

Larry Johnson: End of Negotiations & Launch of Oreshnik

Larry Johnson is a former intelligence analyst at the CIA who also worked at the US State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. Johnson discusses provocations, end of negotiations and launch of the Oreshnik. 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 joined again by Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst who publishes very insightful articles on his blog, Sonar 21, which is free to access and free of advertisements. So make sure to check it out. Thank you for coming back. Your most recent article is "Russia Goes Oreshnik Again," in which the Russians promised retaliation for the drone attack on December 28th. Instead of trying to calm the situation, the United States started to engage in piracy, hijacking a Russian vessel. Today we saw that the Oreshnik was the response from the Russians, although without a warhead. It feels like this might be the last warning coming out of Moscow, given how much fury there is there at the moment. I'm just wondering—what is it that you see has happened now, and why?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, so Russia continues what I call cautious escalation. It started on December 28th with a failed attack on Vladimir Putin's official residence. I really believe the CIA thought Putin would be at that address and that they'd have a realistic shot at killing him. All of that took place while Trump was meeting with Vladimir Zelensky at Mar-a-Lago. That was the first blow. And, you know, you and I talked after that event—the Russians were infuriated by it. I mean, the Russians.

It seemed a little irrational in the sense that, you know, previous terrorist attacks against the Crocus City Center, or even earlier this year when Putin flew out to Kursk and, after that was settled, there was reportedly an attempt to shoot down his helicopter—Russia didn't react with the kind of anger it did in this particular case. Apparently, that's because tied up with the attack on Putin was a target involving a command center connected to Russia's nuclear command structure. And then, earlier this year on June 1st, the United States had helped Ukraine carry out an attack on Russia's strategic air bases—so again, another strike against Russia's nuclear capability.

So I think the Russians, at this point, realized, okay, these weren't accidents. This is deliberate, and they're going to respond—but they're going to respond appropriately. So what did they do this time? They took out 50% of the stored natural gas in Ukraine—50%—and they attacked other key energy substations and centers throughout Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Kyiv. So Russia is in the process of literally turning off all the lights and energy in Ukraine as we enter the depths of winter. And it's cold. They just announced in Kyiv that Klitschko is asking people to leave the city, particularly those who live in apartment buildings or condos higher than ten stories, because they've got to shut off the water.

Otherwise, the pipes are going to burst, and then you get burst pipes. The entire plumbing system for sewage and potable drinking water disappears. So Russia is being measured in its response. It's not lashing out and hitting NATO bases throughout Europe. I think that would be a last step for Russia. You sent me an article earlier that I fully agreed with—this was a warning to all of NATO: if you don't think we can reach out and touch you, we can. We prefer not to. But if you continue to escalate this war, we'll have no alternative but to defend ourselves. That's where this is headed.

#Glenn

Well, yeah, I've interviewed a few times this Ukrainian woman, Marta Avryshko, who's quite critical of the far right there in Ukraine. But she was making the point that every time Russia sends a signal to NATO—a warning—it's always, well, against Ukraine. And it kind of begs the question, why? Of course, I understand why going directly after NATO is a big step, because once that line is crossed, it's very hard to avoid direct war. And then there's the question of the United States—whether it will just sell some weapons to the Europeans and let them burn, or if it will step in.

It's unclear, especially if a lot of destruction is inflicted on Europe. But how far do you think the Russians can be pushed now? Because, again, it's a strange thing in the West—we're not really allowed to talk about what the Russians are thinking, their security concerns, and the anger over there. But really, whenever I hear something from Moscow, you get the feeling their blood is boiling, that they're... they're quite angry with all of Europe, especially the Germans. So how close do you think we might actually be to a war now?

#Larry Johnson

Oh, well, we're closer now than we were a year ago. And, you know, it wasn't just the failed drone attack on Putin's official residence on the 28th. It was also the capture and boarding of the Russian flight tanker by the U.S. And it wasn't, as the West tried to portray it, that this tanker suddenly, at the last minute, flagged itself as Russian when it really wasn't. The Russian foreign minister came out with a scorching statement yesterday, condemning this as piracy, condemning it as illegal. And what was fascinating is that the crew consisted of two Russians—one of them the captain—eight Georgians, and twenty Ukrainians.

Now, think about this. Here you've got Russia and Ukraine at war, but you've got a Russian captain on a ship with twenty Ukrainian crew members. And apparently, they weren't fighting each other at sea. I just learned this morning that the United States has released the two Russians and sent them back. Meanwhile, the eight Georgians and twenty Ukrainians are facing criminal charges in the United States. You can't make this stuff up—it's bizarre. The United States isn't thinking this through; they believe they can bully, just like we did in Venezuela—go in, flex our military muscle, and get away with it without paying a price.

One of these days, NATO or the U.S.—or both—will cross the line, and Russia will be compelled to strike outside Ukraine. At this point, they're content to hit targets inside Ukraine, including any NATO facilities. Two or three days ago, Russia hit facilities in Dnipropetrovsk and Odessa, and farther west in Ukraine, that were all U.S.-owned factories and facilities. Russia attacked and destroyed them. So, you know, I think Russia is also sending a message to Washington. I don't know if they got it, but at least Russia is no longer trying to avoid attacking targets affiliated with the United States or Europe.

#Glenn

Well, the last time we spoke, I mentioned that Zelensky's former advisor, Alexei Arestovich, made the point that in the bunkers beneath the residence—or at least nearby—they have the Russian nuclear command center. And this was allegedly one of the reasons the Russians were so angry. They see it as a direct U.S. strike on their retaliatory capabilities.

Now, I don't have any way of verifying whether this is correct, but it would fit within a wider pattern—the strike on the Engels base, where Russia has its nuclear-armed strategic bombers. Many times, by the way, one can add, it's also consistent with the attack on Russia's nuclear early-warning radars, which are supposed to alert them if there's a nuclear strike coming their way. That's a strange thing to hit because it has nothing to do with Ukraine, and it also makes the Russians, I guess, more worried—less preparation time. So they're going to have to hit that retaliatory strike button much faster, with less time to consider. And also, of course, as you saw back in June of 2025, there was the attack on Russia's nuclear bombers, which the FSB said MI6 was behind.

But I assume the CIA also had a role in this. So, how do you—again, if this attack on Putin's residence fits within all of this—what's the purpose here for the United States? Is it to prepare for a nuclear first strike? Is it to signal escalation dominance, basically telling the Russians, "We can go up this ladder, and we can go further than you, so back down"? Is it to pressure the Russians to accept some concessions, or is it to provoke a response so the Russians get pulled further into a direct war with the Europeans? How are you assessing this? Because this is beyond provocative. I mean, when Russia responds, if our leaders dare to say it was unprovoked, that's beyond comprehension. Imagine if something like this had happened during the Cold War—it would have its own chapter in the history books.

#Larry Johnson

I put myself back in my old role, sitting at CIA headquarters in the analytical seat I used to have. The question comes down from the seventh floor—the seventh floor is where the CIA director sits—and they say, “Okay, the White House wants to know: what are the Russians going to do? What’s their real intent?” Or, if I reverse it, I’m now doing that same job for Vladimir Putin as part of the FSB. The first thing I have to assess is: does the United States respect international law and international agreements? I’d have to say no. Under Donald Trump, the United States abandoned any pretense of recognizing international law or international treaties as valid.

Instead, the United States, under Trump, has made it very clear that they’re going to take what they want, do what they want, kill who they want—they’ll do whatever they have to if it serves their interests. So that’s the first danger. Now Russia is saying, okay, if you’re Vladimir Putin and you’re hearing this, you can no longer depend on any promise or anything written—whatever the United States has agreed to in writing, they no longer respect it. And you’ve got Trump saying very clearly—and not just Trump, but Stephen Miller, Marco Rubio—you have top members of the Trump administration basically saying, “Your international agreements and your international law? We wipe our ass with that, okay? It means nothing.”

So from that standpoint, when you, as Russia, have been trying to abide by international conventions and uphold international laws—including agreements to limit the production of nuclear weapons—you’ve got to step back and say, okay, over the course of the last 25 years, George W. Bush walked away from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Donald Trump unilaterally abrogated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Agreement. And right now, he’s declined offers to pursue or keep New START intact so that we can control intercontinental ballistic missiles. So, with all of that as background, if I’m Russia, we have to prepare for war. The only thing the United States will understand is force, and negotiations are a dead end. If I were the analyst, that’s what I’d be telling Vladimir Putin. Now it’s up to him to figure out what to do.

#Glenn

That's a great point, because the only reason the Russians have these hypersonic missiles—the reason they've been putting so much work into their missile systems—is because they warned they would do this for more than 20 years. It was when the United States announced in 2001, and then, of course, it came into effect in 2002, the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, that the Russians said, “Well, now we have to develop missiles that can circumvent your anti-ballistic missile shield.” The concern was that it’s not as if the ballistic missile shield could ever prevent a Russian first strike, because there would be too many missiles.

It would be overwhelming. It’s more or less fair to say that it’s intended to enable a first strike. That is, instead of having nuclear weapons as a deterrent, it gives them an offensive purpose, because it only needs to be powerful enough to absorb the retaliatory capabilities of the Russian Federation. This is a concern. And even if the United States wouldn’t launch a first strike, the concern is that if

they think they have the capability, it would essentially make them more willing to escalate—because now the field can go up the escalation ladder, and the Russians would have to step down.

I mean, this was the entire reason there was an ABM Treaty—that nuclear weapons shouldn't have an offensive purpose. So it's strange that we'd put all these incentives in place for Russia to develop these weapons. But why do you think the Russians haven't put warheads on them? Because this is the first time the Russians have developed the Oreshnik. I think it was back in June they launched one without a warhead as a warning, and this time they launched one without warning in western Ukraine, near the border with Poland.

#Larry Johnson

Well, let me correct you on that. What I've read is that the Russians did warn the United States three hours before the launch, because they wanted to make sure the U.S.—which has satellites that monitor launches that could look like intercontinental ballistic missiles—understood that what they were launching was an intermediate-range missile. They didn't say where it was going in Ukraine, only that it was confined to Ukraine. So yes, they were warned in advance, and then the United States started calling around, telling people, "Watch out, something bad's coming."

#Glenn

Yeah, I'm not sure if that was connected to the warning, but I did see that the U.S. warned its embassy staff or something like that.

#Larry Johnson

Correct. Was that related to this warning? Well, that was unrelated because it happened a couple of days earlier. Oh, sorry. I think the embassy may have been warned by the Russians, saying, "Look, we're going to retaliate, but it will be within Ukraine." So, you know, the United States took that as, "Okay, hey, Americans, get the hell out, keep a low profile," and so on. But for the specific launch of the Oreshnik, apparently the United States was told about it two to three hours beforehand. So again, Russia is trying to avoid doing anything unilaterally that could be misinterpreted and spin this up into a nuclear war.

#Glenn

Well, in terms of seizing the Russian ships, I mean, much like withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty encouraged Russia to develop the hypersonic missile, we see this new trend of either engaging in piracy—hijacking or attacking ships. You know, initially they pretended it was Ukraine that attacked Russian vessels, even in the Mediterranean, but it's becoming more and more shameless, I guess. Yeah, there's less need to cover up what they're doing. So it's this kind of incrementalism. But given that this is the new approach to Russia, it seems very predictable that the

consequence will be that Russia will begin to protect its vessels more and more with military force, which means the Russian Navy is going to be much more active in the Baltic Sea.

It's going to be much more active in the Black Sea and also in the Arctic, or really anywhere they go. Where do you see this leading? Because, again, the U.S. would feel more confident here, given that it's a much greater maritime power. But the risk of war through miscalculation is growing dramatically, though.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, well, let me go back to the illustration I was trying to use—being a Russian intelligence analyst who has to inform President Putin or answer his questions about U.S. intentions and capabilities. So, to turn the question around, President Putin could ask me, “Mr. Johnson, can you give me one example where the United States has put a priority on international law in terms of limiting its actions?” And I’d have to say no. You know, piracy at sea—what’s the difference between that and piracy on land, when they abduct and kidnap an elected president? Now, we can claim that he’s illegal and illegitimate, but it’s still within the confines of Venezuela.

We may not like it, but he was still viewed internationally as the elected leader. And so the answer is, well, no, I can’t. So you start with the presumption that the United States is not bound by any kind of legal constraints whatsoever. Instead, might makes right. If they think they can get away with it, they’re going to do it. From Russia’s standpoint, they’ve in the past used a lot of these—well, they call them ghost ships—but all that means is these ships are no longer insured by Lloyd’s of London. They’re insured out of either China or Russia. I think Russia and China are now coming to the point of saying, you know what, we’re going to do it ourselves.

We’re going to flag these vessels with our own flags—Russian and Chinese-flagged vessels. And it wouldn’t surprise me if Russia started deploying, you know, 15 to 30 special forces on these ships to protect them, so that any inbound helicopter would face the potential of lethal fire. Similarly, any attempt by Navy SEALs to board a ship underway would face gunfire from on board. You don’t want to get to that point, but that would be a better option than risking a confrontation once the ship’s taken. There has been, I think, a gross overestimation of the importance of Venezuelan oil to, say, China. I look at what the Chinese were doing.

They were doing a favor for Venezuela. To buy its oil—they didn’t need it. It’s like here in the United States: every year we have this organization called the Girl Scouts. It’s for girls between about eight and thirteen, and one of the things they do annually to raise money is sell cookies. Well, think of China as having its own cookie manufacturing company. But their next-door neighbor—there’s this little girl—they’re going to buy some cookies from her. That’s what they were doing with Venezuela. They were buying cookies from her; only in this case it was oil, to help the Venezuelan economy. But

it wasn't something China was dependent upon, or that China had no alternative source for. Not the case. It was, again, China trying to build influence by providing money and assistance, as opposed to threatening and using military coercion.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it's often been pointed out that if the Chinese can't buy oil elsewhere, they'd become more dependent on Russian oil, which would only bring them closer together. And if you read the work of Russian Eurasianists, especially from the early 20th century, their main argument was that our weakness is trying to develop as a Western European, maritime power. But we're a Eurasian power, and they're controlling the seas anyway, so they'll always try to constrain our development by blocking us at sea. What we should do instead is look east, form land corridors, and connect with all the Eurasian and Asian great powers. It just seems there are some unforeseen consequences here.

#Larry Johnson

But let me just interject. This is more evidence supporting our mutual friend Sergei Karaganov's position that the future is in the East, not the West. I mean, it's like Donald Trump is making Sergei's case for him.

#Glenn

Yeah, but this is the problem when you weaponize economic connectivity. If you want to predict how they might act now that the U.S. is getting more involved in piracy—not just against Venezuela, but now going after Russian ships as well—you know, we've had this problem before along the Somali coast. We just put a lot of soldiers and armed mercenaries on the ships. And, well, we're the Somalis now, it seems, hijacking ships. But there are also other aspects: stealing the sovereign assets of countries, which is unheard of; banning access to banks and payment systems; blocking access to technologies. It only works for a while, until countries find ways to circumvent it. And once they do, everything becomes, I guess, a lot uglier. But I did want to ask you—if you were giving advice to the Kremlin, what would you tell them about Washington's intentions regarding the negotiations? I mean, where are the negotiations going now?

#Larry Johnson

Well, negotiations are a dead end. They're not serious. The United States is not serious about actually concluding an agreement with Russia. If they were serious—and I would suggest to President Putin—at your next meeting with Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, say, "Look, if we're going to have any chance of these talks succeeding, we're going to need some concrete measures, demonstrations by you that you're serious. And that means, number one, name an ambassador to Russia who's a serious person, someone we know will have direct access to President Trump."

Number two, drop or suspend all prohibitions on direct flights between Russia and the United States. That has to end. Three, end all restrictions on Russian consulates being able to open in the United States to facilitate travel between our two countries. Four, return the assets—the Russian property that has been seized from our diplomatic missions in New York and Washington, D.C.—and lift the restrictions on our diplomats being able to travel. Do those four things, and then we'll know that you're serious about talking. Otherwise, you know, we're not going to waste our time. See if the United States does that. I don't think they would.

#Glenn

Well, yeah, because I often think about the negotiations they had with Iran, and Trump was making the point that they were making great headway right before they launched a surprise attack on Iran. And, well, if you're sitting in Moscow, you can't help but notice that, you know, as Trump brands himself the peacemaker and says he's got a great relationship with Putin and they're negotiating to end this war—they're 90 percent done—you can't ignore that the war planners behind this are mainly American generals sitting in Germany. It's CIA operatives behind attacks on Russian refineries and Russian ships. It's nuclear deterrence.

Again, it's American weapons launched by American contractors, guided by American satellites, with targets picked by American intelligence. And of course, all of Trump's arguments that we have to impose massive sanctions and pressure countries like India to stop trading with Russia, and the talk that we have to weaken the Russian war machine—which is really just a way of saying we're going to destroy our own economy—all of that talk, and then no progress in the negotiations. It just doesn't make any sense. Why are the Russians still going along with this? Do you think it's genuine, or are they just realizing it's a dead end but amusing Trump?

#Larry Johnson

Well, no, I think there's an element of pressure from China, from India, and to a lesser extent Brazil, that Russia should try to make a good-faith effort to negotiate with the United States. Now, I think that in the wake of the attack on Putin's residence and the abduction of President Maduro, the pressure that would have come from China, India, and Brazil on that issue has now abated—and abated significantly. I think they now recognize that the United States is a lawless country. We see no reason whatsoever to abide by international conventions or international rules. There's no such thing. And listen to Stephen Miller—they blatantly say there's no such thing as international law. We don't have to follow that. We're the biggest, we're the strongest, we're the superpower.

Screw you. We're going to do what we want to do. And, you know, if any of these countries had harbored lingering doubts that Russia might have been exaggerating or misrepresenting the U.S. position, the United States has now openly said it. You know, it's sort of like that scene in **A Few Good Men** with Jack Nicholson—he's insisting they hadn't carried out this abuse against the

younger soldier, and finally, under cross-examination, he admits, "Goddamn right, I ordered a code red." That's just what Stephen Miller and Donald Trump did. They basically admitted, "Yes, we did it, and we're going to do it again." And the rest of the world is going, "Whoa, wait a second. So much for the UN." They've admitted the UN is a joke, something not to be paid attention to.

This is the law of the jungle. And Dmitry Medvedev, I think, correctly observed and commented on this within the last 24 hours. He said, hey, it's about who's the biggest and strongest in the jungle. It's all about force. It's not about right and wrong. It's not about law. Now, listen, this cuts completely against Vladimir Putin's approach, because as a lawyer, he's been trained to actually respect the law. You know, people say, oh, that's ridiculous—but no, he's made quite a point about dotting i's, crossing t's, and trying to proceed in a legal manner in accordance with international law. Now they're being told, in the course of the last ten days, that international law no longer matters and Russia should be prepared to act accordingly.

#Glenn

Well, this is a problem. If there's no international law, then might makes right. You're sending a signal to the international system that if you want any protection, or assume you can have security rights of any kind, it has to be backed by power—by weapons. And this can encourage a lot of balancing against the United States. If the U.S. essentially tells the rest of the world that the only reason we're going to follow rules is because you have power you can use against us, then I think this is an awakening for many states. With Venezuela, for example, the Europeans seemed shocked—like, why don't they just say the magic words "democracy" and "freedom"?

That's why you went into Venezuela—then it's legitimate, and we can support it. But instead they just said, no, it's oil, it's our hemisphere, get out, it's our oil. And then, of course, when they said, also, we want Greenland, the Europeans asked, well, why? What claim do you have? That's sovereign territory. Ah, we need it. It's just—there's not even, at least in the past there used to be, some kind of pretense that, you know, maybe there was a law here or there. Now it just seems like we're ignoring it.

#Larry Johnson

These are the tactics of organized crime. You know, you're running a deli or a restaurant, and the local mafia guys come in and say, "Hey, nice restaurant you've got here. You're going to be paying us 25% of your profits every month from now on because we'll help you keep the place nice. And if you don't, the restaurant's not going to be so nice." You've got to pay up. That's what this is like—this kind of coercion. And just the fact that they insist, "Oh yeah, we need Greenland." For what purpose? "So we can shut down Russia and China." Okay. Okay.

#Glenn

Yeah, and when the Danes and the Europeans in general tell the Americans, "Well, you know, we're allies. You can have more bases here if you want," they say, "No, no, no, we need it under our control." That kind of signals what's coming in the future as well—we might not be friends for that long. And, you know, it's better to have it under our own control. But in this negotiation—well, no, it was negotiations. Sorry, they keep calling them negotiations when the Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians talk among themselves. They call it negotiations. I think they forget they're all on the same side against Russia.

But anyway, in Paris, the Europeans seemed very confident. They thought the Americans were going to give them a backstop on putting European troops in Ukraine. In other words, if they sent troops to Ukraine—and not if, but when—the Russians knocked them all out, then the Americans would step in. But this assumption didn't come out of nowhere. It appears the United States might have left them, very deliberately, with that impression before pulling back. So it kind of begs the question: why? Is the Trump administration trying to embolden the Europeans to send troops even though they won't be protected? So again, is this an effort to end the war, or do they just want to get the Europeans to continue the war into the next stage?

#Larry Johnson

No, actually, I think... I'm going to look at it first from Russia's perspective. You know, when you see your enemy—your adversary—committing suicide, don't intervene to stop them. In fact, encourage them to continue. And that's what I think Russia is seeing the United States do now vis-à-vis NATO. One of the Russians' legitimate concerns up to this point has been that a unified NATO poses a significant threat to Russia. Now, watching Trump's antics and his provoking confrontation with the rest of NATO—and we saw just in the last 24 hours comments by Macron and, you know, a member, I think, of the French legislature saying, "Hey, we need to withdraw from NATO. We need to get out."

All of a sudden, the prospect of a disunited, divided NATO is very real. If I'm working that issue from the standpoint of Russian intelligence, boy, I'd be doing everything I could to encourage that. The more of that, the merrier, because ultimately it's going to make us more secure in the long run. But Trump seems to be acting almost as an agent of Russia in that regard instead of promoting unity. He's doing what he can—he's provoking confrontations with Denmark. In the United States, if you ask most people to find Denmark on a map, only those who've watched a lot of old Hollywood movies featuring Danny Kaye would know.

Remember Danny Kaye? He was this actor, and he was known for singing that song about "wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen," you know, this upbeat tune. That was Denmark. But now Denmark's mobilizing what small military force it has, sending it to Greenland to fight off the United States. Good God, this sounds like a Peter Sellers movie—you know, **The Mouse That Roared.** So if you're Russia watching this, you just holler out, "Put another log on that fire," because the more NATO disunites over this issue of U.S. bullying, the better it is for Russia.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think it's—well, it's a quote attributed to Napoleon. He said, "Never interrupt your enemy when he's making a mistake." And I think that's a good reason—not to keep a low profile, but the assumption is, if Russia doesn't, the more it pushes back, the more it will unite the Western countries. But if it just takes a step back, the whole thing will fall apart on its own. Well, and I—

#Larry Johnson

And I think that's one of the reasons you're seeing restraint on Russia's part with the use of, like, the Iskander missile—not going outside the boundaries of Ukraine, hitting targets inside Ukraine that could minimize civilian casualties but maximize damage to Ukrainian infrastructure, so it won't be able to keep heating homes or providing fuel for factories.

#Glenn

So just as a final question, where is this war going now? Because we see the front lines continue to deteriorate, I think, in the Zaporozhye region. It's clearer there than anywhere else, but also pushing into Dnipro, Kharkov, and the Sumy region. But with all these military victories—as we see them grow—there's also more pressure on, as I said before, the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, and on its ability to manufacture both for the economy and for warfare. And of course, now, as you also mentioned, when the mayor of Kiev, Klitschko, encourages people to leave the capital—well, where are they going to go? I'm assuming he said, more or less, if you have a different place to go.

But for many people, that will mean leaving the country. Now again, this has, I guess, many benefits for Russia. One, it shuts down the economy. It shuts down society a bit. It makes it more difficult for them to actually fight. But at the same time, it makes it easier to conquer cities if they're not full of civilians who could be killed. So... do you see this setting up for a final showdown? I mean, are they looking for a collapse? Because it's not as if this can go on forever. The more holes there are in the front line, the more the Ukrainians are trying to plug those holes with reserves. At some point, there are no more reserves left, and then all the holes will start to leak at the same time.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, no, Ukraine clearly has a manpower problem. Russia has a surplus of forces. You know, they've been steadily building up. I think the total Russian ground force manpower now is about 1.5 million, and they're pushing both mobilization and recruitment drives to expand it to over 2 million. And this isn't just to defeat Ukraine; it's for the follow-on war with NATO that they're preparing for. It doesn't mean they're going to do it, but it does mean they're prepared. They're thinking ahead

and planning so they're not caught in the kind of situation they were in back in 2022, when they hadn't really planned it through. They had a good plan A, but they didn't have a good plan B or plan C if plan A failed.

Sort of the unknown now, or the variable that's thrown into this whole calculation that changes the answer, is Trump's erratic behavior. If Trump pursues the confrontation with Denmark over Greenland, that's going to accelerate the decline of NATO and further weaken it. In fact, you've already got Meloni, the prime minister of Italy, saying, "Hey, maybe we need to start talking to Russia now." And the Russians would be happy to talk. They'd rather get along with the Europeans than not. They don't hate the Europeans, but it's no longer something they absolutely have to have—a relationship with them. So the military situation on the ground in Ukraine, though, I think is going to rapidly deteriorate from what we're seeing now.

It's going to accelerate, and Russia will finish purging Ukrainian soldiers out of Donetsk. They'll be well, well advanced. In fact, right now they're something like 20 kilometers from Zaporizhia, this huge city—same in Sumy. So they're at the point where they'll be able to surround and envelop Zaporizhia, Dnipro, Dnipropetrovsk, and Sumy. And all of a sudden, you know, three major cities for Ukraine are in jeopardy of being lost. At that point, Putin's made it clear that the deal that's been on the table will be replaced by a new one, which means if they occupy Dnipropetrovsk, Sumy, and Poltava, then those oblasts will have a chance to vote to become part of Russia.

#Glenn

Yes, Zelenskyy just recently, I think within the last few hours, made a statement that the tactic of the Russians now is to shut down—this is more or less his wording—to shut down Ukrainian cities. So if the cities are shut down, like what you're seeing now with Kyiv, then essentially the country shuts down and the war is over. And as you said, given—and this is just Kyiv—but given the proximity they now have to cities like Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia, these are the major cities. So yeah, Kyiv is the largest, Kharkiv is the second largest. I mean, this is kind of big. So... sorry, one last question. Sure. What is the next stage here then? Because the Europeans have made it very clear they're not willing to put an end to this war.

They think that if the war ends, this massive Russian army will then be able to deploy to the Baltic Sea or somewhere along their borders. So, better to keep the war going. But if there's no willingness to end the war... well, what might they do? And, you know, the United States under Trump had a more accommodating tone—they wanted to reach a deal and all that. But still, the intelligence agencies, it's not as if they'd be dislodged from Ukraine without a fight. The CIA isn't going anywhere. So what would happen, I guess, the day after? Let's say Ukraine capitulates tomorrow—what would it actually look like? Would you have different factions within Ukraine turning on each other? Would there be a civil war? I mean, there seems to be a whole set of new problems the day after.

#Larry Johnson

Well, the key to that will be who has control of the guns—who's got the military, who will still have some capability to carry out military or paramilitary operations in Ukraine. They'll be the ones who make the decisions. And, you know, Russia is wise enough to understand they're going to have to deal with them. And if it comes to killing them, they'll kill them. It's the same as what happened in the Second Chechen War. I saw a fascinating commentary by Abdi Aladinov, and I'm fortunate to consider Abdi a friend. He was sitting in front of a flag that symbolizes his Islamic faith and the Russian national flag.

He's a Russian patriot, first and foremost. But he was reacting to the boarding of this ship, the *Marinera*, and basically seeing it as a direct affront—a direct attack on Russia that will have to be answered. I think the next step will still be that Russia confines its military operations within Ukraine. But I wouldn't be surprised to see them turn to the United States and say, "We're going to put you on notice going forward. Any U.S. reconnaissance aircraft in the Black Sea or along our borders will be legitimate targets, and we will shoot them down. So if you continue to send them up, we will shoot them down. We're putting you on notice."

And deploying forces on Russian-flag vessels that will resist any attempt by the United States to board those vessels—that will escalate this, and the United States may try to fight back. So I think there is a significant risk, both of this escalating into a military confrontation, and then the other part is what happens when the United States and Israel attack Iran. Russia is now in a closer military relationship to help Iran defend itself than ever before. So we've got two—let's call them two big pots of gunpowder—that are open, and we're walking around smoking cigarettes and flicking ashes. That's dangerous conduct around open gunpowder.

#Glenn

Well, that's what seems—well, it'll be the dangerous scenario now, that as the war comes to an end, the losing side, which is NATO and, of course, Ukraine as well, will become more desperate. Meanwhile, the Russians might—well, hubris might be a problem there too. They might get a bit too bold. But beyond that boldness, the whole setup we've had over the past four years—like, "Oh, this is a great war, now we can essentially use Ukraine as a firing position, we can go after the Russian Black Sea Fleet, we can launch missiles into Russia"—is NATO willing to give up that privilege once the war is over?

It seems, as you said, that at some point the Russians will more or less say, "Why are we accepting these Western drones flying over the Black Sea, picking targets for striking us?" The more confident they are in the battle against the Western proxy, the more confident they would be, I guess, in pushing back against the West. Now, of course, the West is not one entity. I would assume they'd

first try to punish the Germans, for example, given that they don't have any nuclear weapons, they're very much despised, and it's doubtful the Americans would come to their aid. But something's going to change—it can't continue like this anymore.

#Larry Johnson

But did you see Merz's comment? I found it amusing. He said, "Yeah, no, well, we won't deploy German forces to Ukraine without Russia's permission." I thought, hey, he's not completely crazy. He recognized that, you know, if you've got Russian compliance on it, that's one thing. But if you don't have that, you don't do it—which apparently is a message that hasn't gotten to Keir Starmer and his crew yet.

#Glenn

Yeah, but it's just a normative argument. We can put troops in Ukraine because Ukraine is a sovereign country—they invite us, and Russia can't say anything. I mean, it sounds morally nice and correct, but this has been our project for the past 30 years: creating a Europe without Russia. We've made sure Russia doesn't participate in any key European institutions—be it the EU, NATO, whatever defines Europe—and now it doesn't have a voice. So now we can pretend Russia's not there. The problem is that, you know, Russia will assert itself in a different way. This idea that we don't need Russia's permission—well, you kind of do. If you don't have that permission, then you'll be greeted with the Oreshniks. I really don't understand this political class. I think we need to bring back the old guard from the Cold War—those leaders, at least they had some common sense and a bit of respect for war and for their opponents.

#Larry Johnson

Well, again, think back. They were coming off a terribly destructive war. They had lost friends and family, they had seen their countries devastated. They knew what the cost was—you know, the cost wasn't some theoretical construct. It was real, it was tangible. And they knew they didn't want to go back down that road again. So they had a strong incentive to say, "Let's get some rules to live by that we'll all agree to, not color outside these lines. We'll stay inside those lines so we can avoid another war." What they're confronting now with Donald Trump is somebody who's not guided by that at all. He's out of control.

#Glenn

Well, we don't learn from history, and I guess this is the main curse many people talk about—that every generation has to learn the horrors of war on its own. As the World War II generation dies out, there's no one left with a living memory of those horrors. Over the past 30 years, war has been

something that happens to other people, far away. I think this generation will realize that war means Oreshniks falling upon our cities. But I already asked quite a few last questions, so I just want to thank you very much for taking the time.

#Larry Johnson

I always enjoy your last questions—they're always insightful. Keep up the good work. I particularly liked your conversation with Sergei Karaganov; I thought it was very insightful.

#Glenn

Thanks, I appreciate it. And for those listening, I'll leave a link to that conversation in the description. So thanks, Larry, and have a great weekend.

#Larry Johnson

All right, my friend. Take care. Bye-bye.