infrastructure, destroying its army. I mean, it's very brutal what will happen to Ukraine if there's no deal on the table. But this is, again, because of our—let's call them media and politicians—who've been victims of wishful thinking. We're not even allowed to make this argument without being called a puppet of the Kremlin. I wanted to ask you about—could I just comment on that?

#Ray McGovern

Yeah, please, go ahead. I think the background of all this is, again, the fact that the U.S. is not in NATO the way it used to be. Now, what do I use as evidence of that? At the last NATO summit, Trump arrived a little late—you'll remember this, Glenn—and finally the head of NATO, Mark Rutte, says, "Oh, daddy's here. Come on in, daddy." Not our proudest moment. Now, do you know what a deadbeat is? That's a daddy who doesn't pay child support anymore, okay? And that's what "daddy" has turned out to be. He said to the Europeans, "Look, you've done my war. We've spent a lot of money now. Over to you, please." And what do the Europeans do? They try to steal Russian funds for this, okay? So they've shown themselves to be completely inept.

Well, after this last NATO summit, they were saying, "Oh, the next one's in Tirana, in Albania." And I said, "There's not going to be a next one. NATO has fallen apart. It has no meaning without the United States." And, as I say, it's sort of ironic that it took Putin to point that out to the Europeans with this major speech just a week ago. And he also said, "Look, we should have a common Europe. We're Europeans. We didn't want this, you know." Back in the day, there were real professionals, real statesmen, like Egon Bahr. Egon Bahr—nobody knows who Egon Bahr is. I know who he is. He was Willy Brandt's right-hand man, the conceptual author of Ostpolitik, the policy toward the East, where Willy Brandt—and the U.S. acquiesced in this then—said, "Look, it makes no sense to be a hostile entity toward Russia."

Bring them in. Let's deal with them. After all, they have all kinds of nice things we need—cheap gas and oil, you know. So here's Putin himself saying, "Why can't you?" And then he quotes Helmut

Kohl, for God's sake, the Chancellor of Germany at the time. These people all thought that Russia had to be part of Europe, simply because of what Russia has to give to Europe. So anyhow, it's going to be really interesting. The Europeans are going to be suffering even more now, since gas and oil prices have skyrocketed. And they're going to have to—the leaders are going to have to—explain this. And there's no real explanation except, "Well, we believed the Americans that they could win here, and we just did what Biden told us to do." And I'm sorry, but that's not going to work.

#Glenn

I saw the German president a few years ago—was it around 2020 or 2021?—and he made the point that, well, in the past we had Ostpolitik because it was required to deal with the Eastern Bloc countries. Everything had to go through Moscow. But now that they're in our bloc, we don't need to engage with Moscow in that way. Which is a very perverse reinterpretation of what Ostpolitik was supposed to be about. But yeah, again, this goes back to one of the reasons why the Russians now see Germany as returning to its old status as their primary foe. I want to touch on what's happening on the Ukrainian side, though, because after the anti-corruption agencies—which obviously the United States has a huge influence over—started to shake things up in the Zelensky administration, Yermak and others fell off.

But now we see that Budanov is going to take over that position. He seems—well, I'm not going to throw too many compliments—but he seems like a sharp cookie compared to a lot of the others in the administration. How do you think this new reshuffle will, or what it will mean, in terms of the internal power competition within Ukraine? Because Zelensky doesn't really have that much—well, his power has been weakened. If there were a presidential election, people like Budanov would most likely be more popular alternatives. I say "if" there is an election rather than "when." But what do you make of the new reshuffling within the Ukrainian government? Because Budanov is one of the people who has, in the past, indicated that "we are going to lose this thing," so perhaps we should try to strike a deal to save what we can of Ukraine.

#Ray McGovern

Yes, and even more recently, Budanov has written some really critical articles about the conduct and the policy toward Russia. So, yeah, I mean, I was tempted to say—now I'm being over-asked, because it's a real hornet's nest there—I can't really predict what's going to happen. It's hard for me to believe that Zelensky is like Caesar's wife, that he's not as corrupt as all the others. I think we can go with that assumption here, Sam. So, Budanov—he's got this nice boyish face and clean-cut look. He doesn't look like the thug the others do, but appearances can be deceiving, right? I don't know, maybe he is more honest than the others.

And maybe the people who really run things there—the British and the U.S.—would be able to say, "Well, here's a guy who looks a little more decent." But Zaluzhny, now he's another guy who's back.

And I think the key point—and I wish I knew more about this—the key point is, what is the record of these people, these likely successors, with the Nazis, the neo-Nazis? In other words, which one of them is more deferential to the Nazis? I don't know the answer to that, but that would be key. And, you know, the Russians are right in that game. They have as much influence, or at least as much knowledge, as we do. And what goes on in Kyiv—the mayor of Kyiv, Klitschko—he was in the running way back in 2014. Maybe he's a boxer, right?

He might be able to come in, but it's really hard to predict. And maybe it doesn't really matter, because when this thing goes down, there's not going to be much left there, and whoever's in charge will have to be subservient to the agreements—such as they may be—as they're worked out, hopefully, before the whole thing falls apart. One thing to look for is Odessa. Now, I may have mentioned this on your program before, but Odessa—that's a Russian city, my God. I mean, Odessa, Catherine the Great set it up, and Catherine the Great, well, she liberated, she acquired all that territory. The Russians don't want to obliterate Odessa. They're obliterating lots of the lines of communication and supply to Odessa. But would they deal?

Would the Russians say, "OK, Mr. Trump, we don't want to destroy Odessa. We realize that Odessa is necessary to prevent Ukraine from becoming just a farm for the rest of Europe. I mean, Ukraine needs an outlet to the sea, and that's Odessa itself. We could form some sort of multinational authority to regulate traffic on the Dnieper. There's a way to deal with this, but we don't want to destroy Odessa." And Trump could say, "Oh, I saved Odessa." There's a hint going back over three years now—October of 2022—when Putin was asked one of those canned questions at one of his very long Q&As. A correspondent said, "Mr. President Putin, I would like to vacation in Odessa. Do you suggest that I apply for a Ukrainian or a Russian visa?"

#Glenn

I was there. There was also a Greek journalist at Vambai back in 2023. Yeah, I actually sat right behind him.

#Ray McGovern

Yeah. And do you remember the way he replied? He said, "Ah, yes. It could be yabloko razdora—it could be an apple of conflict." Go back to the Trojan War, those of you who learned about the Trojans—the mythology, you know, the apple of discord, right? Yes, it could be an apple of discord, or it could be a way to work toward resolving seemingly irreconcilable differences. So, yeah, go to Odessa, enjoy yourself, and remember, Odessa is a really special, beautiful city. We don't want to see anything really bad happen to it. Now, all my colleagues, everybody says, "Oh, the Russians, they have to take Odessa." Well, I think they will, but I don't think they have to obliterate it.

I think they can work out something where Odessa can be a channel to the sea, enabling a friendly—or at least non-combat—Ukraine to persist as a sovereign entity, economically as well as politically.

So it's those kinds of territorial deals that could be worked out. Sumy in the north, Kharkov—there's a lot of hope. The only thing now is that, over the last couple of weeks, I've become more reluctant to say that Trump, who's the real key player here, has been able to put people like Rubio, Kellogg, and the others off to the side. He has done that, but now it really depends on whether he's willing to own up to the fact that Putin told him the truth about this attack near Valdai, and that the CIA lied.

You know, maybe you were here, maybe you were in Helsinki—or where was it? It was in Poland. Somebody asked—Poland or Helsinki—somebody asked Trump during his first term, with Putin right beside him, "What about this Russiagate thing? What about Russian interference in the 2016 election?" Now, this was long before people realized that that was a bald-faced lie. Okay, so Trump says, "Well, Mr. Putin says that didn't happen." Western press: "Question—who are you going to believe, the CIA or Mr. Putin, for God's sake?" And John Brennan says, "Treason is the word for this. Treason."

#Glenn

But it turned out that his intelligence agencies were lying and Putin was not. So it is—I mean, the Russiagate thing, how it was just brushed under the carpet after being exposed as a hoax, is kind of extraordinary. We could have learned a lot from this, in terms of how unnecessary it was and how domestic politics actually helped to intensify a great power rivalry. This is, to some extent, the definition of a failed power. Once you have domestic quarrels influencing foreign policy to the point that it undermines national interest—because a rational state is one that acts in accordance with its national interest—if you allow domestic quarrels to dictate foreign policy, it's not a failed state, but it's an irrational one. That's a very dangerous path to go down. But instead of learning a lesson, it's become common policy now. We do it in different versions all the time.

#Ray McGovern

Yeah, and who learns the big lesson from this? Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. He looks at all this and says, "My God, now Trump has been president for a whole year. He tried to put James Comey, head of the FBI—guilty as sin, provably guilty—on trial. And he botched that up, sent some pretty liar who didn't know how to practice law. Nobody's been held accountable. John Brennan? Congress has recommended that he be indicted, but nothing happened." So the key thing here, if I put myself in Putin's shoes, is, you know, this guy Trump talks big and he seems well-inclined, but he's not his own man. And some of these Russian authors now are saying, you know, he's weak. We have to recognize that—he's weak.

Now, does that make a hell of a lot of difference? Not in the short term—just in the longer term, over the next three years—because Putin wants something bigger than just an end to the war with Russia having seized the territories it already has, and maybe more. They want something larger. They want something that the US is part of, so they can say, "Well, the US and we agreed that our core interests—our Russian core interests—will be respected." And we don't have a treaty, but we

have a gentleman's agreement. We have various things that can be verified, that limit the number of forces, and we have mechanisms we're going to set up for mutual discussions to tamp this thing down.

Yes, Zelensky is gone. We'll deal with whoever bubbles up to the top, or whoever MI6 and the CIA put in position, but they won't have any real power whatsoever. But they will have to respect the lay of the land as things settle down. So that's the big thing. As I see it, over the next few months, the Russians will keep this very slow pace of taking over these key cities. And in a couple of months, it'll be very clear that without any money—well, they'll have some money maybe into August or September next year from this \$90 billion that the Europeans have scratched together—but what happens after that? It's a fool's errand.

The sooner— I mean, this I agree with when Trump says, "Let's just stop the fighting, for God's sake." You can stop the fighting. Somebody said there were 9,000 Ukrainian troops killed in one week. I don't know, I forget where I read that, but my God, these are human beings. Let's just stop it because we can. It's clear who will gain the spoils of this, but it's also clear who was provoked—and it was the Russians who were provoked. We can prove it. John Mearsheimer said that 11 years ago. The pity is, nobody paid any attention to John Mearsheimer. Everybody in Washington knows everything there is to know, okay? I asked John Mearsheimer once, "John, you're in Washington..."

Did anyone from the State Department or the CIA seek to speak to you? I mean, you've been right about these things. John looked—this is a public meeting—John looked at me and said, "Ray, I've been doing this for 35 years. Not once has anyone from the State Department or the CIA, or the Defense Department for that matter, sought to consult with me." Now, that in itself speaks volumes. And as long as they have this sort of secluded attitude—"we know everything"—there's not much fresh blood getting in there. It has to be the realities on the ground that dictate the outcome. And that, I fear, is what we're seeing now in terms of the resolution to this conflict.

#Glenn

Well, Noam Chomsky made this point once—that it's not that all these people have to be told what to do, the journalists, the politicians. It's just that they wouldn't end up in these positions if they had, I guess, the analytical framework of people like John Mearsheimer, because they would reach the wrong conclusions and they... they wouldn't be heard. Instead, as I said before, we get this now-shock message that, oh, it turns out all our prominent experts were wrong. Well, they're not that leading experts then, are they?

And then they don't ask the question: what about all the people who did get it right—the Mearsheimers and all? Why are you still not listening to them? They're still listening to the same people. I mean, this was the same back with the invasion of Iraq as well. All those people who got it

wrong still floated to the top of the toilet bowl, as if there's no consequence. And the people who got it right remained canceled. It's not a meritocracy in terms of who gets it right; it's just about who's loyal to power, I think.

#Ray McGovern

Yeah, and I think the power comes from what Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex, which now controls the media. Let's be honest about this. Here's a little vignette I'll never forget. In May of 2006, I got a ticket to a closed theater where Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense at the time, was speaking about Iraq and all that. I was receiving an award myself from the American Civil Liberties Union that evening, so I said, well, I'll go in there—I've got a ticket. He went by, and then I got up and asked a question. I asked him about weapons of mass destruction.

Why did he say they were there? And he said, "I never said they were there." Of course, I pointed out, quoting him, "They're around here." Then I said, "Well, how about the ties between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein?" "Oh, well, we know that." In other words, it was a really good four minutes of glory for this guy—me, personally. Early afternoon, so it got on TV. They had C-SPAN, so it was able to show this guy up. Now, as I was preparing for this dinner where I was also going to speak, I got a call. "Hello, Mr. McGovern. This is... what's his name? A CNN pretty guy. Anderson? No."

#Glenn

Say that again?

#Ray McGovern

Yeah. What's his first name? This is Anderson—Anderson Cooper. Yeah, that's it. That's all, man—Anderson Cooper. "Oh, you're quite a star down here in Atlanta. I'd like to have you on my show tonight, but first I have to ask you a question. Weren't you afraid?" Yeah, I was sort of in shock myself. And I said, "Well, no, I wasn't really." Then I thought, wait a second—Anderson Cooper, heir to the Vanderbilt family fortune, pretty boy on CNN making millions of dollars every year—he's asking me if I was afraid? So I said, "Okay, Ray, let him have it." And I said, "No, Anderson, let me be honest with you. I had studied all these issues, and I learned what questions to ask. And when you ask a real question, it's really a high. It's really a high."

So, you know, I don't recommend it to you, Anderson. Think of some real questions to ask people like Rumsfeld when you get a chance. You'll find it's very satisfying—it's a real high. He said, "Oh, well, well, well. Thank you, Mr. McGovern. I'll have my people get in touch with your people." I said, "No, no, don't do that." "Why not?" "I don't have any people. No people. Just have them call me here." So I go on the show—this is the last thing—I go on the show. What's the first question he asks me? "Mr. McGovern, that was quite a performance there with Rumsfeld. Weren't you afraid?" I mean, the guy had no perspective on what a journalist is supposed to do. And there I was doing it,

and he said, "Whoa, I would, in effect... I would be afraid to do that, you know?" So that's just one little snippet where, firsthand, I saw that these guys really are afraid. Is it the money?

Some of it, I suppose, but he doesn't need the money. It's just being in the group, you know—being in with the people who say, "Ah, Saddam Hussein had a role in 9/11," and "Saddam Hussein was going to get nuclear weapons." I mean, just because everybody else says it. That's the sad thing. And I have to say, when you mention journalists, there were two who got it right. I got it right because some of my friends talked to them on the side, right? This is no secret anymore. One of my friends had a desk right outside Rumsfeld's office. She saw who was coming and going, and she talked to these two people at Knight Ridder—no, it was McClatchy. Well, Knight Ridder, then McClatchy. Two great journalists. There's a movie about it called **Shock and Awe**, directed by Rob Reiner. Okay, so what am I getting at?

I'm just—let's see—Rob Reiner. The notion that you can blow the whistle on these things. Oh yeah, well, it's true. These two journalists who were honored, you know, after it was all over—there were begrudging ceremonies, small ones—"Okay, you got it right. Here's a little Oscar for you," something like that. Who are they working for now? One is working for Reuters and writing garbage—garbage—stuff from the CIA. And the other one is working, I think, also for Reuters or one of these other places. And, you know, it's just a matter of livelihood, I guess. You've got to write this stuff. These guys are much too smart to feed on this garbage they're getting—and yet they write it. And one of them said, when I remonstrated, "Well, if you'd spent the last couple of months in Ukraine, you'd look at it a lot differently."

Important. Okay. In the trade, we used to call that Berlinitis. So, you stay in Berlin, you can't go anywhere, and you get a certain circumscribed view of what the world is like—nothing much outside that world. You stay in Ukraine and you get subjected to all those things you're surrounded by. Or you make raids with Iranian troops against these godless Russians. So that's another thing. Berlinitis—when you go into a country, live there, and sort of can't think of much outside that country. This one friend—former friend, still a friend—was subjected to that. So journalism is really important. As you know, it's not so much the professors. There are good professors out there. One of my favorites is Geoffrey Roberts. If you haven't had him on your show, you really ought to.

#Glenn

No, I know him well. I've had him on the program a few times too. I can do it. Good.

#Ray McGovern

Yeah, he's an emeritus professor of Russian history from University College Cork in Ireland, although he's a Brit. And he's just—he's terrific. I seek his advice anytime I go out on a limb, and more often than not, he goes out on the same limb with me. When you're operating alone, you need a little bit of affirmation, or at least some encouragement or support, to say, "Well, you're not completely

crazy, McGovern." I still, in other words, have a glass half full—maybe a little more than half full—because the Europeans have no role to play now. I think that Zelensky, his time is numbered.

I think that Trump, whether it's right now or in the months to come, will have to deal with the fact that either there'll be no deal on Ukraine—in which case he'll look like a real loser, even though he blames it all on Biden—or there will be a deal, and he can say, "Well, you know, we got the best deal we could." And again, I think Putin is flexible enough to do that. Last thing I'll say is that when Anchorage was set up—you may remember this—early August 2025, Trump was in trouble. He was threatening these bone-crushing sanctions on Russia, and he didn't want to do that. And on China and on India. So what did he do? The sanctions were due in about five days. With three days left, he sends Witkoff to Moscow. "What are we going to do?" Witkoff talks to Putin for four hours. What came out of that? We know now.

We know the Russian version, and I've seen nothing to contradict it. "Okay, we'll go to Anchorage, but there are two things we want to come out of it. One, no more talk about a ceasefire just to let the Ukrainians regroup. Okay, you got that, Mr. President? Okay. The other thing is, you're not going to let Zelensky sabotage progress toward a real resolution. Promise that?" "Okay." Witkoff says, "I'll talk to the President." Trump calls Putin. "That sounds good." They go to Anchorage, and that's pretty much all that happened. On the way there, Trump is on the plane with one of these Fox News guys, and he says, "You know, if I don't come away with some kind of agreement for a ceasefire, I'll be very, very disappointed." Well, he should have known. And as it turned out, right after the meeting, Trump got on as a little true socialist and said, "Okay, no immediate ceasefire."

We're going to go for the whole—didn't say enchilada—we're going to go for the whole deal, because that's what we agreed to. Number two, I'm going to make sure that Zelensky and the Europeans abide by this. Whoa, number two. Okay, so what happens? Three days later, I call them the seven dwarfs, sitting at the feet of President Bucci. He talks to them about what he achieved in Anchorage, and then all of a sudden he says, "Sorry, guys and women, but I promised Vladimir that I'd give him a call. Could you just hang tough, go to the next room for twenty minutes or so while I talk to Vladimir?" And they did, and they came back. By all appearances, they sat there, and they understood what Trump was saying: "Look, don't—don't sabotage this. We've got this thing going."

What happens? These guys sabotage it. They get people like Kellogg and others to say, "We can still win, we can do it, okay?" And Zelensky, of course, is the big fly in the ointment. Finally, when Trump realizes that Kellogg has been favoring this and kind of leaking things, he says, "Well, this is for the birds," and he changes. Then he goes to Witkoff and Kushner. This is all on the record. You know, we analysts, we do chronologies—it's zigzaggy—but it's very much on the record that Trump decided to cashier Kellogg. I guess he was leaving the first of January. Good riddance. Okay, there are still a lot of people around there, and the Europeans.

But Trump, you know, typically at the end of the Mar-a-Lago session said, "Now I've got to call my friend Vladimir Putin tomorrow, first thing—or maybe tonight if he's still up. Oh yeah, the Europeans,

yeah. Yeah, we should talk to the Europeans too.” And of course, they talked to the Europeans for a little while. So, in my view, Europe is not going to play much of a factor here. The Europeans should read the national security strategy very carefully, because it puts them in their place. Third—first comes the Western Hemisphere, then China and the Far East, then Europe. And Russia is sort of a subset of Europe, mind you. And then what? Oh, well, we have... the last thing is Africa, of course. Oh—Middle East. Middle East is fourth.

So anybody who looked at that table of contents on the second page of the National Security Strategy and couldn't see how different the priorities were from earlier strategies—well, I don't know. Maybe they're just unable to give Trump at least the credit for putting into his rhetoric, or into his strategy, the way he looks at things. Now, the last thing on that point is that with the Western Hemisphere as the main focus, I'm afraid it's not just the Latin American countries—Venezuela and the others—it's the United States of America. I think Trump wants to have enough troops available really close by, not in Europe, not in Asia, so that he can use them in cities he considers disloyal or disruptive.

Now, there was a Supreme Court decision recently that put the brakes on this, but Trump doesn't often follow the law or the Supreme Court justices. I'm not making this up. On the 5th of September, the new strategy guidance was leaked to Politico—a very well-connected newspaper, whatever. And what did they say? They said the new emphasis is going to be on the Western Hemisphere, places like Venezuela and the homeland. And the homeland—we're going to need to have troops ready to be deployed in the homeland in case we need them in the homeland, okay? Now, that disappeared in the final guidance because the guidance was directed abroad. But I don't know if it's disappeared from the calculations of Trump and the people who support him.

We have midterm elections coming up in November, and then, of course, the presidential elections in three years. Why is that? Is it really about Venezuela, or is it also about the need to have, as Politico reported—yeah, quoting that fellow Elbridge Colby, who before that was a real China hawk? Now, China—we can deal with them in a different way. So anybody who looks at that National Security Guidance, just the priorities listed in the table of contents, and doesn't see that there's been a real strategic change, at least on paper, is missing out and unable to see how much change there's been in this one year where Trump learned several lessons.

#Glenn

You know, 2025 was an incredible year. Well, if you think about the beginning of the year, Biden was still in the White House. How much—not just the U.S. changed, but the entire world. Some of it, of course, was unrelated to what happened in the U.S., but it was part of the broader shift in the balance of power. Anyway, thank you for taking the time. Any last thoughts?

#Ray McGovern

One last thought. When you talk about crucial points, I think of September 3rd. Now, you remember that was V-J Day—Victory over Japan. They celebrated it in Beijing with a huge parade, dignitaries representing about half the world. I don't know if Trump was invited or not, but my notion is that Trump looked at all that and said, "Oh my God, look—the Russians and Chinese are together as never before. Most of the world has this thing called BRICS going. The dollar's in trouble. Maybe we ought to do what Ronald Reagan did back in the 1980s." And I'll say this very briefly: when the U.S. suffered a real defeat, with 241 Marines killed in a bombing attack on their barracks in Lebanon, Reagan had a decision to make. What did he do?

Should he escalate, or should he do something else? He decided to do something else. He withdrew the Marines and got a lot of flak—"You're weak, you're weak." So he said, "Well, I've got to do something." What did they do? They invaded the island of Grenada, just a few miles off the coast of Venezuela, mind you. They invaded on false pretenses, but they had a big victory. The 82nd Airborne went in there, got rid of all those pro-Cuban people, and "saved" the U.S. medical students who were supposedly going to be held hostage. It was all cooked up. I know that because I was there, okay? So all I'm saying is, I think that September 3rd in Beijing told Trump, "Look, not only are they all there, but I'm excluded."

"Is there anything I can do closer to home to show how strong I am?" And his advisor said, "Yeah, you could do Venezuela." Okay, do Venezuela—and keep enough troops around if needed in the homeland. So that's a guess. But the way things worked out, when you have that kind of a very, very clear change of power from West to East in this case, and you have a businessman like Trump who can recognize this kind of thing—when he sees the Chinese and the Russians cavorting together, right?—it makes sense that he would get his speechwriters together and dictate this very... well, it's not very consistent, but it reads pretty well. It wasn't the State Department that composed this.

It was the speechwriters. He dictated it, I'm sure. So that's something. We'll see how it plays out in this coming year—the year that just started yesterday. But I'm not without hope because, well, the arc of the universe sort of bends toward justice. And I think that after the Ukrainians realize there's no hope for them, and the Europeans stop egging them on, there can be a negotiated settlement that pretty much puts an umbrella over this whole thing, where Russian interests are also respected and secured. That's more a wish than a prediction. But if it's ever going to happen, I think it'll happen this year.

#Glenn

Well, we rarely finish on an optimistic note, so I'll take that. And thank you so much for taking the time. Thank you, Glenn.