

Ian Proud: NATO Narratives Collapse - Policies Stay the Same

Ian Proud is a former British diplomat, holding number roles, including the Economic Counsellor at the UK's embassy in Moscow between 2014 and 2019. The Peacemonger: <https://www.youtube.com/@IanProud> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> 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 are joined today by Ian Proud, who served as a British diplomat from 1999 to 2023, which included the role of economic counsellor at the British Embassy in Moscow, where he served between 2014 and 2019, with responsibilities such as overseeing the sanctions, which are also relevant to today's discussion. So welcome back to the program.

#Ian Proud

Good to see you again, Glenn.

#Glenn

So, yes, great to see you. And, well, where I wanted to start today was an article you wrote which, well, not to oversimplify it, but I guess the argument is that Britain has its own deep state. It's a permanent bureaucracy or a blob that has taken control over its foreign policy. And again, you've been a British diplomat, so this, you know, this is an interesting insight. So I was wondering if you could flesh out your argument.

#Ian Proud

Yeah, thanks, Glenn. Look, every state, every nation has a permanent kind of civil service, right, by and large. And that serves to kind of do the day-to-day work of policymaking, giving policy advice to ministers. And there's always a tension between that permanence and the inertia that comes with the permanence, the unwillingness to kind of take new courses of action, to kind of assess performance, and a general kind of lack of efficiency in the system, is offset by the kind of vigour and vitality you get from having elected officials coming in as ministers, as prime ministers, to

introduce new ideas, to actually set a clear strategy to get the permanent staff to work for them. But any foreign policy ultimately should be driven by the people that we elect to govern us, right?

I mean, that's the point. That's why we elect them. We elect them because they have particular kinds of plans and policies and strategies. And we elect them because we think their plans and strategies are better than the people that were in government before them. That's the point. But the problem is that in the UK system, those ministers change so often. You know, we've had seven prime ministers since 2014. We've had 11 foreign secretaries since 2014. If you compare that to Russia, it's had one president and one foreign minister since 2014. What that means is that the new people coming in, the permanent staff see that they won't be around for very long. And they do everything to kind of wait them out, to disrupt their attempts to introduce new strategy, new ideas, etc.

And that's where you get this idea of a deep state. I mean, the deep state exists where the elected officials don't really have the power to affect what the permanent people are doing. They're powerless within the system, and therefore the deep state drives quite critical areas, such as foreign policy: the policy of not talking to Russia, talking about Russia, the policy of backing the Americans to the hilt because we're afraid of having an independent relationship from the USA. The deep state kind of evolves. And actually, of course, the deep state isn't just the permanent staff. The deep state creeps into the mainstream media as well because the mainstream media is stacked full of people with lots of experience and expertise because they were in government, in the deep state.

And they basically kind of recycle what the deep state wants them to kind of talk about. The classic example of, if you can call him a journalist, is Hamish de Bretton-Gordon in the Daily Telegraph, who produces all sorts of weird and wonderful things, nothing of which is true, but you can see the clear imprint of the Ministry of Defence Main Building in everything that he says about the war in Ukraine. So that's how it works. Our elected officials have effectively become powerless. Andy Burnham has arrived as a new Prime Minister, number seven. He's not said anything radically different from what his predecessors said previously. Everybody knows that at most he'll be in the job for three years. And so because of that, it's very difficult to effect any change, particularly on our disastrous policy towards the war in Ukraine.

#Glenn

Well, I'm glad you mentioned the war in Ukraine because Britain, not unlike Germany or France or many other European countries, it appears that Ukraine has become the single issue of its foreign policy. That is, everything is so organized around this to the extent it even distracts from domestic politics. That is, the political leaders these days seemingly only look at the Ukraine war, which, again, shapes their overall view. So how does this deep state or blob or permanent bureaucracy impact the diplomacy of the British over, again, this war? Because it does also result in a diminished

diplomacy. That is, I think, again, not just Britain, but all the Europeans have experienced radically reduced diplomacy. And how does this affect the ability to, I guess, course-correct or change policies?

#Ian Proud

Well, the first thing that I would say is that when I worked for the diplomatic service, it's always the ministers that make the big calls. They meet people, they discuss the toughest issues where they can, they find some sort of way to walk out of the meeting with something that they can live with and that the counterpart can live with. That's the nature of diplomacy. Diplomacy is never, by its definition, you know, zero-sum, and particularly in an increasingly multipolar world, it's even less zero-sum now because, you know, we have to recognize that all our interlocutors, including, of course, the Russians, have their interests, we have our interests, and we're never going to get away with everything that we want out of a meeting.

Russia probably won't get away with everything that it wants out of a meeting, but the point is you find common ground that you can both accept and live with, and move on and have a state of relative stability so you don't end up sort of killing each other, right? So that is diplomacy. Diplomacy happens when the big beasts meet, when the presidents, the prime ministers, the foreign ministers meet. That's when the big things happen, right? Of course, but, you know, we have stopped doing diplomacy. I mean, foreign policy is made up of three things. It's made up of diplomacy, espionage, and military power, those three things. And we've invested in spying a lot, particularly since the Ukraine crisis started. We haven't obviously invested much in warfare, although we talk about it a lot in terms of the imminent threat of Russia invading NATO, you know, this kind of fantastical idea. But what we haven't invested in is diplomacy.

And in fact, we've taken a choice, and the deep state has largely taken a choice that we just won't talk to Russia because Russia's wrong and we're right. Well, that's just not how diplomacy works. I mean, there is no truth. The Russian perspective on how things have unfolded in Ukraine may be radically different from our perspective, but the only way that you can end, or indeed preferably prevent, these conflicts from happening is talking and agreeing that, actually, what can we both live with so that the situation doesn't escalate.

That has disappeared off the map completely since 2014. And of course, since we've had so many different foreign ministers coming in since 2014, and so many different prime ministers, they are not able to course-correct because the system is set. They arrive, they get their briefings. You know, very learned, very senior people who've been doing the job for ages, who know Russia better than anybody else, or so they say, say, "Well, this is, you know, we've tried everything, and this is what we have to do, so please keep doing it." That departure from diplomacy and the focus on espionage—I mean, everybody does espionage. Everybody spies on each other. I mean, that is an

immutable truth. I mean, it's kind of one of the oldest professions, by, you know, spying people to find information. That's what everybody does, of course. But actually, it should be a tool of statecraft, not its author.

You know, the spies shouldn't be setting the policy because they have a vested interest in actually spying, doing more spying, having more enemies, you know, that we can sort of fight against to justify, you know, their budgets. And what happened in the UK was that in 2015, after the Ukraine crisis started, you know, the Russia unit, the cross-Whitehall Russia unit based in the Foreign Office, was then put into kind of co-leadership by the intelligence agency, the UK intelligence agency. And from that point on, you can really say that they've really had the whip hand in terms of deciding what the policies should be, and that the diplomats, they've been kind of sharing ownership and leadership of the unit. But it's clear that actually, kind of the hard-edged spy-type sexy stuff that ministers like to think about, journalists like to write about, has very much been in the lead.

#Glenn

All those James Bond movies have an unfortunate impact, maybe. But I was wondering, though, that as you mentioned, diplomacy hasn't really had much of a role since 2014. And indeed, one gets the impression that they didn't want it to have a great role, that it's better to pursue victory. But I was wondering, how do you see this process from 2014? We initially had that unity government. It was dismissed. We had then the Minsk Agreement. It wasn't implemented. We had the Istanbul agreement that was also seen unfavorably. At least afterwards, Boris Johnson wrote all his articles warning against a bad peace and in favor of strategic patience.

And then we have 2025, with the Europeans being very, you know, giving not much support at all to what Trump was trying to, or allegedly trying to negotiate in Alaska. But I've heard from, yeah, from a colleague that, for example, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, that he had some— that he felt that the policy was at its end, that they needed to change their approach to Russia. But also that, well, he more or less got the message. He said, "That's not how we do things. We already have a path." And then he kind of walked it back. Did you see a difficulty, though, in breaking with the past 12 years now of rejecting diplomacy to a large extent?

#Ian Proud

The problem is, one of the reasons why we've got locked into this cycle is that nobody assesses the effectiveness of the policy. People get locked into the narrative that this is the right thing to do, this is working. And the measurements they use are input measurements. Like, we've done X number of sanctions against Russia, therefore sanctions are working because we sanctioned more people. Nobody ever really takes a step back to say, well, actually, are sanctions working? If you look at, for example, the purpose of sanctions, I'm not saying that I agree with this purpose, don't agree with

this purpose, but it is to kind of cause Russia to cease and desist its destabilizing actions in Ukraine and to kind of interfere with the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. I mean, that is a stated purpose of sanctions in UK law.

Has it done that? Clearly not. Has it weakened Russia's economy? No, it hasn't. I mean, it has changed the structure of Russia's economy, undoubtedly so, but actually Russia has adapted very, very well. Has it actually affected our economy? Has it affected the economies of Europe? Manifestly, yes, it has. Well, these are the questions you'd ask if you're doing a considered evaluation about whether sanctions were successful. But, of course, that evaluation doesn't happen because we're so locked into the fact that we've done this big volume of sanctions, therefore sanctions are good. We've done lots of sanctions, and so on. And nobody stops to scrutinize and ask, is this really working? And that's really what ministers should be doing. That's what ministers should be coming in to ask the system questions about.

Well, we've been doing this for 12 years. Is it working? People aren't asking that question, and that is the problem. That is why the status quo holds, because nobody ever asks, "Is it working?" That is fundamentally the reason why we end up locked into these kind of pointless... And you see in Iran, and we don't need to necessarily talk about Iran today, but I mean, it's the same thing. I mean, nobody in the White House is able to step back and genuinely ask themselves, you know, what are we trying to achieve here? Is it working? If we input a bit more, will it work if we put in a bit more effort, or is actually an alternative approach needed? Nobody seems to be asking those questions. And so this is the core problem. Nobody ever judges the success or otherwise of the policies that we adopt.

#Glenn

Well, that's also a problem, though, with the permanent bureaucracy. You have people who wedded themselves to certain policies. I always thought that that was the one strength of Trump, that is, that the U.S. was heading down, as the polling in the U.S. showed. Everyone feels that the U.S. is on the wrong path, but it's very hard to break away from this. So why not get a massive disruptor who's not beholden to narratives, who was able to break away from, yeah, from former paths.

Of course, he wasn't, though. But—or he did some—well, the war on Iran, he unfortunately did break with the former principle of, you know, not going down that crazy road. But I do want to ask, though, about how does this affect, again, diplomacy? You know, it's also about putting yourself in the shoes of the opponent. Well, I don't have to tell you, but how does that affect the ability to understand Russia? I mean, you can have all the spies in the world, but if you don't talk to the opponent, you do learn a lot from merely engaging with the opponent. And do you feel like the competency in Britain is being reduced in Russia?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, it's been eroded over many years, not just because our diplomats do a really bad job in general. I speak Russian, I passed my Russian exams, but a lot of diplomats who go to work in Russia don't pass their exams. And in addition to that, the university system is now, in the UK, closing down foreign language studies, including Mandarin, Arabic, and Russian, which are three kind of top-priority hard languages, you know, in the UK diplomatic service, because the universities have a funding crisis. I mean, there's no realistic approach to the capabilities that you need. Now, language skills are just one capability, but actually language skills also kind of, as you say, they are really a sort of an entry point into having curiosity.

You know, you have to want to talk to people in a foreign language. You have to have that curiosity about their condition in life, why they think the way that they do, why they act the way that they do, how that's different from how you think and you act. I mean, languages give you an entry point into that, but if you don't have the curiosity in the first place, languages still won't finish, you know, the process in terms of really engaging with and understanding the people that you're working among. I mean, when you're a diplomat, you work in Russia, you are the minority. You know, you are a stranger in a different land where they set the laws, you know, they set the rules. You have to abide by those laws. Of course you do.

But actually, you're there to kind of understand, you know, why does the Russian state act in this way? What do ordinary Russian people think about the direction of policy in Russia? What is the real state of Russia's economy? Is it as bad as the Daily Mail would tell you on a day-to-day basis, that it's going to collapse at any moment? You're there to get honest insights, both to improve your ability to build understanding with the Russian interlocutors that you engage with in the ministries, but also so that the quality of the reporting that you send back to London is high quality and it's accurate. It gives an accurate sort of unfiltered view of the situation on the ground. It doesn't go for easy points in terms of just telling London what they want to hear, but it gives an honest impression to the best of your ability.

And, you know, if you're getting out and doing the circuit, then your ability to do that is obviously going to be improved. So when you're sending lower-quality diplomats out to Russia who don't speak Russian and who don't endeavour to get out of the embassy and really engage with people in Russia, then therefore, A, the influence that they can have with the people they talk with is reduced, and B, the quality of the reporting that they send back to London is also reduced. And so, actually, when you have poor-quality reporting going into the machine in London, then that quality reporting is more likely to kind of say things that the person writing it thinks that London wants to hear, so it just adds to the whole echo chamber effect. So you've got an embassy, but it is really still part of the London echo chamber, if that makes sense.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, this is, again, it feels like a wider problem within Europe, though, that is the lack of an honest assessment, because I often went from the assumption that our diplomats or politicians, they

kind of know what's actually happening in Ukraine, but they're kind of, well, trying to win over the public to their narrative so they can, you know, continue this war. But, you know, as a colleague of mine in the EU Parliament said, he said, "No, no, no, they genuinely believe this." Like, for example, this summer when we had this big PR campaign that, well, Ukraine is turning the tide, you know, they're winning, they're winning, that they actually did believe this, that they thought they were winning.

And for that reason, they're also now, in his argument, in a massive panic. That is, they don't know what to do. And, well, you kind of see the same in Britain now, not just, you know, in the EU Parliament, where there's panic. But, you know, if people follow British media, you've probably seen these comments over the last few days by people like Jacob Rees-Mogg. You know, he was making the point that, you know, he kind of went away from, "This is not our war," now, "It's our duty to die in the war with Russia."

And I saw on a panel where it was argued that, you know, we might have to suspend habeas corpus because, well, all those people who come with pro-Russian arguments, they should probably be locked up. And you have, you know, this is kind of where we're going. Obviously, this is not what you say if you're feeling very confident. And so it's more or less confirmed now, I think, that there is panic going on. But where do you see then the British politicians going here? Because it doesn't seem like a war is really an option if you assess the capabilities alone.

#Ian Proud

Well, I think what we're seeing is that the narrative has become completely detached from reality. They operate in completely different realms. The whole narrative of victory, the whole narrative that war is inevitable, it's developed a life of its own. And it's completely disconnected from actually what's happening on the ground. You know, both in Ukraine itself, but also what's happening in the United Kingdom and the linkages between the two in terms of people feeling disenfranchised. You see it also in Germany, you see it in France, where people are feeling disenfranchised because they feel their political leaders are just doing things that make no sense. I mean, ordinary people can look at the situation in the war in Ukraine and say, well, this makes no sense.

This is making us poorer. This is making us feel less safe. It's making us feel less safe because our governments tell us every day that we're going to have to be conscripted and go to die. This makes no sense because, well, why aren't they trying diplomacy? I think, yeah, I think, well, most—the vast majority of ordinary sort of people around, you know, Europe, anywhere in the world, quite frankly—spend very little time thinking about sort of foreign policy. Ultimately, foreign policy does start and end at home. And foreign policy is starting to come home to ordinary people and saying, well, actually, this foreign policy is terrible, and we want our governments to focus on, you know, domestic policy.

And the reason that disenfranchisement, I think, is accelerating is because the narrative just lives in this completely artificial bubble now. Nobody's looking at the reality. It's one of those great mysteries in life that Ukraine can have its most corrupt government, I would argue, ever since the downfall of the Soviet Union. And the reason I say ever is because actually I think every Ukrainian president since, you know, the downfall of the Soviet Union has been corrupt. That's partly due to the fact they didn't really kind of tackle oligarchic power, you know, in that kind of chaotic period after the Soviet Union collapsed. Don't need to get into a whole kind of detailed dive into, you know, what happened, but they've all been corrupt to a greater or lesser extent.

Why I say Zelensky is even more corrupt, and the most corrupt, is that actually the big difference is that he's been given another \$350 billion, you know, of Western taxpayers' money. So the amount of money that he can kind of steal is just vastly bigger than anything that came before him. This Pinchuk guy who hosted the YES conference—you know, yes, please give us more money—recently, he's just bought himself a new massive superyacht. The number of Ukrainian-driven Bugattis in Monaco—I mean, apparently somebody said that, you know, Kyiv was Bentley's third biggest city in the world for kind of luxury car sales, you know, in 2025. So the point I'm making is that actually, it's a mystery that nobody in the West seems to care about this.

It's a mystery that nobody in the West seems to think about, you know, busification and the fact that, you know, ordinary people are being dragged off the streets like dogs and sent to the meat grinder. You know, the Financial Times will report on Russia's manpower difficulties. Nobody will talk about busification. It's a mystery, you know, for example, that actually... You know, people who are just honestly speaking out, like Yuli Mendel, are getting sanctioned by Zelensky and not even allowed to speak at the European Parliament, getting banned, being invited by parliamentarians and being banned from speaking.

It's a mystery that actually Europe has this kind of energy crisis, obviously partly caused by the war in Iran, but also caused by cutting themselves off from access to cheap Russian energy. And we're paying four or five times the price of gas of the Americans and other parts of the world, and nobody in the capitals—it's not that they're not talking about it, they're saying that, well, actually, when we had Russian gas before, it was an addiction, and that was bad, and we can't be addicted. It's far better to pay five times the price of gas. And people are saying, well, this is nuts. So, you know, the reality and the narrative just live in completely different spheres, you know.

And so the narrative has taken hold, and obviously the deep state just continues to propagate that. It is in its interest to do so. And, of course, as I've said, I think, many times before, the further down the road you keep kicking the can, you know, the bigger or the hotter the can becomes. At some point you're going to have to pick it up and tell people that actually, we failed, and actually we catastrophically failed. This will be a bigger failure for Europe than Vietnam was for the United States. History will look back on this war in such a way. I truly believe that. But, you know, the difficulty is—and to a lesser extent, this also happened in the Vietnam War.

We've been saying since 2014 that we were winning and that we would win and that Russia would be defeated and we'd be victorious. You know, and when the can is picked up, people say, "Well, hold on, weren't you telling us that we were winning, that Russia would be defeated, its economy would collapse, that people would turn on Putin, and that eventually we'd break Russia up into smaller states? Well, sorry, what suddenly changed that you're now telling us that that wasn't possible, and now we're a lot poorer, and you're telling us we should be conscripted to go die in a war?" So, I mean, it's a crazy situation, and, you know, the deep state, of course, has played an outsized role in that because the lack of legitimacy and the lack of tenure of our elected leaders.

#Glenn

And as this shifts in narrative, it's all like we were said, "This isn't our war," but now we have to prepare for war. We're told that, you know, we've seen for all these years that Putin or Russia has been, you know, being very restrained in order to avoid a direct conflict with NATO. But now he's planning a direct war with NATO. They sacrificed their entire deterrence. I mean, NATO countries were assisting now in launching missiles into Russia, and Russia still doesn't want to trigger a world war by retaliating. And, you know, even so, they're planning to attack NATO. I mean, you have all these clashing narratives, and what you said with the oil as well, or energy. Von der Leyen and the Germans are still insisting that Russia cut them off from energy.

But it's, you know, like you said, the narrative is immune to reality. But I was wondering, though, if you think this could be heading towards war. Because I've been listening to people like the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Robert Fico, but also the former president of the Czech Republic. I had him on my channel two days ago on— no, sorry. Yeah. It was Václav Klaus, and he also said, "This is the first time in my life I'm afraid of war," because, well, also, we're repeating something Fico said, which was that the European politicians have dug themselves so deep in all these problems, and, well, I would add also these narratives, which you can't dig out from, that they may even want to provoke a war with Russia. But why would you provoke a war you can't win? Or do you think we're not necessarily going that way?

#Ian Proud

I do actually think the risk of war is at its highest that it's been, really, since the Cold War. I really do believe that it is because... I don't see any evidence that ordinary kind of politicians, policymakers in the blob, journalists in the UK—there's a remarkable amount of alignment—that they all seem to think this is the right thing to do, that we should have a war, despite the fact that the British Army is at its smallest state since 1823. Well, let's just conscript people and make people sort of go into the army and fight a war.

Nobody is willing to talk about an alternative. So, yeah, I mean, I think we're dialed into the gradual ratcheting up. You get some BlackRock Merz and, uh, you know, his approval rating of less than

10%, the lowest of any apparently elected kind of German chancellor. You know, I mean, what is going to save us? Well, people will save us. You know, voters will save us by actually asking, you know, for different political parties that actually want to take a different approach. That's why what's happening in Germany right now is really, really fundamental, I think, in terms of the shift. Voters are not choosing the war parties increasingly. And of course, when that was in Romania, when it was in Hungary, it was easy. The European Commission could just cancel out the votes.

But I think that's going to be harder in the major European powers, to cancel out the votes. You know, France has its presidential election next year. Marine Le Pen, for the first time, is starting to be a bit more outspoken that actually this war is going to be stupid and so on. We're not there yet in the UK. Reform is still sort of backing Ukraine for as long as it takes. So, you know, I think the UK will continue to be the back marker on this, with people like Jacob Rees-Mogg saying, well, we should all be prepared to fight and die. For what? I mean, why can't we live in peace? You know, we had this devastating war with Japan. The Americans dropped a nuclear bomb on Japan. Now Japan's a big ally.

You know, we had this devastating war with Nazi Germany and, you know, millions of people died, most of them actually in the Soviet Union, to kind of defeat Nazi Germany. And now we're allies with Germany. I mean, why can't we skip the war and just be friends? This is my eternal question. You know, why can't we skip the war thing and just be friends? And nobody can provide an answer to that because they're driven by an utter hatred of Russia. That hatred gets worse by the fact that Russia has proven itself resilient in the face of 20,000-plus sanctions, being insulted on a day-to-day basis by our politicians, having their borders shut, having threats put on their citizens who visit European countries and cities, that their visas might be limited in duration or might be revoked, or better to let Russian people just stay in Russia and not visit us.

All this intimidation and threats against Russia on a daily basis. And, you know, I think the more Russia doesn't respond, the more angry we seem to become. So, I mean, you know, President Putin is kind of caught in terms of what does he do. I think the measured approach he's taken—it's hard to use the word "measured" when we're in a full-scale war in Ukraine, let's be honest about it—but in terms of escalation with Europe, I think it's been a right approach because I think, this is just my assessment, that he is watching the kind of slow fragmentation of the political and economic project in Europe. And he's saying, well, actually, I don't need to escalate because, you know, there, as Scott Ritter said to me yesterday, they're doing a good job of killing themselves. So, you know, why do I need to escalate? Escalating just increases the risk to Russia. That's just how I see his calculus right now.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it's against these narratives which continue to survive, though. That is, Russia can absorb all the sanctions we're able to throw at them. They're able to outproduce in military hardware what all of NATO can combine. But they're still kind of like a gas station masquerading as a country. They

can't, you know, they're still backwards. These kind of narratives and perceptions don't die easy. But as you said, the Ukraine strategy is failing. The diplomats hold on to it nonetheless. What do you think would be a different, more ideal diplomatic approach, though, if you were still in that service? I mean, what we hear—we don't hear much about political settlements. We hear a lot about ceasefires, which are temporary pauses. Yeah. What do you think Britain could realistically aim for? Again, if you're not winning a war, you can't decide everything. So what is a reasonable position to take?

#Ian Proud

Well, before I answer that question, I'll say something on the point about ceasefires. Now, this is a point the Europeans have been pushing for so long: Russia should agree to an unconditional ceasefire. Why wouldn't Russia agree to an unconditional ceasefire? Well, the reason they won't is that they've seen time and again that whenever there are pauses, then one side rearms and just comes back stronger to attack again. And in fact, that's exactly what the Americans have been doing with Iran as well. Well, we'll have a ceasefire, but then after a while we'll break the ceasefire, after we've had a chance to replenish our military stock. So a ceasefire isn't a solution.

A ceasefire is just pressing the pause button, allowing both sides to kind of get some more energy and come back to fight again. That's not really in anybody's interest at all. You know, that's certainly not in Russia's interest. Frankly, it's not in Ukraine's interest either. It's not in our interest. You know, what we need is some sort of deal. And that deal can only happen through diplomacy. That deal can only happen when, you know, Ukraine is engaging with Russia in proper, detailed, technical diplomatic talks, not just Zelensky-led stunts where, you know, "Oh, meet me in Istanbul if you're brave enough. If you're not brave enough, face me in writing"—Putin a letter full of insults with an aside at the end saying, "Well, let's meet," you know, as if that's any kind of serious diplomacy.

Diplomacy is tough. Diplomacy means sitting in a room, going through the hard, detailed—frankly, a massive list of issues—a bit like what happened actually in Gomel and in Istanbul at the start of the war, right, in the famous deal that was then scuppered by Boris Johnson and Victoria Nuland. Diplomacy requires hard work. It's not Zelensky meeting Trump for 40 minutes in New York yesterday. It's kind of months of detailed preparation, to the point where, you know, leaders can actually meet. President Putin can meet with Zelensky if he's still in power, or whoever replaces Zelensky if there's some sort of change in power.

Who knows, you know, what will happen? I mean, but that process will take a long time. And I'm not saying that as a delaying tactic. It just does. I mean, there are so many things where both sides disagree. There's an issue on territory. There's an issue on minority language rights. There's an issue on ultra-nationalists and Nazis in Ukraine. There's issues on reconstruction of Ukraine. There's issues on children and that sort of thing. There's, like, a massive list. There's issues of dead bodies that both sides still hold that need to be... There's issues of prisoners.

I mean, it's just like a huge list. Future status after the war ends in terms of its neutrality, on the basis that, you know, Russia will not accept, you know, a ceasefire while NATO is saying, well, you know, Ukraine still belongs to the NATO family, putting the NATO ticket back on the table, saying we haven't given up the dream just yet. You know, there has to be some clarity that Ukraine will never join NATO. You know, there has to be something for the Europeans to figure out on what Ukraine's European future will be. I mean, it's just like a massive list. It's going to take some time, and that requires the Europeans to get on board, and they haven't got on board.

And Zelensky's absolutely not on board. I mean, he doesn't want the war to end because, from his point of view, if the war ends, his political career is over. The polling says that he won't win an election. Diplomacy has to come back into the room, but the Europeans and the British have departed from it. Until they get back onto it, I mean, the war is just going to drag on. I've been saying for much of this year that the war will drag on until 2027. I said earlier this year that even after the Europeans agreed another 90 billion, the Ukrainians will come back in September for some more money.

They beat me to it by coming back in August for some more money. It's also very predictable. You know, we've been saying that, actually, well, you know, as soon as we get to winter, you know, Ukraine's energy system will be battered, and then drone attacks are on, and therefore it's going to be harder to defend the sky. So, you know, they need to start that diplomacy now. And even if they start it now, there's a very slim chance they could get a deal over the line before the winter strategic bombardment campaign starts. I don't, frankly, see any signs that that's going to happen. So that's very true, yeah.

#Glenn

I did want to ask about the American position here, because when Trump was running for president, he was on more than one occasion making references to NATO expansion being the source of this. So you kind of had to take this off the table. And, indeed, this was also what Pete Hegseth said in one of the first two months of the Trump presidency—that is, the second presidency—that, well, we have to take NATO expansion off the table, and also no security guarantees. We have to accept territorial concessions. Since he took power, he hasn't really spoken much about this at all. Now he's talking about Putin and Zelensky hating each other. How do you make sense of this? Because he's also now trying to make a deal with Zelensky not to strike Russian oil refineries, but surely the Americans are pretty involved in this operation. So is this just Trump not being in control, or just Trump being deceptive?

#Ian Proud

I think Trump has lost all of his leverage. And yesterday's meeting—I had an article in Responsible Statecraft this morning on the meeting they had yesterday—Zelensky can take one look at Trump and realize that probably in November, Trump's going to have less leverage because there's a good

chance that both houses will have gone to the Democrats. Zelensky knows this. And actually, ever since Trump has come to power, Zelensky has fallen back on his European allies backing him in resisting efforts by the US to mediate some sort of peaceful settlement of the conflict. And now Zelensky can see that Trump will soon be a lame duck president, and therefore he doesn't need to try too hard, because then the ball will be back in von der Leyen, Kaja Kallas, BlackRock Merz's court in November, and they'll keep telling him that he's doing the right thing and just carry on.

So I think, actually, I do genuinely think there's a grain of Trump being sincere in wanting to end the Ukraine conflict. He wanted to have better relationships with Putin in his first term in office. He was hemmed in by the likes of Lindsey Graham and the CAATSA sanctions bill. He's tried this time, and he got off to a good start, but then the politics of Washington caught up with him again. And the Iran war just frankly made it impossible for him to have any headroom. It made it impossible because as soon as the war in Iran started, it just hardened the Europeans' position that they weren't going to allow Zelensky to make any concessions to Trump. So with midterms now, I mean, Trump is cutting an increasingly irrelevant figure, which is a shame because I genuinely believe that his intentions were the correct ones, but he just didn't have the political capital to see them over the line in the face of European resistance.

#Glenn

Well, a key concern of mine, though, is let's say Ukraine begins to fall apart tomorrow and the Europeans realize, well, we might actually need a deal after all. As you said, this will take a long time. You know, you would have hoped that our diplomats would be talking. You would have a rough deal, a common understanding at least that, okay, this war began because of NATO expansion. We have to find a neutral arrangement to put an end to this security competition.

And, you know, some general ideas about the disputed territories or, you know, what to do about the Russian language and, you know, these basic human rights. But there's nothing really there. So if things begin to falter tomorrow, you know, what are they supposed to do? Make the first visit and start to chart out the mutual possibility for meeting? We seem so far apart, but not just because of the war going on for so long, but no diplomacy yet. What might the EU do here? Is the belief that if they end up in a direct war with Russia, that the Americans will be involved? Or do you see this not being likely?

#Ian Proud

I think the Europeans are in complete denial. And as I said at the start, it's about statesmanship. It's about the kind of elected leaders. Kaja Kallas, Ursula von der Leyen aren't elected, but, you know, Baerbock, Merz and Macron and Starmer are elected. And even though he's not been subject to an election, you know, there was a time when Zelensky was elected too, right? So these are the kinds of people in charge. These are the people that need to kind of want to act in the higher interests of their state, and they're not doing it. I mean, Zelensky is acting in his own interest. God knows what

interests Kallas and von der Leyen are acting in, apart from just beefing up the powers of their unelected bureaucracy in Brussels.

Nobody's kind of thinking about putting the interests of the Ukrainian state above their own personal ambitions and their personal antagonism towards Russia. That's the first thing. I mean, Ukraine is already falling apart. I mean, will it fall apart? I mean, it's already falling apart. I mean, you know, its adult population, you know, working age and above, I mean, 50% of them are now pensioners. Its population is almost half the size it was at the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its economy is working on the basis of payday loans from Europe. All sorts of human rights abuses are being carried out. Elections haven't been held. There's a martial law argument to make about that, but it's clear that Ukrainian people want elections. Corruption's running amok. Cities are being battered. They'll have no energy and heat for much of the period of the wintertime.

I mean, it is already falling apart, Glenn, and it has been for the past few years since this stupid war started. But people don't care because this doesn't get reported in the Western mainstream media. So it's like Descartes: if you can't see it, it doesn't exist. You know, we just carry on as normal. We watch Strictly Come Dancing, and the new season's started, The Great British Bake Off has started. We have lots of things to titillate our senses. And of course, the BBC just drugs us with a daily dose of government propaganda, as do all the mainstream newspapers. So, you know, we don't even know. I mean, Ukraine doesn't even exist, except that, you know, we're beating Russia, and that's the most important thing. And I sound cynical, but that's, you know, what it is. I mean, you know, we need statespeople who will step up, and we just don't have them.

#Glenn

Zelensky isn't a statesperson by any means.

#Ian Proud

He will do anything to keep this war going. The ES conference even said, this Pinchuk-organized conference where Boris Johnson attended, we just need enough missiles, enough money to keep fighting through to April 2026. The Ukrainians want to fight through the winter. They said this. Look up the outcomes of the US conference. Even though it's obvious to anybody that their whole infrastructure system is going to get battered over the winter. People will die of cold. People won't have lighting and things like that. It's terrible that this happens. No one would want these strategic bombardments to happen. It's a truly dreadful thing. But it's a war. And it's a war that Zelensky doesn't want to end. It's a war the Europeans don't want to end. And that's why, sadly, Ukraine is and has been for some time falling apart.

#Glenn

Again, this is the narrative that is, well, the Ukrainians want to continue. They want to win this. But who are these Ukrainians? I mean, because you do have some facts out there. You can look at the polls, which show that most Ukrainians do want a negotiated settlement now. And yet, that translates into, well, for the Europeans, we don't want to talk to the Russians. And instead of starting talks, we'll go to Kiev and tell them to start conscripting women to make up for the manpower problem. I mean, it's... And all of this can fall under the umbrella of, you know, helping Ukraine, supporting them.

It's... I think at some point the narrative has to begin to crack a bit because it's... As you said, so many things have been ignored from the busification and everything else. And all of this, ignoring the plight of the Ukrainians, is always done to serve, essentially, to keep the war going. And the logic is, well, the Ukrainians want it, but Zelensky wants it. And we're paying him a lot of money for wanting it. So it's... Yeah, I just feel this can't go on for much, much longer. At least this winter looks very, very difficult. Do you have any final thoughts before we finish up?

#Ian Proud

No, just that. I mean, you know, we don't see... Well, in fact, we see a bit more coverage of what's happening in Iran, right? You know, there has been a bit more honest reporting about, you know, young girls being sort of killed by a U.S. Tomahawk missile in school and stuff. There's a bit more information. There's a bit more information about what's happening in Gaza. There's a bit more information about what's happening in Lebanon and what's happening in the West Bank. But it's almost like there's a news blackout on Ukraine. And it's tragic, you know, because... Basically, Western leaders are covering up the truth. I mean, they're covering up the truth because they're failing, and at some point they're going to have to admit to the fact that they're failing and have failed Ukraine, and their voters will not like it, and their voters will start to turn out, as they did in Saxony and Hesse and other places, and say, we don't want leaders like you who lie to us and make us less safe and make us poorer.

You know, we want leaders, and I mean, politicians are politicians. I mean, I think there's an argument whether democracy really exists, but at least within our system, you know, we can get rid of people after a certain period of time. But of course, that is also part of the problem because, you know, it almost reinforces itself when you get rid of elected leaders. And what do you still have there? You still have the deep state. So I don't know how to kind of solve this situation, this kind of democratic crisis. I mean, I think it is a democratic crisis that we face in Europe, of which, you know, the war in Ukraine is an ugly manifestation.

#Glenn

Well, thank you so much for taking the time. And where can people find you?

#Ian Proud

Well, I've got my own YouTube channel I recently started called The Peacemonger, at Ian Proud. So most importantly, please look at my YouTube channel, which is called The Peacemonger. I've actually interviewed you, Glenn, on there a couple of times. I had John Mearsheimer, Jeff Sachs, other great people as well. We were talking yesterday. So please, please do find me there and continue to support my work. I'd really, really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

#Glenn

I will leave a link in the description.

#Glenn

And, well, thanks again.

#Ian Proud

Cheers, Glenn.