Max Otte: How Germany Destroyed Itself - No Turning Back

Max Otte discusses how Germany began to ignore and undermine its own national interests after the Cold War. Max Otte is an entrepreneur, political economist, investment manager, philanthropist and political activist. With 141 votes, he was the runner-up for the election of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany on 13 February 2022. 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 Professor Max Otte from Germany, who has done a lot of interesting work. One of them is a book called *The Rising Middle Power: German Foreign Policy in Transformation*, which explores Germany's post–Cold War foreign policy. I'll make sure to leave a link in the description. Thank you very much for coming on the program.

#Max Otte

Well, thank you, Professor Diesen. The book is out of print. It's my dissertation. It was published by St. Martin's Press in New York in 2000, so it's 24 years old, but it outlines the broad development in German foreign policy doctrine, and I think it's still quite relevant today.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, that's what I thought too, given the date and what was covered in the book. After the Cold War, German foreign policy changed quite a lot. But of course, it hasn't stayed the same, especially if we look at the past decades. I'd say over the last 15 years it's taken a bit of a turn as well. Some would point to 2008 and 2009, the financial crisis, but definitely the past four years have taken an even—well, I'd say a strange turn—both in the economic and security aspects. So I thought a good place to begin would be: how do you assess, if we start broadly, the foreign policy challenges and changes after the Cold War, just to get a sense of the position Germany found itself in?

#Max Otte

Germany was uniquely positioned after the Cold War to be, let's say, a mediator between East and West. And Gerhard Schröder, during his time as chancellor in the late 1990s and early 2000s, did a lot of that. I mean, he had a relationship with Vladimir Putin, and that was when Nord Stream was initiated. So Germany was ideally positioned for a multipolar, peaceful world if it had taken that role—which, of course, it didn't. That's what I examine in my dissertation: the foreign policy doctrine of Germany. If we go back even further, the whole thing started, of course, with the end of World War II and what we call re-education.

I mean, the German elites were re-educated—so to say, westernized. We still had a lot of Nazis in the government or in the bureaucracy, so they were still there, but the pillars of German foreign policy were clear. You could not, and you did not, talk in the old Federal Republic at all about national interests. National interests were always inextricably linked with NATO and European integration. And that was what the generation of my father—who saw a few months of service in the Wehrmacht at the end of the war; fortunately, he didn't go into any combat situation—that's what this first generation after the war thought.

I mean, we built Europe, and we have NATO as a defensive alliance. Those are pillars—almost constitutive of the German foreign policy doctrine. They are the German foreign policy doctrine. So we did not, let's say, formulate a genuine German point of foreign policy or German national interests without mentioning those things. I mean, for me, even when I was much younger, it always seemed strange—and not good—that first you should define your national interests, and then you choose which alliances you forge and which alliances you join, and so on and so forth.

But that was not the mindset of the first generation after the war. And of course, there was re-education—also some brainwashing. I mean, people talked about 1945 or 1948 as our "zero," which of course it wasn't. There were a lot of continuities from before the Nazi period, and also international continuities. But that generation really thought, "We are building something new." And in East Germany, of course, it was also like the hour zero: "We're building socialism." They were very much close to the USSR. But in the end, this didn't serve us well, and we can go into that when the opportunity of unification arose.

#Glenn

What's interesting with Germany, though, is how it has seen its history and development as interconnected with that of Europe. If you go back to the 19th century and Friedrich List, who built on the ideas of Alexander Hamilton, the idea was that industrialization...

#Max Otte

I'm a big fan of Friedrich List.

#Glenn

I love Friedrich List. I cite him in almost every book I've written. He's quite excellent. And, well, again, these are the same ideas that built the American system and all, but his main idea was that the development of Europe and Germany were, to some extent, two sides of the same coin. The transportation corridors, the financial instruments developed, but also the customs union—the Zollverein. Sorry, my German pronunciation is awful. But overall, this was the idea that if you had this, Germany would then be the heart of an industrialized Europe, so it wouldn't be excessively dominated from the periphery, from Britain at that time.

So this was kind of the role of a balanced—or you could even use the word multipolar—structure of the day, without reading too much into that. But I thought that during the Cold War, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt made a comment in 1978 where he argued that German foreign policy rested on two pillars: the European Community and the North Atlantic Alliance, so today's NATO. And he said this was necessary not just for a stable Europe, but also to counter what he called the ever-increasing relative strength of Germany.

That is, it's economic, political, and military power. Because of history, there would always be some concern about the relative strength of Germany. And Germany was rising, so it was important, he said, to clothe ourselves—that was the word he used—in the European mantle. And again, there's nothing deceptive there; it's just that what is good for Germany should be good for Europe, and for the other Europeans to see that Germany's rise was anchored within the EU and within NATO. So it wouldn't be seen as a zero-sum game, essentially. But how do you see the institutional framework of Europe today, though? Because these pillars are not doing well.

#Max Otte

Yes. Well, when we go back to Schmidt, of course, he presided over the peak of post-war Germany in the late '70s. That was the time of inflation and all that. German industry was really strong. And Schmidt didn't do too much for production reasons—conditions in Germany, I mean. He just presided over an economically very strong Germany, and he did that well. He was a man of smart words, but he didn't do so much economically. For example, he said with the French president, Giscard d' Estaing, "We let the French do the big symbolic gestures, and we stay in the back seat and cooperate with them," and so on and so forth.

Of course, that was the main argument: will Germany rise again, will it be bad again? But that, of course, is already a strange scenario, because we're taking Hitler and the Third Reich as the reference point. And this is thirty years later—it was a totally different Germany. So yes, Germany, if it had pursued its own interests more strongly, would have become stronger and stronger. I've just recently seen, let's say, a projection of what might have happened had the First World War not occurred.

And I see the causes very much in British diplomacy and history. Germany was, let's say, inexperienced—diplomatically not very experienced and not very smart. But anyway, had the First World War not happened—and it was clearly in British interests that it did—then Germany would be about 200 million by now, just by natural development. But anyway, this is alternative history, of course. That was the main argument: we have to restrain German power. But if you go even further, that's where it gets perverse. You get to Joschka Fischer, who was the foreign minister under Schröder, and in the mid-90s he had written an infamous statement: we must dilute Germany until there's not so much left, because otherwise it's a problem. Actually, his book was called *Problem Germany*.

And somebody like that becomes foreign minister. Fischer acted in Germany, and Schröder, his boss, so to speak, acted in Germany's interest. So I'm quite sure the relationship between Fischer and Schröder was not too good. But going back to the argument you mentioned—to restrain Germany, to, let's say, tie it down—I mean, we could go back to Lord Ismay's saying about what NATO is for: to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down. That's putting it pretty bluntly. But as long as a state—if a state, over a prolonged period—doesn't use its potential, doesn't use it wisely, it will first become schizophrenic, which we were, and then it will abolish itself, which we are doing. So that's the upshot of this, let's say, erroneous foreign policy.

And if we—I mean, the German idea of Europe would be a federal Europe, a subsidiary Europe—decentralized, not centralized, but federal, meaning one person, one vote. And, of course, the French didn't like that because it would make Germany automatically the dominant power in Europe. So they devised a system based on intergovernmental cooperation, where much of the initiative comes through the Commission or through the Council of the heads of government. Somebody once called the current constitution of the EU a French custom-tailored suit. And Germany went along with that.

I mean, after the war, of course, we were morally, let's say, blamed—and rightly so. So we thought we should be very careful, making very big concessions. The same thing happened during the creation of the euro, which is one of the case studies in my book, when Kohl basically gave away the Deutsche Mark, which was huge. I mean, I was one of the original euro-skeptics. My, let's say, lecture to introduce myself at Boston University in April 1998 was "Why the Euro Will Fail." I made the economic argument for certain things, and the Americans, of course, liked that, so I got the job. But it was also my genuine opinion. So yes, Kohl basically gave away the euro.

It would have been a fair deal if there had been a central or European multilateral nuclear deterrent. If the French military had been integrated into a multilateral structure, then I would see it as a fair deal. And then Germany would have used its potential. But that, of course, didn't happen. So we have a highly centralized, dysfunctional EU. And I might add one more thing, actually: when Jacques Delors came out with the Delors Plan, I thought it was a good idea. He said we're building Europe from the bottom up—meaning we unify things, we unify regulations, we basically grow together that way. And then, of course, we had Schengen afterwards.

But nowadays I see it as an economic weapon, because if you have strict regulations, you can be sure they're followed 150% in Germany and maybe not 100% in other countries. So that kind of tight regulatory network is actually an economic burden on Germany and an advantage to other nations. I could go through many different economic areas and show how Germany is at a relative disadvantage in this EU, because it's always said that we need the EU for German industry—which, there won't be much left of after this year—but we need the EU for German growth and so on. This is a partial myth. I could go deeper into it, but I guess this is probably not the place for it.

#Glenn

I do want to ask, though—you mentioned the foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, who argued that Germany should be diluted. I guess this is a form of redemption, or self-harm as an expression of collective guilt. Is that more or less the direction, or...?

#Max Otte

Well, I don't think Joschka Fischer was a person who felt much guilt. I mean, he was in the radical left Green movement in Frankfurt in the '70s—he drove taxis, he fought with cops, he was a tough one. Later he saw that the game was being played differently, and he just adjusted. So for me, it's sheer opportunism. He saw that the real handlers of the situation were not in Germany, that Germany's room for maneuver was very limited. I mean, Schröder, his boss, used it, but Fischer basically did what transatlantic circles told him to do. He was very much in favor of the bombing of Serbia and later Kosovo. And after his active political career, he became an advisor to Madeleine Albright's hedge fund. So, I mean, it was sheer opportunism—he said what needed to be said to get the next job in some U.S.-dominated environment.

#Glenn

Well, this is interesting because—after the bombing of Serbia, or Yugoslavia as it was then—he told the media in an interview that he had been raised on two principles, he said: "Never another war for Germany, and never another Auschwitz." And he said, "In Kosovo, we were forced to choose." So he said they abandoned the idea of never another war. This is a flawed argument, I would say. There was no Auschwitz in Kosovo to begin with. But I always thought that was a fascinating statement because it, to some extent, reflects power as well. After World War II, Germany didn't really have much of a possibility to use force.

So the argument was that the lesson of history was no more wars—because of the past, it demanded restraint from Germany. But after the Cold War, we had this rhetoric from Fischer that, because of the crimes of the past, Germany had a special responsibility not just to prevent itself

from doing it, but to prevent others from committing similar war crimes. So suddenly, history became not a reason for constraint, but a reason to remove constraint. And I thought, yeah, political opportunism, as you defined it. Absolutely. It does seem like a proper way to define this.

#Max Otte

Absolutely. I mean, this is—please.

#Glenn

No, sorry.

#Max Otte

This was very expedient for him. I mean, after all, he was a well-trained politician, and he was looking for a way to sell this to the German public. And this was how to sell it—so he did. And he destroyed, by the way, the Green Party, or made it one of the most NGO-influenced, transatlantic, warlike—probably the most warlike—party in Germany. Which is amazing, because actually, when I was 18, I considered joining the Green Party. I come from a conservative household, but it was a very German phenomenon in the beginning. I mean, people knitting in Parliament—eco people, ecological people, knitting there. There were a few, let's say, farmers, one or two who had Nazi links in the founding phase. But it was a very German thing: no war, keep out of NATO, withdraw, environment—these were all very German themes.

So I thought, here's a very genuine German party, and I was tempted to join—which I didn't. I joined the CDU much later, in 1991, after I'd had a scholarship from them for my studies. My father died in 1983, so I joined the CDU out of gratitude in 1991 for that scholarship. I was never an active politician in my life, except for running for president four years ago—but that was brief. So indeed, the Greens were a uniquely German phenomenon that was completely turned around, and most of that turning around was done by Joschka Fischer.

#Glenn

Well, some of the roots of this show themselves today. The Greens now seem very militaristic—with Baerbock and others using quite militaristic language. I thought this was strange, because the way Germany has handled Russia has been interesting. On one hand, Germany managed its relationship with the Americans and Europeans through two frameworks—the EU and NATO. But during the Cold War, Germany also had a good approach toward the Soviet Union. While the Americans often pushed a harder line—"we have to weaken, exhaust the Soviets"—the Germans had more of a reaching-out policy.

Well, at least from the U.S. perspective, the idea was that if you engage, you can mitigate security competition and create peace. That seemed to be what they were going for. But after the Cold War, a sentiment grew in Moscow—from Gorbachev onward—that the Russians had supported German unification. Yet when it came time for European unification, meaning actual pan-European security agreements and institutions such as the OSCE, they felt more or less stabbed in the back, because instead they were faced with NATO expansion, which redivided the continent, only moving the dividing lines further east. So how do you see this?

Because if you look at how the Cold War ended up to now, the rhetoric in Germany—especially from Scholz and now from Merz—is something we haven't seen in ages. I'm just wondering, how do you make sense of this? Because it's a very militaristic view, this desire to defeat Russia as it is. I mean, it's so different from what you mentioned before—Gerhard Schröder, when he was chancellor. His father fought in the Wehrmacht and died. Yeah, and died. And Putin's father also fought in the war, and his older brother too. I mean, they were both deeply involved. And to see them come together in friendship—it was kind of... the optics of it were quite good, to see Germany and Russia, these two major European land powers, make peace.

It had a nice symbolic effect. But today, Schröder is very much vilified in Germany for his ties to Russia. And somehow the aggressive militarism of Merz is almost seen as a sign of virtue—that he stands by Ukraine and all of that. I was wondering, how do you see this massive shift now against Russia, seeing Russia and Germany again at odds with each other? And sorry for the long-winded question, but if you're here now in Moscow, it's not the Americans they're looking at with the greatest anger. It's increasingly Germany and the United Kingdom who kind of share the prize of being seen as the main adversaries—if not the main enemies—of the Russian Federation.

#Max Otte

Yes, well, the United Kingdom, of course, was always the doer behind the scenes that initiated these things, but the Germans were willing to go along. I have two strands. First of all, how could this happen? I mean, German diplomacy was always, or mostly, very weak—at least at the level of the diplomatic corps in the Kaiserreich. The diplomatic corps was no match for the British corps. This was a very young nation. The British had hundreds of years of experience in the game of diplomacy—sometimes an evil game, sometimes a very tricky one. The Germans were straightforward, not very well trained. Bismarck wasn't interested in building a tradition; he did things himself and moved pretty quickly.

World War I ruined the Weimar Republic, which was, of course, a period of upheaval. And then, during World War II, there wasn't much diplomacy either. So anyway, it was a highly inferior diplomatic corps in terms of means and instruments—no match, no comparison to the British, not even close. And then, of course, after the war, this was never really rebuilt because there was always the idea of NATO and European integration. That was what occupied the minds of the

diplomats. So, let's say in the early '90s, when the first steps of expansion took place, nobody had this on their radar. I had it on mine. I thought in '95 or '96, this is going to lead to problems. That's more than 30 years ago. It was the period when I wrote my dissertation. I said, this is crazy—this is going the wrong way. But Germans were busy; the '90s were a party decade in Germany.

We were celebrating reunification. We had a good economy. But many things were lost in the '90s. I mean, this just wasn't on the radar. Also, the competition—I mean, the Americans switched from economic partner to competitor in the early '90s, just like that. And then Willy Wimmer, a former longtime undersecretary of defense from the CDU, told me this. In '91 or '92, the whole, let's say, openness shifted. There was much more economic competition from the U.S., and the same happened with legal systems. I mean, we could have spread the German continental legal system to Eastern Europe, but it became more like the Anglo-Saxon system. And those are two very, very different philosophies of law. Now Germany and France are increasingly forced to play—well, their soccer teams are forced to play by football rules. And our companies too, in accounting and so on and so forth.

So that's that strand. I mean, we just missed out in the '90s because we didn't see it. But the other thing is, why did we become so warlike? Because after the war, we were re-educated to believe that integration with the West is the most important thing—which I don't think is true. I think Germany should have a bridge function. It should define its own place in the world and then have peaceful cooperation and alliances, however those form. I mean, this is, of course, very hypothetical thinking, but in the minds of many people, the U.S. integration into the West was basically hardwired. So even after Nord Stream was blown up, most conservatives wouldn't see the real problem or the real issue. And of course, if you're in a turbulent world like we are—with many uncertainties, many moving variables—you search for simple truths or simple enemies.

And so, because the state media apparatus is totally controlled by the media—well, let's not say the government, but the mainstream consensus, which is the government consensus, of course—these views are being pushed. Social media is being censored, and this has been happening since 2017, when we had the first big law in that regard. I mean, one thing was, um, in 2014, even when Euromaidan happened—I've read a book about it—there was huge, huge indignation in public discussion boards about how this was handled. People were saying we should look for dialogue with Russia, that this was a coup done by the West. There was a huge wave of indignation. I can send you the book afterwards—it's in German, but it has good footnotes. And a lot of the German newspapers actually closed down their discussion boards to prevent that kind of debate.

So Germany has always been, I mean, ideologically prepared to be a bulwark of NATO, or the U.S., or the East, or the English, or whatever—and an economic backstop for France. But also, the debate was, of course, steered in that direction. And, you know, Angela Merkel came from the GDR, but she, of course, like Joschka Fischer, knew where the power was, and she didn't care much about voters. I mean, she was more like the French president, the U.S. president—her colleagues—and also the NGOs. Those were the ones she listened to. But she basically froze, whereas Friedrich Merz

comes from a political family, also like Michael. But, I mean, he was the chairman of BlackRock, and so he's been a tool of, let's say, the people who give him the jobs to do, always. He never built his own company; he was always a high-priced lawyer who basically executed things for others.

#Glenn

But I wanted to go back to the idea of Germany, because being an economic power is not the same as being a geoeconomic power. That is, if you go back to Friedrich List's ideas, it's about industrial might, technological sovereignty, physical connectivity through railroads and rivers, financial instruments with banks and the development of the euro—all of these things, including the institutional aspect, like the EU using collective bargaining power. All of this is part of economic power. But Germany, much like Japan, never really managed to turn that into major political influence. The main reason, I guess—the common denominator—would be the strong U.S. influence, which continues in Germany.

But the reason I bring it up is because you mentioned that the competition–cooperation dynamic shifted after the Cold War ended. And, I guess, through the geoeconomic lens, the argument I often make is that during the Cold War, all this economic rivalry was largely contained. The reason we had two previous world wars was that there was this rivalry between the rising industrial powers. But during the Cold War, you had such clear delineation—you had the capitalists, you had the communists—and because the main communist adversaries were decoupled from economic statecraft and international markets, it managed the competition. And also, because the main focus was the Soviet threat, it had a mitigating effect on the rivalry between the Western capitalist nations.

But once the Cold War was over, many things happened. Suddenly, the Russians and the Chinese began to engage more in economic statecraft. But also, with the absence of the Soviet threat, the Europeans and the Americans—their industrial competition would predictably begin to intensify. So it created a very different situation. Given that, and the more complicated relationship with Russia, what do you see as the main challenge for Germany going forward? Because the NATO system appears to be fracturing, the European Union has seen better days, and we now see the possibility of a direct war with Russia. So how is Germany navigating these difficult waters?

#Max Otte

So many questions.

#Glenn

Sorry, I packed in too much there, maybe.

#Max Otte

Germany—I'll start with the end. Germany is not navigating at all. At all. Germany is dissolving. Friedrich Merz is now confused because his masters are in Washington. I mean, I'm exaggerating, but his NATO line is—of course—he's seeing the Greenland issue, that America is becoming overly aggressive as a hegemon. So he's confused. His worldview is maybe shaking, but he's—I mean, I didn't think it was possible how quickly he basically went 180 degrees on everything he promised during the election. Now he's backpedaling again.

So he seems to be, I mean, Mr. Opportunism—change your opinion to the second power. It's just amazing. I've known him for a long time, and even I didn't think that much, let's say, flexibility in opinions would be possible. Put him on a podium, give him something to say, and he's happy—something like that. So Germany is dissolving. As I said, we never had a coherent, consistent diplomacy representing Germany's interests. I mean, we had, of course, a very diligent diplomatic corps, but not at all versed in the games of power politics—in the nasty aspects of it, or in the indirect aspects of it.

So that was never really the same as in Britain. And I'm completely with you that we were left alone until 1991—economically, mostly. We never had economic diplomacy because Germany, like Norway, was a highly, let's say, networked and consensus-oriented economy. You had your industry associations, your networks within industry, and that worked pretty well. It worked from the Kaiserreich through the Nazi period and onward through the Federal Republic of Germany. Of course, Speer imposed some central planning after 1942 or 1943, but those networks continued to function, whereas the U.S. and Britain always had a very strong diplomatic focus on economic matters.

I mean, my dissertation advisor, Aaron Friedberg, wrote his dissertation on British economic diplomacy as a response to the rise of the German Kaiserreich, from 1895 to 1905. So, I mean, Germany never had that perspective in the German diplomatic corps, whereas Britain—and increasingly the U.S. after World War II—did have that perspective. I was an intern at the Institute for International Economics in 1986, and Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Jeffrey Schott wrote a book about economic sanctions where they had more than 30 case studies. The book is, I think, about 700 pages. So how do you employ sanctions? I mean, there was never any thinking about that. Diplomacy and economics—or business—were almost two separate spheres in Germany.

And that's why we didn't realize what was going on in the '90s. Now Germany is being destroyed—I mean, the destruction is already more than 50 percent, maybe 60, maybe 70, who knows. It'll take a generation or two to rebuild, basically the same as when Friedrich List started. And once again, if you control the media, if you have those preset notions that the West is the best, that NATO and cooperation with the U.S. are almost constitutive to German foreign policy doctrine—and if you have somebody like Friedrich Merz or Angela Merkel… And Merkel and Putin didn't like each other, but somehow they still got along.

But you have somebody like Friedrich Merz, fully steeped in the tradition of, let's say, anti-Russian, Western thinking. And, of course, below the surface, there are still those anti-Russian sentiments with some people—though not so much in the East, amazingly, because they've had thirty-plus years after the war to reframe and rethink. But in the West, all of this comes together, and we have a crazy, crazy government that wants to strengthen or escalate the war. Although Friedrich Merz has now said something else—he said Russia is also part of Europe. So we'll see how it goes. I mean, even in the craziest of times, there's always some glimmer of hope at some point. But we'll see.

#Glenn

How do you see this? Because you keep saying—well, making the point—that Germany is being destroyed, to a large extent destroying itself as well by not pursuing very basic national interests. Now, some argue there's a history of this, that when a country gets smitten by cosmopolitan ideas that deviate from national interest, it tends to start ignoring those things. For example, when Napoleon invaded in the early 19th century, some German princes surrendered their sovereignty and national interests without much of a fight. If anything, there was even some enthusiasm, because this has been referred to by some as "the shame of the princes." That is, Napoleon's annexation was, to some extent, welcomed—partly because they received economic compensation, but also because of the cultural aspect, the sense of being part of a more cosmopolitan idea.

Now, as opposed to national identity—you can draw some links here to post–Cold War Germany, where there's this idea that you shouldn't have, or that what unites shouldn't necessarily be, a national interest. That this could be, well, more or less a "naughty word" as well. Instead, it falls within the political West—as a community of values, as the EU would suggest, or even as the political West with the United States—the idea that it's liberal democratic values that define the collective "us," as opposed to national identities, while national identity is seen as divisive. Is this part of the explanation behind, I guess, Germany's response to Nord Stream?

Because it's kind of, as someone standing on the outside, quite remarkable how Scholz was just standing there next to Biden, essentially, when he threatened to blow up Nord Stream. And even afterwards, there hasn't been—this was Germany's key energy infrastructure, and it was destroyed. For a while, they blamed the Russians because that was good for Western unity. But when it became evident that it was either the Americans or the Ukrainians—likely the US being involved anyway—the whole thing just disappeared. And I haven't... there's not much talk anymore. I know there are some investigations, but do you see this as being about cosmopolitan ideas versus national identity, or do you think that's the wrong path to look at?

#Max Otte

A bit different. Of course, it's being sold as cosmopolitan ideas. When the German Federal Republic was founded, it was all about the West and those kinds of things. But in the end, those cosmopolitan

ideas reflect a certain style, a certain society—and those cosmopolitan ideas are British ideas. Of course, the set of continental European ideas is different. I mean, Napoleon was much vilified by the British; they had regular propaganda campaigns against him, and later, around 1900, against Germany as well.

And there were these huge novels in Britain about how the 200,000 German domestic servants in London would revolt and take over. The British were always good at propaganda and campaigns. So that kind of liberal democracy—well, they could have it. Of course, the Kaiserreich in Germany had its construction errors, but other countries have construction errors too. One of them was that the opposition was never really allowed to come to power or have a political role, so it stayed opposition forever. That's a construction error. The British system assimilated opposition quickly. But still, these are different national styles. It's not cosmopolitan versus national. I mean, the French have a different government system, the Germans have a different government system, and the British have one. For a long time, the German and British systems, to some extent, competed in the US—but of course, it leaned much more toward the British system. Now something else has grown out of it. So the cosmopolitan idea was how you sell it, but of course, there are real interests and real stars and real ideas behind it.

Well, Nord Stream—if you point to that again—tight media control, control of the elites through transatlantic circles, the propagation of those ideas, they're deeply implanted in people's minds. I mean, regular people would say this is crazy, but if you're in the political class—and the political class is quite detached from everyday life, and most of them are career politicians—you can basically, of course, plant that idea and then propagate it.

#Glenn

But given that, what kind of unites Germany with the wider European idea—again, the European identity they're trying to build—is very much sold as moral foreign policy. And because the EU is supposed to be a normative power, this has been quite important in the projection of power. As you say, you might present it as values, but behind it there should be something tangible. The British have been better at this. They obviously sell their foreign policy as being about civilization and liberal democracy, but behind the scenes, it's very strong national, even imperial, interests often being pursued. But what happens now—always. Sorry, always. Correction, always.

Always. But what happens to this moral foreign policy now? Because it's hard to keep the pretense up after Syria, for example—when, you know, now allied with the ISIS leader in Syria, after backing the genocide in Gaza. After Iran, when it was Mertz who said, "Well, the Israelis are doing our dirty work by destroying and bombing the nuclear facilities in Iran." And of course, Ukraine has a whole folder of its own in terms of what will be deeply impacted—immoral acts. But how do you see this? Does this dissolve the whole idea of our foreign policy—that is, EU foreign policy, German foreign policy—or has it not really sunk in yet?

#Max Otte

Um, I have no idea, of course. If you come—I'm highly skeptical, as you probably are, about these so-called claims of a moral foreign policy. The best it can be is measured, proportionate, balanced, reasonable. But to put it, let's say, under very moral banners would lead us back to the Thirty Years' War, when we basically abandoned those things. Of course, we've been doing this at least since World War I. So with morals, it's always the question: who imposes them, and for what purpose? And the Germans are very good at following abstract morals. And of course, the matrix is, let's say, tearing apart, and there are blips in the matrix everywhere—big blips. So we don't know.

We simply don't know what's going to happen. Um, my dream scenario, which I outlined in my book *World System Crash*—I mean, it's in German, about 630 pages, I wrote it eight years ago—my ideal scenario would be, of course, a multilateral world with a somewhat, and somehow, unified Europe. But I said even then, this is highly unlikely. The most likely outcome is a new Cold War, with an American bloc and a totally subservient Europe, and a Chinese bloc. And then—this was 2019—I said the status of India and Russia is open. So, in some ways, we're drifting in that direction. We have a U.S. pole, we have a Chinese pole, we have some smaller poles, and I have no idea if we're going to go through this transition without further major catastrophes or not.

I mean, there's always hope, but we're certainly in very, very insecure times, as the world always is when the hegemon changes. My teacher at Princeton, Robert Gilpin, wrote about this—*War and Change in World Politics*—and, let's say, the U.S. is clearly the declining hegemon. Trump is playing a high-risk game, which may succeed or may not. We don't know. But yeah, I'd like to finish on this: we have no idea where it's going to go. It's highly risky. I just hope that we come to our senses in Europe and that we de-escalate—and maybe we do, indeed, need the total collapse of Germany for sense to return.

#Glenn

Well, in those dark, parakeet thoughts—yeah, no, something definitely has to, I guess, change or adjust. I often make the point that multipolarity is something we should take seriously in Europe, as a reality in terms of the distribution of power. I think during the bipolar world, it was always in America's interest to make sure its frontline states succeeded—so Western Germany should be better than Eastern Germany. In the post–Cold War era, I think the effort was to create a collective hegemon, and Germany had a special role as one of the key nodes for the United States to project this global empire.

But in the multipolar world, as we saw with Obama already talking about a pivot to Asia in 2016, that's when I started writing a lot of articles and books arguing that we should begin to adjust. Because if you're pivoting to Asia, you're pivoting away from somewhere—and that somewhere is Europe. Once Europe loses its value for the Americans, they'll begin to reshape the transatlantic relationship. So instead of investing heavily through generous economic deals or providing security, I think they'll

shift to something more extractive. As you now see with Trump, industries have to move to the U.S., more energy should be bought from the Americans, weapons should be bought from the Americans—and why not take some territory like Greenland while they're at it? The Europeans haven't really adjusted to this in terms of gaining more power.

#Max Otte

Actually, I must add one thing. This shift to a highly extractive stance has been going on at least since the early '90s, and Germany hasn't noticed it—and now it's too late. We could talk about many things, about whether that extraction is going to happen, but it always has been, since the end of the Cold War, a very unbalanced deal.

#Glenn

So, is it too late to switch now—to adjust?

#Max Otte

It would be very, very costly—very, very difficult.

#Glenn

Well, Professor Otte, thank you so much for taking the time. And as a fellow European, I think we should remember that what happens in Germany will affect all of us on this continent. So thank you very much.

#Max Otte

And thank you.