

John Mearsheimer: Venezuela, Greenland & the End of NATO

John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, where he has taught since 1982. Prof. Mearsheimer discusses why we may be on the path to the end of NATO. 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. We're here today with Professor John Mearsheimer. Thank you very much for coming back on the program.

#John Mearsheimer

My pleasure, as always, Glenn.

#Glenn

So we see that the American people were tired of forever wars and costly nation-building efforts. They hurt America's standing in the world and were rarely successful. For this reason, Americans voted for Trump, who consistently criticized these kinds of wars and advocated an "America First" approach instead. Obviously, we haven't gone down that path. There's been a lot of criticism, and his base is split. But from a realist perspective, what are the strategic interests of the United States in Venezuela? Beyond the stated reasons like democracy promotion or narco-terrorism, what do you think the United States is actually trying to achieve there?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, when you talk about America's interests in the Western Hemisphere, it's important to understand that the Monroe Doctrine basically lays out what our interests are. What we want to make sure of is that no distant great power—whether it's Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union in Europe, or Imperial Japan or China today in East Asia—forms a military alliance with a country in the Western Hemisphere or puts its own military forces there, as the Soviets did during

the Cuban Missile Crisis. That's what the Monroe Doctrine is really all about: keeping distant great powers out of the Western Hemisphere, which we, of course, dominate because we're so powerful. Now, this operation had nothing to do with the Monroe Doctrine.

There's no danger at this point that either China or Russia is going to form a military alliance with Venezuela or is thinking about putting their military forces in the Western Hemisphere. This just isn't an issue. It's not about great power politics, which is what the Monroe Doctrine is all about. In my opinion, this is a good old-fashioned case of imperialism. It's a case where the United States was interested in running the politics of Venezuela. Apparently, if you listen to President Trump, his main concern is who controls the oil in Venezuela. And he basically thinks that's our oil—it's ours to decide what it's used for and how it's used. This is just blatant imperialism, or neocolonialism. It has little to do with the Monroe Doctrine.

#Glenn

Well, the U.S. has intervened in Latin America more than once. But do you see this as being consistent with those kinds of patterns, or is this something different? Because it certainly feels more brazen than it was in the past. As you said, there were open references to taking the oil, for example. And while Trump said that "we will run Venezuela now," he later argued that the new acting president of Venezuela, Delsy Rodríguez, could hold power in Caracas as long as—this is a quote—"she does what we want." Otherwise, there would be more strikes. I mean, isn't that basically saying there's no need to get rid of the existing government as long as they do as they're told? How are you seeing or assessing this?

#John Mearsheimer

Glenn, there's really nothing new here. As almost everybody knows, the United States has a long history of interfering in the politics of countries in the Western Hemisphere. We see any country moving toward the left as a threat, and we almost always step in and try to topple the regime. Remember, President Trump isn't just talking about regime change and social engineering in Venezuela these days—he's also hinting, quite openly, that we might do the same in Colombia, Nicaragua, maybe even Mexico. He seems to believe the United States has a vested interest in interfering in the politics of any country in the hemisphere that he doesn't like. And again, this is really nothing new. The United States has a long history of this.

Chile in 1973, Guatemala in 1954, and on and on. But what makes this so brazen—to use your word, which I think is absolutely correct—is that Trump doesn't try to justify what he's done with diplomatic language or liberal rhetoric. He basically says, in very blunt terms, that we can run Venezuela, it's no problem, and Venezuela's oil is our oil. He sounds like a blatant imperialist, and you don't see much evidence of that usually. When the United States goes in and acts in an imperial way in the Western Hemisphere, it tends to cover up its behavior with liberal or idealistic rhetoric. But President Trump doesn't act that way. He's a Texas Chainsaw Massacre kind of guy—you can

see him coming a mile away. He's very blunt, and therefore it's appropriate to say that this does look brazen.

#Glenn

Well, what does this mean, though, for the wider world order? Because over the past 30 years, the so-called liberal, rules-based order has basically meant that international law would apply to everyone—except the West, under the leadership of the United States—since we were seen as the champions of liberal democracy. So international law could be set aside if it was deemed necessary for a liberal democracy or humanitarian cause. That was an important part of the hegemonic order. And to a large extent, we saw this begin in Kosovo, when we said that, well, it wasn't legal, but it was legitimate.

So essentially, we said liberal democracy creates legitimacy outside the rule of law. That was how we could run an empire—a hegemonic system—and still give it legitimacy. And I feel that, in terms of attacking Venezuela, the Europeans did our part. We gave the Nobel Peace Prize to Machado under the idea that, you know, if the United States went in with its military force, it would mean installing democracy, and that would bring peace. I mean, this is the whole liberal peace thesis—that democracies don't go to war, they're more peaceful, and so on—and that this peace can be delivered by military force. But instead, we saw that Trump didn't take it. It was a nice layup.

He could have had that legitimacy, but he said he didn't want the excuse. He was even dismissive of Machado taking power. Instead, he talked about how much wealth we're going to take out of the ground. Should it worry us, though? I mean, that Washington now doesn't bother—Trump doesn't even keep up the pretense. On one hand, it's nice to have some honesty; on the other hand, it's important—the stories we tell about ourselves, that we at least pretend to abide by certain ideals.

#John Mearsheimer

Yes, for sure. Let's just talk a little bit about international law. As you know, when the United States was the unipole—this was during the unipolar moment, from roughly 1993 until about 2017—we were really the only great power in the system, and we threw our weight around all over the world. We nevertheless paid careful attention to international law. And if we violated international law, we went to great lengths to say we really were not violating it. Now, what's going on there? The fact is that you need international law. You need international institutions. You need rules. In an incredibly interdependent world like the one we live in, rules and laws are absolutely essential. And the key point to keep in mind here is that the United States wrote almost all of those rules and almost all of those laws.

So we had little problem obeying the rules or obeying the law most of the time, because, again, we wrote them in ways that were in our national interest. But along comes President Trump, and he really is *sui generis* here. He has utter contempt for international law and international norms. He

just thinks they don't matter. And he thinks that when he goes out and breaks the law, it's not necessary to justify what he did—it's not necessary to put the velvet glove over the mailed fist. The end result is that international law, the rules-based system, is being trashed. And the question you have to ask yourself is: is this in the American national interest, or is it in the interest of other countries around the world?

And I would argue that it's not in their interest. Again, we need rules. We need laws. We need norms. The reason past presidents have paid so much attention to these matters is because they understand that. But Trump doesn't think that's true. He just thinks he can go out and trash the rules-based system, and in the end, we'll be better off. As for other countries, the truth is he doesn't care about them. He only cares about the United States of America and what he thinks is right or wrong. So that's really what's going on here. And the end result is not going to be good, because international law is important for the United States and for other countries as well.

#Glenn

I noticed some speeches by Hegseth. He treats international law as if it were some woke plot that constrains America from pursuing its interests. But again, in situations like war, international law has to be a mutual constraint—some framework around killing each other that limits it and makes it as civilized as possible. But also, again, the stories we tell each other matter. I mean, when Biden blew up the Nord Stream—or allegedly blew up the Nord Stream, though yes, very likely he did—the Germans were willing, the Chancellor was willing, to stand next to him and pretend that when he said, "Oh, it wasn't us," Biden was telling the truth.

The Germans were very willing to buy it, even though no one, I think, truly believed it was the Russians who blew up their own pipeline. But at least the pretense was there. Now there's nothing. Even the Germans now—the chancellor—is asking, "Well, what is the legal justification? You know, we need something. At least give us a narrative. Say that this is about, you know, an authoritarian dictator, not just oil." It seems there's some real anxiety there. But yeah, that brings me back to my question. The Europeans stayed relatively quiet on this. I think they hoped their obedience would be rewarded, but instead their, I guess, spinelessness is being punished. I think Trump smells weakness, and now he's set his eyes on Greenland. Do you think this is real? Because it does seem to go beyond mere rhetoric meant to distract.

#John Mearsheimer

Are you asking if I think there's a real possibility he'll actually take Greenland?

#Glenn

Or is this just some reality-show tactic, where he shifts the focus? Or do you actually think the United States will take Greenland now?

#John Mearsheimer

I think there's a serious possibility the United States will take Greenland. In a certain sense, people like you and me find it hard to imagine the U.S. invading Greenland, taking it, and turning it into the 51st state. It's just hard to comprehend us doing that. But I wouldn't be surprised if Trump did it. If you look at how he thinks about using military force, he's willing to use it frequently. I believe he's used military force in seven different countries since taking office, and he's almost at the one-year point of his presidency.

Remember, he became president on January 20th, so we're close to January 20th again. In the past year, he's attacked seven different countries. This includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, and a handful of others—Venezuela as well, obviously. But the distinguishing characteristic of all those attacks is that they were small-scale. They were what I call pinpricks. And he's been very careful not to get involved in nation-building, not to get involved in a forever war. He understands that's one thing you don't want to do. Remember the attack against Iran on June 22nd of last year—that's 2025—it was a one-day affair.

He attacked Iran, declared victory at the end of the day, said the problem was solved, finished, and then moved on. And of course, if you look at what he recently did in Nigeria, he lobbed a couple of missiles there, but that was the end of it. He didn't get involved in any meaningful way in Nigeria. So when you talk about Venezuela and Greenland, the big question on everybody's mind regarding Venezuela is: is he going to end up in a forever war? Is this the first case where he's tripping himself up? Has he jumped into a quagmire? And I think the administration believes that's not the case—that they can do this on the cheap.

It's sort of a pinprick operation. They kidnap Maduro and bring him to the United States, then prop up the vice president as the new president. They use economic coercion to get her to dance to our tune. I think that's their view. It's another pinprick operation in the end. With regard to Greenland—it wouldn't be difficult for the United States to conquer Greenland. It's not going to be World War I, or even really a war, I think. The American military could take Greenland with relative ease. And when you look at Trump's pattern of behavior—how willing he is to use military force when he can do it on the cheap and get away with it—that fits perfectly.

I mean, he'll get away with it politically. The Europeans will scream for a while, but in the end, it's not going to matter much. They're not going to put up much resistance. He has no respect for the Europeans. So the fact that he can do it rather cheaply, that it could be portrayed as another pinprick operation, I think tells you there's a really good chance he'll try to take Greenland. And going back to Venezuela, the big issue on the table is whether he's going to get dragged into a quagmire—into the business of nation-building—or whether he'll be able to pull this off quickly and easily.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I saw Stephen Miller—he was interviewed, and he made the point. He was asked, “Would you use military force to take Greenland?” And he was kind of dismissive of the whole idea, saying, well, the Europeans aren’t going to fight back. So you’d just essentially sail in, plant a flag, and that’s it. He’s probably correct, though, that there wouldn’t be a fight.

But have you been surprised by the European reaction to this? Because overall, it seems that over the past year or so, all the liberal values that were supposed to unite the West have kind of fallen apart in a spectacular way—not just the reluctance to find a diplomatic path in Ukraine, but also the genocide in Gaza, backing an ISIS leader to take power in Syria, supporting the destruction of Iran’s nuclear facilities, and now bombing or attacking and kidnapping the president of Venezuela. By giving the stamp of approval time and time again and supporting it—yeah, all these things packed into one year—I’ve never seen anything like this before. How much can the West actually absorb if we define the political West based on a region of values?

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah, a couple of points on what you just said, Glenn. First of all, the genocide in Gaza. I think the fact that the Europeans and the United States have supported Benjamin Netanyahu in carrying out genocide in Gaza was a deadly blow to the liberal international order. The idea that a group of liberal countries—countries that emphasize the importance of liberal values—blatantly supported a genocide that the whole world could see taking place in Gaza dealt, in my opinion, a truly serious blow to that order. And then, when you add everything else that’s happened under Trump to that support for the genocide, you can see why this order is in deep trouble.

And furthermore, it’s really hard to argue that liberal values mean very much in the West. It looks like empty rhetoric. All of this goes back to the Biden years, because remember, October 7th took place during the Biden administration, and the Americans especially—but also the Europeans—supported the Israelis in carrying out the genocide in Gaza before President Trump came into office. Trump, of course, continued to support the Israelis and still does as they carry out the genocide. But again, this is a huge problem. Now, the question is, what’s going on here? Why are the Europeans not pushing back against Trump?

And I’d make two points there. Number one, the Europeans are desperate to have good relations with the United States because they want the United States to stay in Europe. The United States is making all sorts of noise—especially under President Trump—about pulling American troops out of Europe, eviscerating NATO, and reducing the size of the American military footprint. This horrifies European leaders because they understand that the United States serves as a pacifier in Europe. So they want to keep us, the Americans, in Europe. They want to keep NATO intact, and they think the way to do that is to appease President Trump.

So anytime President Trump does something outrageous and they're opposed to it, they nevertheless back him—or they criticize him in a very soft way—because they want to make sure he stays in Europe. They want to make sure he likes Europe. But the problem with President Trump, from their perspective, is that he's basically a bully. And if you show weakness, he'll just slap you around. We all know that Trump has unmitigated contempt for the Europeans to start with. The European countries are nowhere near as powerful as the United States, and when they get down on their knees and appease him, he's just going to slap them around. He's going to treat them with contempt.

And this is, of course, what he's done. Now, you might expect the Europeans to learn from this and do a 180-degree turn and stand up to the Americans. But no—they're so desperate to keep the United States in Europe, and they're so used to being in a position where they grovel at the feet of an American president, doing whatever he wants, that you have a situation where Trump can pretty much get away with anything and not receive any serious criticism from the Europeans. And this gets back to our discussion of Greenland. What would happen if he took Greenland? It would be very interesting to see whether the Europeans finally stood up to him. You'd think they would, but I wouldn't bet a lot of money on that.

#Glenn

We saw this at the Munich Security Conference in February, when J.D. Vance spoke. At the closing ceremony—I'm forgetting the name of the person who wrapped it up—he broke down in tears because of the speech and how Vance referred to the Europeans. And of course, there was a national security strategy more or less calling for regime change in Europe, blaming the EU for destroying European civilization. And now, of course, there's the threat to take Greenland. You'd think at some point they'd start to grow a spine and do something.

It was an interesting comment by the prime minister of Denmark. She said that if the U.S. attacked and took Greenland, that would mean the end of NATO. But do you think, more or less, this is already happening? We've talked about the decline—if not the collapse—of NATO, or at least it becoming a shadow of itself. Do you think this would be the thing that finally destroys NATO completely? Because, well, the U.S. doesn't seem too interested in keeping it, and the Europeans can't ignore that reality has shifted dramatically.

#John Mearsheimer

You also want to remember that the whole question of Ukraine is intertwined with the issue of NATO's future. You know, there were many people arguing—even before the Venezuela crisis recently broke out—that NATO was in deep trouble. And if the Russians won in Ukraine, which certainly looks like it's going to be the case, that would do serious damage to the alliance. So if you connect what's happening in Ukraine to a possible invasion of Greenland, one could argue it would be a deadly one-

two combination that would basically ruin the alliance. The alliance might remain in name, but in terms of being an effective organization—of looking like what it did between 1949 and 2025—those days would be gone.

NATO would be a shadow of itself. It would be effectively wrecked. I think you can make that kind of argument. Again, I think the Europeans will—excuse me, Glenn—I think the Europeans will go to great lengths to prevent that from happening, in large part because NATO means, for them, keeping the United States in Europe, keeping the American pacifier in place. And they're desperate to do that. So it may be the case that if Trump were to invade Greenland—and let's hope he doesn't—the Europeans would nevertheless swallow their pride and not back him. They would criticize him, but do it in a way that wasn't so damaging that it would wreck the alliance.

#Glenn

It just seems like a key challenge for the political West is to renegotiate the relationship between the U.S. and the EU, because beyond the rhetoric about Trump, there's something significant here about the distribution of power. The U.S. can't afford to be as generous as it was after World War II. It has other priorities. It can't be everywhere. Europe's not a high priority.

Its relative power in the world has also declined. Uh, so the Europeans kind of want the America of the past—that is, to commit and continue to, well, essentially pay for everything. It just seems that for the Europeans, they're either super subservient to the U.S., or they become very anti-American. They always seem to polarize a bit. It just seems that it would be possible to have a more reasonable relationship if we just adjusted to the new multipolar realities—that is, both sides benefit from a partnership, from security cooperation, economic ties. But at least maybe a divorce—go from being married to being neighbors, something along those lines—just something that works for the United States. Because dismissing the new interests of the United States, I think, is folly. I mean, of course, Trump tends to be much cruder than other leaders, but there's something below the personality there. There's a real shift in power that has to be addressed. The idea that we can just continue as if it's the bipolar or unipolar order doesn't really make that much sense.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah, I think you're exactly right, Glenn. And I would connect what you just said to this whole notion that there's a group out there—or a civilization out there, whatever you want to call it—that's labeled "the West." During the Cold War, when we came up with this term, "the West," it made eminently good sense because we were dealing with the U.S.–Soviet competition, which took place mainly in Europe. The heart of that competition was in Central Europe. All the countries on the western side of the divide were closely allied with the United States, and of course, those on the eastern side were closely allied with the Soviets. So in that context, it made perfect sense to talk about "the West," and we were tightly integrated.

Furthermore, after the Cold War ended and we moved into the unipolar moment, there was obviously no Soviet threat anymore. But the countries of Western Europe were thoroughly liberal—they shared the same values as the United States. What happened was that the West, left over from the Cold War, decided to move NATO eastward, bring more countries in Europe into the West, and continue to talk about international politics as if there were still this group of countries you could call “the West.” And in fact, that made a lot of sense. Furthermore, the West during the unipolar moment was interested in spreading liberal democracy all around the world. As you know, the United States during that period adopted this foreign policy of liberal hegemony. We were interested, à la Francis Fukuyama, in spreading democracy all across the planet, because we thought that was all for the good.

The Europeans bought into this enterprise. It was reflected most clearly in NATO expansion. NATO expansion was initially all about spreading liberal democracy, economic interdependence, and so forth—Western institutions moving into Eastern Europe. So it was very easy during the unipolar moment, as it was during the bipolar moment, to talk about the West. But that world has gone away. And a lot of it has to do with the fact that, for the first time in American history, the most important area of the world for us—for the United States—is not Europe. It’s East Asia, because of the rise of China. So this is a very powerful imperative for the United States to pivot to Asia and pivot out of Europe.

And when you get somebody like Trump, who's the president and who has contempt for Europeans, and you combine that with the structural imperatives pushing us to pivot to East Asia, you're going to see big cracks in the transatlantic relationship. It's very important to emphasize that as the transatlantic relationship deteriorates—as U.S.-European relations worsen—the Europeans will be on their own in ways they haven't been in a long time. I think you'd have to go back to 1945, and the years before 1945, to find cases where Europe was pretty much on its own and didn't have the American pacifier in place.

And what this means is that you'll see fractures inside the West. You can see this in Europe today—there are all sorts of fault lines inside the EU and inside Europe more generally. And, by the way, as we've talked about before, the Russians will go to great lengths to exacerbate those fault lines. They'll also work hard to worsen relations between the United States on one side of the ocean and the Europeans on the other. So there are just a lot of forces at play here that are undermining this concept of a rather homogeneous West that existed during bipolarity and unipolarity, but is now beginning to wither away.

#Glenn

This idea of Europe being all alone is interesting. It was predicted by some, though. I did an interview on this channel with General Harald Kuyat—he was the former head of the German armed forces and held the highest military position in NATO. He wrote an article and gave an interview back in January 2023, so about three years ago now, in which he predicted that we had more or less

already lost the war in Ukraine. The Russians would take it, and when it became obvious that it was lost, the Americans would start to pull back. The title of the article was something along the lines of "We will be left all alone, facing a very angry Russia."

So I was wondering how you would tie this conflict in Venezuela to Ukraine, because if you look at Denmark, it's a bit ironic. The Danish government prides itself, to some extent, on being the first to recognize Kosovo—so again, a breakaway. Well, they find themselves on the other side now. They also sent almost all their weapons to Ukraine and have been among the most hawkish in this proxy war against the Russians. Whereas, as you said last time you spoke, it's now a direct war on Russia. So what does this mean, though? Because this, of course, adds to the desperation. When we joined this war against the Russians, we were standing behind Biden, and he said he would fight till the end. Now, of course, it's very different. How do you see this playing out?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think that what's happening in Venezuela—even if you added an invasion of Greenland to that situation, that whole problem set in the Western Hemisphere—pales in comparison to what's happening in the Ukraine war. The fact is, what Trump has tried to do with the Europeans, vis-à-vis the Ukraine war, is shift the burden of supporting Ukraine onto their shoulders. And the Europeans, of course, cannot shoulder that burden. They don't have the financial resources or the weaponry to support Ukraine. And Ukraine is going to lose the war. Once Ukraine loses, there's going to be a blame game.

And the Europeans are going to blame the Americans for withdrawing support for Ukraine and shifting the burden to them. And Trump will blame the Europeans. He'll say they didn't cooperate with him diplomatically, so he turned over the responsibility for dealing with Ukraine to the Europeans, and they didn't measure up to the task—so they're responsible. So you'll have this blame game. And then you'll have a blame game inside Europe itself. You'll have people like Viktor Orbán on one side, Keir Starmer on the other, and Macron as well, and they'll all be arguing about who's responsible and where we go from here.

And at the same time, as I said before, the Russians will be going to great lengths, for good strategic reasons, to exacerbate those tensions inside Europe and across the Atlantic. So I think there's going to be a lot of trouble in Europe moving forward. And most importantly, you're going to have poisonous relations between Russia and Europe for as far as the eye can see. One should not underestimate the catastrophic consequences of the April 2008 decision to bring Ukraine into NATO for the foreseeable future. And we're talking about a long time into the future.

Poisoned relations between Russia on one side and Europe on the other. And this is going to be, as I said before, an increasingly divided Europe. The United States is not going to be serving as the pacifier in the way it has in the past. This is going to be terrible for Europe, and I think Europe is in real trouble. I think that's a bigger problem for Europe than the whole question of what's going on in

Venezuela or what's happening with regard to Greenland. And, by the way, to go back to my point, the Europeans are desperate to keep NATO intact—which means keeping the American pacifier in Europe. This is why European leaders appease the Americans.

And here we're talking about President Trump—why they appease him at every turn. But that's not a winning strategy, because, as we talked about, you have to stand up to Trump if you have any hope of getting your way with him. The Chinese figured this out, by the way. Remember early in his term, President Trump tried to get tough with the Chinese with tariffs, and the Chinese made it clear to him, in no uncertain terms, that they had cards to play and they would use those cards. The end result was that Trump backed off. Same thing with the Houthis—remember he said he was going to go in and slam the Houthis? He said that President Biden was a pussycat.

He didn't wage war against the Houthis in any meaningful way. He—Donald Trump, the "real man"—was going to go in and do it differently, bring the Houthis to their knees. Well, he went in, tried to defeat the Houthis, and he failed. He quit. He backed off. He said, "The Houthis are tough hombres. I can't defeat them, and I'm backing off." Right—and that's how you get your way with Trump: you stand up to him. If you don't stand up to him, he'll walk all over you. And of course, he's been walking all over the European leaders, humiliating them at every turn. That will continue to be the case until they stand up to him. But I don't see much hope that they're going to do that anytime soon.

#Glenn

No, I don't see that either. So, last time we spoke, you had just given a speech at the European Parliament—at the EU Parliament—arguing that Europe's future was bleak. Do you think Venezuela has made it any bleaker, or does it not really play that much into the whole political West? Of course, besides if the US actually takes Greenland, though.

#John Mearsheimer

I don't think what happened in Venezuela really matters much for the overall direction that U.S.–European relations are moving in, or European–Russian relations for that matter. I think what happens in Ukraine is of great importance there. I mean, the thing to remember about President Trump is that he uses military force and does outrageous things so often that what's very important one day, a week later, isn't even a front-page story. It could be that a week from now, Glenn, the United States will be attacking Iran again—maybe the Israelis and the Americans will launch a major air campaign against Iran. I'm not saying that's going to happen, but it's certainly within the realm of possibility.

And there are a lot of people who think it's going to happen sooner rather than later. But once that happens, the front-page story will be Iran, not Venezuela. So another dimension to this is that the Venezuela situation is not likely to remain on the front page—either here in the United States or in

Europe—because we'll be off pursuing another escapade. This is one of the ways Trump gets away with all these endeavors he's pursuing. He does something, people start to criticize him, but before the criticisms can sink in, he's off attacking another country. Then people start to criticize him again, and before those criticisms sink in, he's on to another country.

So as long as he doesn't get bogged down in a forever war—or, to put it slightly differently, as long as he doesn't get bogged down in nation-building—he'll be able to continue this policy for the foreseeable future. And this is why the big question at this point in time is: where does Venezuela lead, right? He thinks, and his advisors think, they went in, they won a quick and decisive victory, and now managing Venezuela will be a minor problem. That will free them up to move on to the next escapade. That's their view. And there are a lot of people—I'm one of them—who have real doubts about whether that's true. I think that when you go in and you break a country like Venezuela, you effectively own it.

And he claims that he owns it, right? He says that we're going to run it. When he starts talking like that, you say to yourself, okay, if you, President Trump, are going to run Venezuela, doesn't that mean you're going to do nation-building? And if you're going to do nation-building, isn't this going to be long, difficult, and messy—and likely to lead to failure? But then there are other people in the administration who argue that we're not going to get seriously involved in running the country. We can do it on the cheap. We'll see what happens. But if he gets bogged down in Venezuela, that will greatly limit his maneuvering room to attack more countries down the road, as he's been doing since he took office about a year ago.

#Glenn

Well, it's great at shifting the focus. Last week we were talking about the Epstein files, and now, of course, they're all gone. But I'm not sure how long you can play this game before there's a massive miscalculation that draws him in. That could already be happening. Anyway, I know you have places to be, so I just want to thank you again for letting me pick your brain.

#John Mearsheimer

Oh, thank you, Glenn, for having me on the show. It was a pleasure talking to you. I just wish we had some more uplifting subjects to talk about these days. I mean, this is the new year—we're supposed to think in terms of "happy new year," but given events in the world, it's hard not to be thoroughly depressed.

#Glenn

Yeah, very much agree. Well, thanks nonetheless. You're welcome.