

Fred Weir: NATO & Russia on a Collision Course for 30 Years

Fred Weir is a Canadian journalist who lives in Moscow and specializes in Russian affairs. 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> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. For the first time today, we're joined by Fred Weir, a journalist who moved to Moscow in 1986, then as a journalist for the Canadian Tribune, and then settled there permanently and has since worked as a correspondent in Moscow covering political events. So thank you for coming on the program.

#Fred Weir

It's a great pleasure. I've watched some of your podcasts, and I'm impressed by the wide variety of people you get on and the interesting conversations you can create.

#Glenn

Thank you. I feel in this day and age, we don't get that much in the media. Often, what frustrates me is that we're in a very dangerous place. It seems like, from both the politicians and the media, the only way they have to explain what's happening is that we are good, our opponents are bad. If you look at the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, it's a bad thing, and if it's bad, we should reject it. I mean, there's a lack of nuance and willingness to adjust. So I'm trying to do my part. But I did want to discuss today, though, some of the evolution or development of the relations between Russia and the West.

Because, again, the benefit of you having been there, a Western journalist in Moscow for 40 years now, is that you do have a very unique insight into understanding how relations between the West and Russia have changed since the end of the Cold War. Essentially, how could you go from that immense optimism in the early '90s, believing that we were now on a path to perpetual peace, to now, where we're essentially discussing World War III and the possibility of nuclear exchange? So,

yeah, I guess a very wide question would be, you know, if you look back now towards the end of the Cold War, did you see the roots of the causes being linked there in different expectations about peace and security?

#Fred Weir

Totally different time. When I moved to Moscow, it was at the dawn of the Gorbachev era. And that five years or so, the last period of the Soviet Union, was a dismantling of the Cold War and of the Soviet Union, as it turned out. But the attitudes of people around me—well, they were fed up with their government, with the Soviet system. I mean, most of the people around me were educated intelligentsia, you may say. And it's always been harder to read regular Russians when you go from Moscow. And, you know, it's not clear what they thought. But when the state collapsed, they were certainly apathetic en masse.

But the attitude then among the people around me was not just that their system was a failure and an embarrassment to them, but that whenever they went West—and many of them were going in various ways in those days—they saw what was undeniably a superior society, way of life. They just could see it, and they believed in it. And I would often be critical. You know, I come from a left-wing Canadian background, and I would try to interject, you know, some kind of more nuanced opinions about life in the West. But the opportunity for rapprochement was there. It was so clear that Ronald Reagan saw it, an old Cold War warrior, and embraced it.

And when the Soviet Union collapsed, it seems to me—and this is hindsight, retrospect, because I didn't think any of this at the time—but now it seems to me that it was one of the great watersheds of history. You know, like after the Napoleonic Wars or World War I or World War II, when the old order had clearly been broken—in those cases by a great war, but in this case by a long and arduous Cold War—in all of those cases, they held a big conference. In most cases, it was the victors. But in 1815, the Congress of Vienna was not just the victors. It was a more all-embracing kind of meeting where they set up an order in Europe that lasted, kept the peace for a century.

After World War I, it was a different story, a vindictive kind of conference. But after World War II, they created an order that still survives today and is the last vestige of stability that we have. And in 1991, there was virtually nothing. There were talks and there was a reunification of Germany and some documentation there, but you can't point to much that was decided at that critical moment about what the future order in Europe and the world should look like. And then the Soviet Union collapsed, and I remember being disquieted even in the early '90s, when that pro-Western sentiment in Moscow was overwhelming.

I mean, even the communists in this town in the 1990s didn't think there was any destination for Russia other than to join the Western-led world order. Maybe they had their terms or differences and so on, but they didn't see any options. And when Putin came in after the disasters of the 1990s for Russia—it was a catastrophic decade here—and he also wanted reconciliation. He wanted to

become a partner in a US-led order, and it took quite a while for him. I mean, I guess he laid out his third-way idea in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference, but the road to that was paved with terrible disappointments for Russia.

Not just the failure of Western-style capitalism to take hold in Russia and the manipulations of Western advisers in the 1990s, which were to try to speed the growth of capitalism as fast as possible, and therefore they positively encouraged developing an oligarchy. I mean, all these things fed into a decade of collapse and catastrophe, economic crash, social implosion here, and also gradually a loss of that belief that the West is the answer, that it's the blueprint for the future. And I guess the different sectors of the Russian elite, you know, would have seen it through a different prism. But, you know, everybody felt the gradual loss of direction, which explains how, when Putin came in, he had a fairly draconian program.

It was liberal, liberalizing in the classical sense of, you know, economically, socially. But it was authoritarian in the political sense, a restoration of, well, he called it the dictatorship of law, but it was, you know, taking the system that Yeltsin created, which was inherently—it had the potential in the Russian Constitution—a very strong presidency was right there. Yeltsin did that. But Putin exploited it, developed it. So Russia returned to an authoritarian type of system, which it has had for a thousand years. But I've written a lot about the democratic possibilities that were there very, very clear in the Gorbachev era. And in the '90s, it was largely shut down in 1993. But still, Russia could have gone different ways.

And if the West had been different in its attitudes, for instance, if the collapse of the Soviet Union had happened during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's time, and he would have brought New Deal ideas to Russia, they would have worked much better in Russia than the shock therapy did. But anyway, it's all water under the bridge, and I'm not sure if I'm speaking to your question, but there was a long, hard road to disillusionment, to Putin making that speech in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference. And all Russians sort of went through it. But the Russia that Putin has built, and since 2007 has been, not Western path, not returning the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire, any of that. The liberal reforms that were sort of born, spawned in the 1990s, they weren't designed by Putin, but they have transformed Russia.

This country, you know, it has private property, market economics. The consumer economy is entirely on market principles. There may be more of a state-led element when you get up into the high-tech and heavy industry and raw materials. But the economy that I live in, where I go to my shopping, go for restaurants and coffee, and so this is not so different from the Canada I grew up in, you know, the street life. The private property, especially in land, has made such a long-term difference, but even in the short term, the ability to buy and own land for the first time in a thousand years. When I explain to Western people, you know, you can actually buy land and own it, they say, "Yeah, so?" But that was never the case in any Russia. No one other than a czar could point to a piece of land and say, "I own this."

But my wife is one of the first generation of Russians who can. And she recently filed a geodetic copy of our land at a registry office, just like you would, I guess, in Norway. I mean, it's surrounded by laws, zoning laws and tax obligations and such, but basically it's land ownership. And the ability to own land and repurpose it for commercial purposes has created a housing boom in not just Moscow and St. Petersburg and a few other big Russian cities, but almost everywhere. Suburbia is happening. And it also created an agricultural boom. You know, you have to pinch yourself when you remember that the Soviet Union was the world's biggest importer of grain, and Russia is one of the biggest exporters of grain. And that is all down to an agricultural revolution based on private property, not, you know, Bukharin's idea of private peasant farmers anymore.

It's agribusinesses, but they're tremendously productive. And now, when you go into the supermarkets, virtually everything in the produce section is homegrown. So all this has huge implications. Russia today is a completely different planet from the Soviet Union that I came to. And I feel terrible about the war that's happened. I see all the dynamics that have led to it. I have contradictory feelings about it. But basically, all of the opportunities that might have been there at the collapse of the Soviet Union, had there been creative diplomacy, any amount of forward thinking, leaders who maybe would sit down and draw up a new blueprint for a basic world order, all of that that might have prevented the place where we are now never happened. And here we are.

#Glenn

Yes, I've spoken to some Russians in agriculture who make that contrast between the Soviet system and now: that during the Soviet Union, it was the government would come to the farmers and tell them essentially what to produce. And if they couldn't deliver it, then at least lie about it. But now it's different. That is, the government still comes to the farmer, but asks, you know, how can this be made more efficient? What infrastructure should we build, or, you know, technology? So it becomes a different relationship.

But I did want to ask about the settlement of relations between the West and the Russian Federation after the Soviet Union. Because, you know, you mentioned World War I and World War II. And after World War I, the kind of approach that was taken with the Treaty of Versailles was, let's perpetually weaken the Germans so we won't have the German problem. In World War II, they went the other way, a little bit like they did with the French after the Napoleonic Wars. That is, give them a seat at the table. We'll embrace them. Of course, critics would point out Germany was perhaps embraced because of the Soviet threat.

You needed to industrialize, reindustrialize Germany to have, you know, as a locomotive to drive the Western Europeans forward, as opposed to, yeah, as opposed to making it into one big potato field system. But in the early 1990s, Russia and the West, they spoke about building this common pan-European security system. This was based to a large extent on the talks from the Helsinki Accords from 1975. Then they had this Charter of Paris for New Europe in 1990, and then, of course, developing the OSCE in 1994. The key principles were, again, based on the Helsinki consensus: no

more dividing lines, indivisible security, no more bloc politics. But when and why do you see this vision beginning to break down?

#Fred Weir

Well, it was mainly Gorbachev who painted very bright visions of, you know, Europe united from Vladivostok to Lisbon and so on. And there was some movement, as you say. But the basic decisions that should have been taken, I mean, in terms of the security architecture of Europe, that's the main thing. The Warsaw Pact dissolved. Maybe NATO could have dissolved, and something new put in its place, something more inclusive. Because in the vacuum, and the Soviet Union did go away, it just wasn't there at the table anymore. Instead, there was this menagerie of little states and one big Russia. And they didn't—I do recall there was a lot of debate in the United States about how to deal with Russia, and not much consensus.

And in the end, they didn't. I think it happened mainly under Clinton. The basic decisions were, let's just expand our institutions, NATO in the first place, and the European Union was becoming a thing. These are the time-tested, proven, history-winning institutions, and let's just keep expanding them eastward. That's something that they still haven't let go of, you know, even though I think it was clear to Russians, I think it was even clear to Boris Yeltsin, that there wouldn't be a place in Russia for Russia. Russia's too big, too obstreperous, that it's not digestible in the way Poland or Czechia could be.

And I think that the American idea is that we would have allies, new allies, much like we did after World War II. And we'll just expand the post-World War II order, but just with us in charge now, not a bipolar system. And that, in retrospect, I think you can see, is disastrous, because Russia on the outside, and especially a Russia that was rebounding economically, socially, geopolitically under Putin, wasn't going to wear that. It just—there had to be a strategy for Russia, something that could include it, that could draw it in. And I think the record shows pretty clearly that in the early years of, you know, the 2000s, Putin was all for that.

But he got disappointed in so many ways. The Iraq War was one thing. The failure of the West in general, and the Americans in particular, to see the Chechnya war as part of the war on terror, because the Russians very much saw at least the second Chechen war as against Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. The Americans not only didn't go along with that, they encouraged the Chechen rebels. And these kinds of things were stepping stones to Putin finally coming to the conclusion that Russia needs a separate path, one that works for Russia. And I think he did that.

And that was when also his personal break with the West occurred, because I can remember in the early 2000s, the Canadian ambassador here had us journalists over for lunch together. And he was praising Putin to the skies. "Putin, and you journalists don't seem to understand it." And we would point to his authoritarian tendencies and so on. But there was a lot of—at least some people in the West saw Putin as a potential partner, the way Putin saw Russia as a partner for the West. And

although he continued things like the rapprochement with China, settling the border issues with China, all happened under Putin's watch early on. His main focus, and the main focus of Russian foreign policy until about 2014, was the European Union and the West at large.

And when it comes to geopolitical partnerships, they only thought about making a compact with the Americans. It's maybe a Cold War hangover of theirs, but it's still very much alive. This is basically Putin's hope with Donald Trump, that they can revive, they can get some kind of bilateral partnership going. But of course, things are so far gone, and I don't see any going back, at least until the Ukraine war ends, and it depends on how it ends. I don't see any possibility of reshaping the global or even the European security architecture in a lasting and constructive way.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it's interesting with Putin, exactly because he's been there for so long that it's easy to track the position he took. I mean, because in the beginning of the 2000s, I think he saw an opportunity with the U.S.—well, calling 9/11 an opportunity may be a bit dark—but by essentially trying to partner up with the U.S. against the war on terror, essentially having a different enemy can put them on the same team. It didn't play out. He tried that with the EU as well, that is, to sort out the common neighborhood, that is countries like Ukraine. In 2005, they had this common space agreement saying that, you know, we should harmonize our integration efforts, make sure they're not zero-sum in nature. But, you know, it didn't mean anything as soon as it was signed.

The EU kind of still followed the same path of having this agreement, EU-centric Europe, where countries should decouple from Russia and gravitate towards the West. So nothing really changed. But I did want to ask you about—you mentioned you had contradictory feelings about the war, and I think it's a good—I guess I feel the same often, because on one hand, I always thought a war between the Ukrainians and the Russians would be unthinkable. On the other hand, it should also have been predictable since 2004, especially the Orange Revolution kind of made it clear what path we could be on if it became a frontline state for NATO. And again, in 2008, we heard essentially the Western powers—well, a lot of intelligence chiefs, politicians, ambassadors—make this clear as well, that this could take us on a path to war.

Angela Merkel said it. And giving a Membership Action Plan for NATO to Ukraine would be interpreted by Moscow as a declaration of war. But again, on the other hand, I also don't think that the Russians should have invaded. But on the other hand, I also recognize that the alternatives were exhausted, and the Russians saw this as an existential threat. So again, contradictory feelings, as you say. But how did we end up here, though? How do you see us getting to the war? And where is this heading?

#Fred Weir

One point I think I should make, and I differ with a lot of my colleagues on this, or they haven't thought about it maybe, but the policy of Moscow toward the so-called near abroad, the former Soviet space, whatever you want to call it—people say Putin wants to restore the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire. It's neo-imperialism. And it's not quite that. I think it's fairly clear that the basic policy that Moscow has pursued, even from the '90s, has been one that—something like what post-war Marxists called neo-colonialism—where you have these independent states there, you accept that they're independent, they have their own systems of government and their own separate existence, but you keep them in your sphere of influence by various means.

Overarching international agreements like economic, military, and political alliances, you may use more underhanded methods as well—capital flows, labor flows, all those things that sort of create a sphere. The sphere of influence is a loaded term, but I think that's basically what has been the Russian approach. And not to restore— And you could see, for instance, in 2008, when the Russian army had defeated the Georgian army in that brief war, why didn't they march on Tbilisi? They didn't even try regime change. They pulled back to the lines that had existed since the early days. And yes, they make protectorates of those little breakaway states. That's one of the means of control. But they didn't try regime change, and that's rather telling.

Because they easily won that war. And again, in 2014, you know, the Moscow police force could have defeated the Ukrainian army in the Donbas in 2014, but they didn't. They secured the People's Republics, and they intended to use them as leverage in Ukraine. I'm not saying that Russian policy is nice. It's kind of, you know, colonial. It's something like France in Africa or, you know, a lot of—but it's in that category of policies. And it's in danger of changing maybe now because Putin is fighting an all-out war, and he has to— The territorial demands were never very high on the Russian list of demands. The main thing is that they want a Ukraine that's sort of in the Russian sphere of influence. No NATO, for sure, and other things that keep it in the orbit.

But maybe now, after all these years of fighting, there's a territorial demand there that really upsets the apple cart, you know, the global system about not changing borders by territory. It's not as if this is the first time it's been done, but it's a big scale. And so in this, you know, I'm leading up to answering your question, sorry. But I thought in 2022, I saw all the problems. I thought that the Russians were doing a kind of Kabuki military theater with those force arrangements on the border. They were trying to pressure NATO into renegotiating the terms and backing off Ukraine's application for membership in NATO. I thought he had lots of options. And I personally am half Ukrainian by ethnic descent.

#Fred Weir

It was part of my beat as a journalist for a couple of decades. I spent a lot of time in Ukraine. Well, I don't have any kind of possessive emotions about the place. Mostly, my overwhelming thought when I'm down there is, thank God my grandparents emigrated to Canada in 1902. But anyway, still, I

know, since I spent my childhood going to Ukrainian school in Toronto every week, that there is such a thing as Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation. It has a right to a separate existence. And bringing that— I mean, I just never conceived of that coming under threat.

It was unthinkable for me, and still kind of is. And so how Putin talked himself into war— and this is all, I mean, history will eventually tell us— but clearly he did it with some idea, a very narrow circle of people, mainly security people, I guess, because all of the sources that I talked to, and I'm sure the people that you've talked to, people like Fyodor Lukyanov, you know, who are well-connected in foreign policy circles in Moscow, they did not have the slightest idea. They were telling me right up until the last day, "There won't be any war." So they were all cut out of the loop. And Putin did that. So it's on him, you know. But what we've found since— I mean, the war went on— Putin had the good sense within a few weeks to realize that the regime change operation that he launched wasn't going to work.

And he pulled back and tried to negotiate peace. Again, the main terms being Ukrainian neutrality and a measure of demilitarization, not territory. We still don't know the reasons why that fell through, and then it morphed into a larger war. And Putin still was trying to do it on a shoestring. You know, all through 2022, most of the fighting was being done by Ukrainian militias from the Donbas. I mean, that's one dimension of this war that almost never gets mentioned, and you can't say it, actually. It has strong elements of a civil war to it in Ukraine, and the mercenaries, the Wagner mercenaries, and so on.

It wasn't until the setbacks in late 2022 that the full front line was put under control of the Russian Defense Ministry. And even then, it's only now that they're ramping up to a full war economy. And, you know, I can't say that— I mean, it's taken on a different life from whatever we had in February '22. It's quite a different animal today, a monster. And you can see why at least most of the Russians in my circle, people that I talk to, and they're educated, independent-thinking people, they all more or less agree that this is not a war against Ukraine. This is a war against the collective West. This is the Kremlin talking point, you may say, but it's what most of the Russians I know sincerely believe.

#Glenn

I always thought that the miscalculation, though, that we did in the West after the Cold War in relation to the security architecture was by building a new Europe organized primarily around NATO, EU, but also the specific NGOs and this whole architecture. Russia essentially had no seat at the table by design. That meant no institutional voice and no influence. And the assumption was, you know, if we just—well, seemingly the assumption was if there's an institutional framework where they have no voice, then they won't have anything to say and they will essentially just go away. But, you know, this doesn't make much sense for the largest country in Europe. So I think that, again, the miscalculation was by stripping the Russians of any institutional influence, they were left with excessive reliance on hard power, which is—well, if you're a great power and you need to have some

influence in your own neighborhood to make sure that it doesn't undermine your security, that's—it seems like a recipe for disaster. But about the Russian approach, though, towards Ukraine, I do agree. In 2022, when the war began, I think there was a lot of indications that the amount of troops that went into Ukraine, it suggested that, you know...

#Glenn

The occupation was really the objective. You had a lot of top American analysts pointing out that, given, you know, the bombing that the Russians did the first month, the Americans did more in the first 24 hours in Iraq. But this was because they didn't—well, not only of their good nature, but because if you do too hard bombing, too much destruction, it's going to complicate diplomacy thereafter. So, and Zelenskyy confirmed on the first day after the invasion that he was contacted by the Russians to start talks about restoring neutrality. So again, this was a limited objective: let's just restore Ukraine's neutrality, get it off the front lines of a divided Europe. But now, though, we see four and a half years into this war, the rhetoric has changed dramatically. It's no longer the brotherly people. You hear now, you know, references to, you know, so-called Ukraine, so essentially dismissing the sovereignty of that nation. But how do you see that evolution? Because that's, yes, troubling.

#Fred Weir

Yes, no, it is very much so. Fortunately, there are no signs that it is a deep ethnic hatred or anything like that. I'm a Canadian, and we often say that we have the biggest Ukrainian diaspora in the world, but that's not actually the case. Russia always did have the biggest, and this number of Ukrainians here in Russia is greatly swollen by war refugees. And they seem to integrate well. There's no, like, there's no street-level hatred, is what I'm trying to say. There's no animosities of that kind at all. But yes, I mean, I guess you subscribe to the war bloggers' Telegram channels, and they increasingly use that kind of language. I can't tell you what kind of language they use in the Kremlin.

I don't know. I hope it's not that, because I hope they have a post-war vision that does involve helping Ukraine reconstruct. They're going to take territory, how much is undetermined, and they're going to create a Novorossiia-type of area. And I'm sure they'll find enough former Ukrainians who want to inhabit it. As I said, I traveled a lot in Ukraine over the recent decades, and a lot in eastern Ukraine. And it's not that they were pro-Russian. They always voted for the Party of Regions, which stood for their language rights and their kind of collective desire to keep the border open and keep the sort of Soviet-era openness that they were accustomed to.

And I have no idea what they all think now, but in Eastern Ukraine, they were all Russian-speaking. I mean, everybody was Russian-speaking, and they advocated not joining Russia, but being friendly. What I observed, and I'm talking only about eastern Ukraine, east of the Dnieper, what I observed is that almost nobody had developed a Ukrainian identity. They didn't feel Ukrainian. And that doesn't mean they felt Russian. But their instincts were to keep the doors and windows open to Russia.

Their cultural lodestar was Russia. Language—they all watched Russian TV. They all traveled easily. And everybody on both sides of the border has relatives. Absolutely everybody in Russia has some Ukrainian family somewhere in Ukraine, and vice versa.

This war is so tragic in a lot of ways, but what I think has yet to come into view, the Kremlin's idea and the Russian idea, will be to reconstruct whatever territories, new territories, that it's taken in a Russian image. They're already apparently doing that in Mariupol. I used to go to Mariupol, and I know the city well, and I watched all the videos of it being destroyed with bombs. Really abjectly unhappy feelings. But I see videos now, and I gather they're selective. You know, you can't necessarily trust everything. But from what you can see, there's massive reconstruction taking place in that city, and people are coming back. And I think that's the Russian plan after the war, to go over to a reconstruction economy there in the East and remake it into the Russian image.

#Glenn

Yes, it has to be said. The only top official I heard use this kind of derogatory language would be Medvedev, but that's kind of the role he plays. Lavrov, I've seen the recent rhetoric of the past two weeks especially. It has emphasized that the war on Russia by NATO is also, to an extent, a war on Ukraine by the way society is de-Russified. So that can kind of show you what kind of narrative they will go for after the war, that is, yeah, patch things up with Ukraine, as, you know, they did this to both of us, essentially. But, yeah, regarding the Ukrainian identity, I always thought the same, because in the western part of Ukraine, they kind of often see the common history with Russia as an imperial history, and, you know, all the Russian culture and language as an imperial relic, while in the East they have this more of a, yeah, the brotherly people, the wrong people. But I always thought that you could find unity nonetheless in Ukraine.

It was built on the idea that Ukraine has a distinctive identity from Russia, but not anti-Russian. I think if this was the platform, I think that would have been the best basis for cementing its sovereignty, which is still pretty young—not the nation necessarily, but the state itself. But I did want to ask, where is this war headed, though? Because, again, you have—well, I guess front row seat is not the right term—but you've been watching this very closely as a journalist there from Moscow. Where is this headed, do you think, in terms of how it ends? Because when a war has been going on for this long, it becomes very difficult to find compromises, right?

#Fred Weir

Yes, and as I said, and as you said, it develops a momentum of its own. It changes its nature. And the Russians are clearly frustrated by the inability to win on the battlefield. I mean, they'll tell you—I did a story about this. It'll be published soon. I interviewed several Russian military experts, and they all insisted that we're moving forward. We have the strategic initiative. But the technological changes, the drones, the prevalence of drones on the battlefield, make any kind of maneuver in force absolutely suicidal. They're developing tactics. They're moving forward in groups of five and

ten. You know, they infiltrate Ukrainian areas, which is why you have this huge gray zone and very little actual movement of the front line.

And I know they're frustrated about this because all the mathematics say they should be. You know, they should be able to bring force to bear on these fortress cities and Ukrainian front lines and crush them. Yeah. And that's what their own war history tells them. But it's the change in war tactics, and especially the development of battlefield drones. Apparently, there are just thousands and thousands of them. You can't go out in the street in any frontline place and not get targeted. So, because of this, they are going over to massive bombardment of the Ukrainian rear, which is infrastructure, transport, you know, power, like supposedly target water supplies. I mean, it's terrible because they're going to basically demolish Ukraine and make it uninhabitable, at least major cities.

And, I mean, this is horrifying, and also it will intensify the feelings that you spoke of, that, you know, people don't forget easily or forgive. And this going over to massive infrastructure destruction—I mean, they haven't done it before, and I guess it's—I don't understand the Russian strategy. For example, there are ten railroad bridges over the Dnieper River. They are the connecting threads between East and West Ukraine. And the Americans would have taken out all ten of those bridges on day one of a war. The Russians still haven't done it. I don't know why, but it's because their idea was never a full-scale war with Ukraine. And I guess I fear they're coming around to that idea. And this winter we will see, you know, very, you know, very serious escalations there.

#Glenn

Do you see any possibility for obstructions to peace? Because I keep hearing now, because the situation is getting quite difficult on the Ukrainian side in terms of the manpower issues, the air defenses—I mean, for this reason, you hear now Zelensky demanding a ceasefire. The Europeans are echoing this, this unconditional ceasefire, which Russia then sees simply as a way of prolonging the war by giving the West or NATO time to regroup, rearm, and then keep the war going. So they're demanding a political settlement, while NATO and Zelensky are asking for a temporary ceasefire. Do you see any changes here? Any reasons for optimism that this will come to an end at the negotiation table?

#Fred Weir

Well, the Trump administration is trying. They seem to think that there's a window. And maybe it's just their own, you know, selfish reasons, you know. But what Russian military experts and security experts that I've been talking to say is that it's very unlikely that, as long as the Europeans are in Zelensky's corner, they cannot—this is what they say—the Europeans cannot countenance the idea of a Ukrainian defeat. And the terms that Witkoff and Kushner were bandying about are basically Russian terms, you know. They're the so-called understanding that emerged from Anchorage a year ago, plus a few things. But they're basically Russian terms, minimal Russian terms for ending the war.

And they would—even Russian experts will tell you that the Europeans won't have it. And for Zelensky, accepting those terms would be the end of him. So, probably not. And the Americans, at least Trump, for all his talk, doesn't seem to be able to keep a single idea in his head to follow through with, and he doesn't seem to be able to twist arms in Europe or Kyiv to make them accept it. So, yeah, I think the war will go on. But all the Russian experts say the battle situation is much stronger than it was a year ago, and it will be much stronger again in a year. So if they don't accept these terms now, they'll be tougher ones six months, a year down the road.

#Glenn

Well, yeah, let me finish up by asking where people can follow your work.

#Fred Weir

Well, I am the Moscow correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor, which is a Boston-based newspaper. It was founded by a church and is still funded by a church. I'm not a member of that church, but it's basically a secular newspaper. Because it's not commercial, it has its own approach to things. And from my background, I find their sense of mission, which is to tell the story in human terms, not to get engaged in information warfare, but to find the, you know, the real human reasons why things happen.

This jibes nicely with my own personal sense of mission, so I've been their correspondent for, well, since 1998. And I've worked for a lot of different publications as well, but mainly it's the Monitor, and you can find them online. They're a big national newspaper in the United States. And also, I speak forth a lot on Facebook. I have a Facebook page. I blog there a lot. It's not as grand as the way you have your podcast, but I try to express myself on questions that I couldn't get my editors to sign off on, but Facebook. And that's about it.

#Glenn

Well, I like the mission you have over there, and that is to get away from this information warfare which dominates the media and return to journalism. So thank you for your work and for taking the time.

#Fred Weir

Thank you. It was a real great pleasure.