

Lawrence Wilkerson: Trump Withdrawing from the Middle East & Europe?

Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. Colonel Wilkerson discusses how Trump's approach to Europe and the Middle East could be an effort to withdraw. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@GDiesen1> Support the research: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> 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 today by Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, the former chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of State, to discuss some of the possible miscalculations being made. Thank you for coming on. I wanted to ask you about, as I said, some of the wrong directions that not just the U.S., but NATO might be taking at the moment, because President Trump appears to be in a great hurry to reverse the relative decline of the United States. His secret weapon—or approach—seems to be to either use force or threaten the use of force to get what he wants. However, he doesn't seem to want to be pulled into any costly conflicts.

So Panama went quickly—just a little bit of threat, and he got what he wanted. Greenland became too complex, so he's backing away a little. It appears that when Yemen and Iran didn't go his way, he pulled out quickly, while Venezuela seems to have been the ultimate success. That is, well, in his view, that was a one-day operation—kidnap the president, and now ideally be able to dictate foreign and trade policy. But from your time in the military and in politics, how do you assess this risk of miscalculation? Because he might be getting into a larger war, which he doesn't necessarily want.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's a lot to unpack. Let me make a few comments about general things—like Venezuela, for example. He doesn't own Venezuela; he owns Maduro and his wife. And I think that's going to become increasingly apparent over the coming months. Let me point out something else, too. I know you didn't say this directly, but you did mention that I had worked for Colin Powell. Do you know Trump had his autograph and memorabilia and so forth in the Pentagon removed? He's a Black man, so he's been removed—he's been expunged. I'm waiting for them to expunge the wing of the National War College, the most prestigious war college for the U.S. armed forces, which was expressly dedicated to him and named after him. That'll be the next move, Paul.

This is a reprehensible administration—taking a man like Colin Powell, whose feet Donald Trump isn't worthy to kiss, and eliminating him from the record, for the present anyway. I'm sure this will all be reversed if we ever get rid of Trump. Take the Kennedy Center, for example, which is now going to have a two-year renovation period. I knew they were looking at renovations because I go to the meetings where the leadership talks about what's happening, but they sped them up. Two years—they're going to be out of whack and not doing anything, which will be unpleasant for the artists and everyone, essentially saying they weren't coming. So this is what Donald Trump is doing. Now, to your question—look at what he's doing right now with the premier instrument of his creation, if you will, and that's this farce in Gaza.

First of all, Netanyahu is still killing at an alarming rate, actually—given that it's supposed to be a ceasefire and that we're supposed to be focusing on this new organization. But look at what he's done with regard to his own national security strategy. You've probably read it. You know it says we're leaving the Middle East, or at least cutting back considerably on what we're doing there. We're taking on one of the biggest responsibilities. Even if you just read the fine print on this operation—which Trump is going to be in charge of for life, along with all these other people paying a billion dollars to come in—we're not leaving. Unless—and now I get to the point—I think this whole thing about a war with Iran is a farce. I think they've clued him in at the Pentagon. I think others in the allied structure, such as it is today, have clued him in too.

And I think he understands that he's taking on far more than the American military can handle, and that ultimately, with the midterms coming—if he allows them to happen, and I'm becoming very, very worried about that—they're going to end his presidency too. If not through impeachment, then certainly through "four years and gone." And God bless you, and the devil take you. So we're at a point right now where... what you asked about, I think, is being dealt with in ways that experts and others—well, I sent you that piece by Anatol Lieven. I don't know what you think about it, but I wasn't able to get you the comment I made back to Anatol.

But the comment was essentially, I think you're a little too positive on both sides. And what you just said about Russia, I think, is an indicator of that. The fact that oil prices have dropped, that inflation might be 12 or 13 percent, that they might have to start conscripting people and stop paying those elaborate fees and so forth—all those things are impactful. Yeah, but they're not going to stop Russia from doing what it has to do. And if it wants to close this thing down, something like what you're talking about—Odessa—a dramatic move like that is probably necessary.

At the same time, I have to admit that Anatol is probably right—that as long as Europe, and to a certain extent the U.S., continue to fuel what's happening with Zelensky and his ability to do anything against the Russian forces arrayed before him, it could go on forever. Or at least a long time—and that would be forever in this context—because, as I said before, I think Putin is more concerned right now about something you don't hear anybody talking about. He's concerned about what Joe Biden, and even people before Biden, did when we started this antagonistic approach to

Russia—building all this apparatus to get Russia sucked into Ukraine. He's worried about being stuck there. His military is tied up—tied up big time—in Ukraine.

And we're threatening him in other places—largely right now, right in his face, in Iran—because he has a defense treaty with Iran. And we're threatening to use military force in a very obvious way against Iran. We've just used it in a not-so-obvious way, except for those of us who recognize what Kermit Roosevelt did in 1953, because that's precisely what we were doing in Tehran and elsewhere in Iran. We were conducting an insurgency and trying to overthrow the regime, with Israel as the main pole in the tent. It's so confused right now that when people tell me Epstein is going to bring down Trump—if it isn't Epstein, it's the affordability issue, with the tariffs not doing anything but ruining it.

If it's not that, it's the other things he's doing that people are finally waking up to. If it's not that, it's the incompetence of his crew. If it's not that, it's the fact that Americans are beginning to understand there's a real threat of an Insurrection Act invocation and troops all over America, particularly in Democratic cities and so forth. All of that is true, and all of that is building toward the midterms. But he could very well cancel the midterms and get away with it, probably, with this supine Congress. So I'm looking at this whole situation, Glenn, as far more dangerous domestically than it is externally—even with Iran standing out there right now, looking like it could go off at any moment.

I don't think it's going to go off. I think they're talking, and I think the talks are making progress. I don't know what they're going to mean ultimately, but I suspect it's not going to mean what Trump said it would mean—that is, almost a total disarmament of Iran or major military action mounted against them. I think that's poppycock. We've moved all these forces around at, incidentally, great expense, and we don't have a whole lot of dollars to spare these days for nothing more than Donald Trump's attempt to look like a big-time negotiator again, using the only tools at his disposal—sanctions and, ultimately, military force.

#Glenn

It seems that he was riding a bit high after the success—well, let's call it a “success”—in Venezuela, if the objective was simply to kidnap the president. But, you know, from his tweets, there's this indication where he writes that we now have an even bigger armada than we had when we went toward Venezuela. And the Ayatollahs, you know, they watched what happened in Venezuela yesterday. But it's a strange argument to make, because that kind of success isn't transferable. There was no major war with Venezuela—they just sent in troops, kidnapped the president, and took him back to the U.S. But that can't be done with Iran. No one is suggesting they'll swoop in with some troops and kidnap the Ayatollah. That's not going to happen. So it's unclear why this operation in Venezuela should give so much confidence about defeating Iran militarily. Sorry?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I was just going to say, while you're on that point, I'm told that finally some congressman's questioning of a principal cabinet officer in the Trump administration got back to Trump. And that was Rand Paul, who put Marco Rubio on the spot with a simple question: what if someone did that to your boss? No, no—what if someone did that to your boss? What would you call it? Rubio tried to find his answer, and Rand pushed him: what would you call it? Wouldn't it be war? Wouldn't it be an act of war? Wouldn't it be something you'd respond to with war? That got back to Trump, I'm told. Yeah, well, it should. It should. And there should be more congressmen with those kinds of cojones asking questions like that of principal cabinet officers and just hammering it home.

So you're in a situation right now where Trump has set examples of his international relations policy, if you will, that are going to come back and haunt him big time—especially if Congress finally grows up and finds some moral courage and some political courage. And there are more and more Republicans. Rand Paul, I know, is a rare beast, just like Tom Massie is a rare beast. But there are more and more Republicans. Remember, I'm a Republican. They don't talk to me much anymore, but when they do, they're grumbling. They're grumbling. They don't know. One said something like this: we got a pig in a poke. Well, if you know that Southern expression, it simply means you didn't get what you asked for—you got something far worse.

#Glenn

Well, it's very strange that there hasn't been more pushback against Trump among the Republicans, because he's delivering something very different from what they asked for. But on the Venezuelan issue, it's also very different from Iran. You know, if you want to go from one success to another—because Venezuela really, really did not want to trigger a larger conflict—again, it's in America's backyard. It's nothing it could win or come out of stronger. So, you know, they took one on the chin and more or less let it go. But that's not the case with Iran. This idea that we can do a “bloody nose” attack on Iran—just hit it hard one day and then call it victory and go home—

The Iranians seem to have made it clear that this will only encourage the United States and Israel to come back again. So they've essentially said, “We're going to hit back with everything, even if it's a small attack, and it's going to strike everything in the region.” It's going to be a regional war. I mean, this is not what Trump wants, it seems. He wants that sweet, short campaign—bomb in the morning, Iran doesn't retaliate, and in the afternoon they say, “Well, let's stop it here, we'll go home,” and then he can claim victory. But what can he do now? Either he triggers a major war, or if he walks away with nothing, that doesn't fit well with the strongman reputation he's trying to build. There's nothing to show for it. So how can he get out of this position he's boxed himself into?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

A couple of weeks ago, I would have said you were absolutely right—that the most inevitable outcome would be some use of force by the United States. But in the last 48 hours, I've been

disabused of that by several people in Iran, several people in the region, and several people here in this country who have some insight into what's going on right now, especially on the military side. What I'm being told is that, as Foreign Minister Araqchi said a few hours ago in his CNN interview—though he was careful in how he put it—there are substantial talks happening right now. Whether they're direct or going through Omani channels or good offices or whatever, I don't know. But he sounded like they might be direct, at a lower level.

And what's happening in those talks is that they're making progress. That progress includes things like, "We're not going to try to take your ballistic missiles away from you." Ultimately, what we want—and this is the kicker—is the same thing President Obama got in the JCPOA. I mean, that's the recipe they're talking about. I'm sure the Iranians would find that palatable. What Araqchi was hinting at was that as long as it doesn't take our—what do you want to call it—our statehood away, as long as it doesn't take our prestige and pride away, we can sign up to it. The impression I got was that he thought that's the direction they were heading. So if they're going that way, then what we can look at this armada as an example of is simply Trump's way of bringing pressure.

You might have gotten the same thing if there had been more meaningful talks with Maduro in Venezuela. The problem there, of course, was that he was the objective—and I think he intuited that, if not knew it outright. You can't negotiate very well if what you're negotiating is your life and your future going away. But in this case, it's Persia—a vast landmass with 90 million people and so forth—and they failed miserably. Trump's got to have some kind of appreciation of that. With Bibi's plan, the idea was to overthrow the regime. Mossad, the CIA, and Kermit Roosevelt and his boys from 1953, metaphorically speaking, were all in there, beavering away, trying to kill Iranians and blame it on the Iranians.

They were doing all kinds of things. I'm going to listen to Kinzer—Quincy Institute is putting Kinzer on, the third, I think it is, around noon. And I know what Stephen's going to say, pretty much, because he knows this is what was going on. There's not a better expert on regime change in the world than Kinzer, especially on Iran. So that failed. It failed abysmally. It failed so badly that the Iranians have most of those people in jail or have already dispatched them, or whatever. So now there's nothing left but kinetic, in-your-face military action. And I think the Pentagon has let—well, even though Cain probably filtered it heavily—nonetheless, there are people in the Pentagon who would push, push, push: "We don't want to do this. This is stupid."

If we do this, we're going to be there forever and a day, and we're going to get a bloody nose repeatedly. And, oh, by the way, you're probably going to have a lot of facilities destroyed. You're probably going to have Israel existentially threatened. And, oh, by the way, there's a nuclear weapon there that Bibi can use. And, oh, by the way, you know oil— you think Russia's in trouble now with oil prices dropping? Oil will triple or quadruple, and Russia will be helped. So all these things are bearing on Trump right now. And he's not stupid in that respect, I don't think. He may be

growing increasingly demented, but I don't think he's stupid yet. So I think we're talking, and I think that's what he's looking for. He's looking for a deal that he can push around and add to his Nobel Peace Prize list.

#Glenn

Well, so far it's the FIFA Peace Prize. But that being said, what deal is there to be made? Because it appears the objective is to destroy Iran—or, let's say, regime change.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's Israel's objective. I don't think it's ever been Donald Trump's objective. He only made it his objective because Miriam Adelson told him to.

#Glenn

But even if the objective is regime change, if there's no replacement regime, then essentially it would result in the collapse and fragmentation of Iran. It just seems that any peace agreement would be a stepping stone toward that kind of destruction—like the demand to reduce ballistic missiles or drone stockpiles, weakening regional allies.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

The missiles are not in the deal. And indirectly, Araqchi pretty much hinted strongly at that—that none of that other material, which is essential for Iran to maintain its defenses in the region against others like Saudi Arabia, for example, is included. It doesn't have any defenses that are like normal defenses, if you will—a big national army, a big navy, a big air force. What it has, certainly, is missiles galore, and that's its principal defense. And they're never going to give those up. So I think that reality—I know that reality—is well known in the Pentagon. We actually argued at one point that you can't, Mr. President, even think about going after that part of Iran's security apparatus, because it's all they've got. And they're in a dangerous region.

The hint there, in parentheses, was that the leading danger is Israel. So if you disarm them like that, they'll take advantage. That's another reason why I still think Israel is our puppet, not the other way around. And I think we're going to see that big time now, because Netanyahu is furious that we're doing what we're doing with this new organization and slowing down his ability to kill Palestinians. But he's somewhat subdued by the fact that, I think, even his own military has briefed him: if Iran attacks us again, we may be destroyed. So he knows he would have to go to the nuclear weapon in order to prevent the country from being destroyed, were Iran to seriously go after him now. So you've got a real mix there. And Trump's got to deal with that mix.

And I think he's come to the conclusion that he needs to deal with it through diplomacy. Araqchi spoke about that too. When the CNN guy pressed him, he didn't do it dramatically or harshly. He asked the question, "Well, you've been cheated before—let's put it that way." And Araqchi went over the cheating in the middle of diplomacy and everything else. In fact, he called it trust. And that's what the Iranians have been calling it ever since we started this mess. Ahmadinejad called it essentially a lack of trust. And that's what Araqchi said: how can you get a deal then? How can you talk? How can you get any kind of deal that will satisfy both sides? Well, we're building trust. We're building trust. And one of the ways you build trust is you don't attack again.

#Glenn

But it's still unclear to me, then—what is there to discuss between Washington and Tehran? What can Tehran offer that Washington actually wants?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think what you're looking at is an attempt by Trump—by circuitous means, if you will. Maybe I'm giving him too much credit for skill here, but by indirect means, he's trying to do precisely what his national security strategy said we were going to do: get out. Yeah, he's trying to pull the major U.S. commitment out of the region—not break ties with Saudi Arabia or any of the other countries that have money—but get us out of that region. Because I think he knows and understands, and I think some of the comments he made even before he was elected the first time indicated this, that that's a stupid place for us to be, that we have no interest in being there other than protecting our interests in the region, which are mostly oil and Israel.

And you can do that without being in the region. My God, we did it for forty years that way. We didn't have a single boot on the ground for almost forty years, other than advisors and things like that. We had all of our strategic strength—our power—offshore. We called it offshore balancing. And we swore, we swore in the military, and our president swore with us: not a boot on the ground, no rubber on the ground in the Middle East. Well, that's what he wants—to get back to that.

#Glenn

Well, it could easily be the opposite, though. If those missiles start going off, the U.S. could end up bogged down there for another decade.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, whenever you threaten this way, you always have that possibility. I had to tell Ahmadinejad, in a meeting with him during the U.N. General Assembly in New York—me, let's see, who was it? Two, three of us. Frank—what was his name? His dad was a very famous CIA agent—Wisner, Frank

Wisner. He was Under Secretary of Defense for Policy too, and he was our ambassador to India. We were up there to ask Ahmadinejad to do certain things if we did certain things. And he was there to ask us, or to answer our questions, and so forth. My role was to talk about an incidents-at-sea agreement—you know, INCSEA, like we had with the Soviets—because we were very fearful we were going to have an incident in the Persian Gulf or the northern Arabian Sea, and it would lead to war.

So after talking about that for a few minutes—Frank and I talked in the hallway afterward—we had the foreign minister from Iran with us, who spoke fluent English. And Ahmadinejad said, “As I understand it, we have about 1,875 kilometers of shoreline on the Persian Gulf, and you have zero. So where’s the problem?” From that point, we got to a rational way of talking about it. The problem is, we’re always going to have boats at sea, and you’re always going to have boats at sea in your region. As long as you have boats at sea in your region, and we are, let’s just say, by happenstance—freedom of navigation, whatever—going through your region, we need to have an agreement so we don’t slaughter each other and start a war.

And then we worked it out. Now, that’s a small, small incident. But that’s what needs to happen now on a much larger scale. We need to push our puppet out of the way to do this, because our puppet is principally its leader, Bibi Netanyahu, who is growing more and more strained in his relationship with his people every day. They don’t want us to do it. They simply don’t want us to, because the last item on Bibi’s bucket list is changing the regime in Iran or throwing it into utter chaos—and those might be the same thing. If you change the regime, you’re probably going to have utter chaos. But that’d be fine with Bibi. So Trump’s not going to do that, I don’t think. We’ll just have to see. I may be dead wrong. I hope not.

#Glenn

You see, this is the same approach in Europe—the desire to just get the United States out. Because I’m thinking, if I were Trump—he says NATO—well, he said NATO was outdated. Essentially, the Europeans should learn to defend themselves. Whenever he talks about NATO’s success, he’s essentially talking about the Europeans themselves spending more on the military. Now, if he wanted to break NATO, he wouldn’t be able to do it by himself, given that this would be widely unpopular in Washington. However, if you mess things up enough with the Europeans, then the whole thing will fall apart. It’s a good way of doing it. I mean, the whole thing about going for Greenland—I think he genuinely wants Greenland, of course—but it’s also a good way of reducing the footprint in Europe, if that’s the objective.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, you’re right. I think it’s Howard, isn’t it? Mark Howard, the ambassador to Denmark—the guy who, along with Peter Thiel, covets all the minerals under the ice cap in Greenland. He was supposed to go over there, present his credentials, and basically say, “I want your country,

Greenland. I want your state—whatever—I want it.” I understand now they’re talking seriously about an agreement, a written agreement that would, so to speak, sidestep NATO and give the United States whatever access it feels it needs and that they’re willing to grant. So that problem, I think, is probably being worked out too. But you’re right. I think Trump would, not aggressively, but by hook or by crook or whatever, like to be free of NATO—other than perhaps the nuclear umbrella commitment—because I don’t think he wants to see a whole lot of countries in Europe thinking they ought to go nuclear.

#Glenn

In terms of this overall strategy—the desire to reduce the footprint in Europe—how do you see this being successfully played out in Ukraine? Because, as you said before, things aren’t going well in Ukraine. For many of the parties, it’s going worse. Ukraine itself, of course, is struggling big time with manpower and the economy, the infrastructure—especially the energy infrastructure—everything’s shutting down. And the Russians also, well, they want to put an end to this whole thing. So it looks as if the slow, grinding duration of the war might be coming to an end. As I mentioned before—I was telling you earlier today—I was speaking with the former head of the German armed forces, and he was making the point that he believes if there’s no diplomatic settlement by March, the Russians are going to launch a massive offensive, going for Odessa.

Now, if this is the case, it’s a dramatic escalation—but it sounds about right. They’re bringing Ukraine down to the breaking point, and they want to get this war over with. So how does this fit into what America wants? Again, I’m a bit surprised. If Trump wanted to end this war, he seemed to have had plenty of opportunities over the past year.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You know, if my history doesn’t fail me—and it might, as I grow older; I forget a lot of it—I think the Curzon Line was roughly equivalent to the Molotov–Ribbentrop line. Maybe Putin might go all the way to that. Then they’re going to get a real shock, because here’s a man who’s willing to use nuclear weapons to protect what he thinks is his sphere of influence. And he’s been very explicit about that, as has Lavrov. And here he is, taking not only all of Ukraine, or most of it, but maybe a little slice out of Poland too. You notice how the Poles are acting right now? They’re madly trying to get rid of anything in their entire political structure that looks like it favors Moscow. They’re trying to eradicate it because they want to hug up so close to Washington. And they feel—and rightfully so, because our ambassador there is making them feel this way—that they have to do that in order to exist, in order to have a future.

They have to tie themselves to the United States. Well, look at what Donald Trump is trying to do. Do you think Donald Trump wants to have the Poles as a responsibility for his administration? I beg to differ. I don’t think so. So, I mean, this is a mess—a huge mess. But basically, Russia has the advantage, and they’ve had the advantage all along, in real terms as well as, I think, in future terms.

The problem for Putin, increasingly, is that he realizes we're doing things to him elsewhere. And he needs his armed forces to have a little more flexibility—even to threaten, even to provide deterrence. It's very hard to provide deterrence when we're playing games elsewhere, like in the Caucasus, while the bulk of his ability to respond is tied up in Ukraine.

#Glenn

Well, I think the Europeans have been very clear about this too. They'd like to see the war in Ukraine continue simply because it ties the Russians down. The prime minister of Denmark said that, and the defense minister of Sweden made the same point. If the war ends, it would be very bad—then Russia would have more troops in the Baltic Sea. You know, this is a common theme now. You heard the same thing from Germany's intelligence chief yesterday. So as long as the war goes on, Russian forces are tied up.

But again, I think the Russians are aware that, especially when the world is shifting and changing as much as it is now, Russia would like some flexibility in case something goes wrong in places like Iran. It's not ideal to have all your troops tied up. But if you see this as an existential threat, there are limits to how many concessions you can give. Then the only alternative is to put a quick end to this—but that means escalating in quite a dramatic way. So, is that what you expect to see now?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, if you look at the neocons—and there is such a thing—if you look at the neocon view of Russia's major strategic objectives, the first one is to destroy NATO. And the neocons would say they're well on the way to doing that. The second is to destroy the transatlantic link. These two can be complementary, or they can be separate. I think if you take down NATO, you'd probably take down the link too. And the third is to establish better relations with Washington. In other words, they think—Russia thinks—that there's an impediment, and that impediment is the transatlantic link and NATO specifically, standing in the way of having better relations with Washington.

For whatever reason, the neocons—some of them, at least—would tell you that there are ulterior motives on Putin's part for wanting better relations with Washington, because he realizes who's got the upper hand in the world now: it's China. So he wants better relations so that he can do what he can from the inside to undermine the empire, making China's role a little bit easier. I don't buy that, because I don't buy this comity between Beijing and Moscow, except as a convenient expedient to deal with the stupidity of the empire. And I mean that—the stupidity of the empire. That's the only reason China and Russia are together in this sort of tacit alliance.

Now, what's happening out in the far east of Russia, with China sort of moving in for Lebensraum and such, is okay with Putin right now because he can't do very much about it. But in the future, that might be a bit of a problem too. And one never knows where India and China—and that relationship—is going. But as I've said before, the fundamental movement of power is away from the

West and toward the East. Russia is caught in the middle, being both an Asian power and a European power. So Russia is going to keep its powder dry for whichever way it ultimately goes as this power shift takes place, realizing it cannot match China—not now, and probably not for the next 30 or 40 years.

So it's got a tacit alliance right now, which seems to be working pretty well. And it's keeping an eye on Washington to make sure it can hold its hand as it collapses, as it were—and also to make sure those five, eight, whatever it is, 5,895 nuclear warheads don't get launched at it. So... this is a kabuki game, but the inexorable movement of power is from west to east. And Putin is caught in the middle, as Russia most often has been over the last thousand years or so. He's got to do a tap dance between the two until the resolution of that movement becomes more visible and more solid. And, you know, we are a Western Hemisphere power only—and not a very powerful one either. He's playing the long game. I think he's playing the long game.

#Glenn

Well, we'll see if he can afford it. He might not be in Washington that long. But if we look at the national security strategy—the last question here—is, if the overarching goal is that the world is multipolar, then what do we do? We can't be everywhere. Let's at least retreat to the Western Hemisphere and make sure we're kings over here, at least. That is, no presence of other great powers. And again, it makes sense, but... sorry?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Impossible. Sixty percent of South America's commerce is already with China—and about sixty percent of each individual nation's commerce as well. You can't fight that sort of thing except as a kind of rearguard action, which is what Venezuela was, in part—a rearguard action.

#Glenn

No, I doubt our ability to reverse this, but this will be the region of highest U.S. priority—that is, the Western Hemisphere and East Asia.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Forced upon us. Forced upon us. Oh, yeah— not selected. I mean, I can't make that point too strongly. At least there's enough sense in the current regime to understand they don't have any choice.

#Glenn

But given how Europe has been demoted, how do you see the current problems between the Americans and the Europeans in terms of NATO? You mentioned that NATO would be in some trouble. Is this just a rough spot, or do you think this military bloc will finally begin to fall apart?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think NATO did. I think there are two possible outcomes, or variations on those two themes. One: the principal leaders in Europe—we all know who they are, the Germans, the French, and the British. Although I kind of want to throw the British out these days and maybe put your country in there or something—someone with a little more moxie than Britain. They just disappoint me, majorly. That choice is that the leadership gets together and creates its own security architecture. It can be tied to our nuclear system; it can even be tied to what I'd call a late-day example of Reforger. You remember Reforger?

Return of Forces to Germany. We had all these units in the United States that were designated to flow overseas if the Russians attacked through the gap and all that kind of stuff. It could have dimensions like that, but certainly it would have the nuclear dimension, because you don't want a whole bunch of European countries deciding they're going to build nuclear weapons. So you'd have a decent European security architecture that develops over, say, a decade, is well funded, and has its own defense industrial base. That's the good alternative, I'd say—for Europe, and maybe for the world.

The other alternatives—they fall apart. They simply fall apart, bite each other, hate each other, fight each other. Uh, I don't mean—I hope I don't mean—in actual warfare on the ground, but you know, economically, financially, otherwise they just don't get along. They fall apart, and they're not very powerful. Remember those books from about 15 or 20 years ago that people were writing, saying Europe had a combined GDP equivalent to the United States, and they were the future? They were the future. Well, boy, has that gone out the door.

#Glenn

Yeah, I remember, I bought a book once—was it 20 years ago? It was called *Why the 21st Century Belongs to Europe.*

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yes, exactly.

#Glenn

This isn't a book you'd write today, though.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

But it could be good if Europe takes the best parts of what it's done since the war—especially its social systems and its democracies, such as they are—and refurbishes them, builds its own security identity, and cooperates in making that a fairly formidable one. Build the defense industrial base and so forth. They've got to get off the Lockheed Martins of the world, other than maybe an occasional purchase or whatever, and build their own defense industrial base. If they do that, in 10 or 15 years they could still be pretty formidable. I mean, what are we talking about—400 million? Maybe by then 350 million, because their populations are going down. So is ours now. Have you seen ours since he stopped the immigration? We have negative population growth now, or very close to negative.

#Glenn

Well, I don't think a diminished role for Europe would necessarily be that bad, as long as it's stable, because I made the same argument when I was working in Russia. I said that Russia should essentially embrace its smaller status in the world, as opposed to in previous centuries. Unlike in the 19th or 20th century, when Russia had both the intentions and the capabilities to assert itself as a hegemon in Eurasia, it would always be the target to be balanced.

These days, the Japanese try to reach out to Russia so they won't be too dependent on China, so they won't give away their neutrality in the disputes between China and Japan anymore. We see that India doesn't want Russia to be too China-centric, so they want to reach out more to the Russians as well. Even before 2022, the Europeans were cautious—"let's not alienate the Russians too much, because then they'll get too close with China." So it's nice not to be there; they want to stay balanced all along. You have a bit more flexibility if you don't have to be the biggest guy on the block.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You're talking like a sane man.

#Glenn

Yeah. They don't care for that in Europe anymore, though. Is there a sane man or woman in Europe? No, I think—well, I think this is the problem. They all refuse to accept reality as it is. They all want the '90s back. But, you know, that's gone. You have to accept the cards you have now and do the best with them. But they essentially want to pretend they're sitting on something different. So it's very destructive.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Common failing, though—especially when such huge power shifts occur, as they are occurring today.

#Glenn

Well, thank you for taking the time. Do you have any final thoughts before we wrap up?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

No, I hope I'm right that we aren't going to drop iron bombs or whatever on Iran. I mean, I just think that would be a disaster—an absolute disaster.

#Glenn

I couldn't agree more. I made the point before that Trump built up all his forces in the region, and I think he's the only one who's able to just go home without dropping bombs on Iran—that he can just shift the focus to something else. Because, you know, a week ago we were talking about invading Greenland, and now all this military force has surrounded Iran. He could talk about choking off Cuba tomorrow and the whole Iran thing would go away. So I think he's the only president who has the professional BS to be able to pull off a humiliating withdrawal. But I think, at some level, that's what has to be done.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Oh, he's going to—it won't be humiliating for him. He's going to say that he stopped the war and exchanged mechanisms that will keep the peace for forty years. I mean, that's the way he'll phrase it. And maybe, maybe this is all about Epstein. I don't know. But if you've seen any of the revelations that have come out in these pages that were heavily redacted—nonetheless, by these idiots who are doing it—people said to me yesterday, “Well, yeah, but there's no direct connection between Trump and Epstein.” The hell there isn't. And then you look at some of the things that are being said in the emails, and some of the things that you can tell were redacted. This probably is worrying the bejesus out of Donald Trump—and maybe Melania, too.

#Glenn

Oh, no, it's quite shocking, these Epstein files. I mean, it's as if every conspiracy theory ever coughed up has been proven now.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I heard one this morning that the NKVD, the GRU—whatever that element is called now in Russia—and the Mossad cooked up the whole thing and shared the blackmail apparatus. I said, I believe everything in there that begins with Mossad and ends with Mossad. I don't think Russia really had its hand in this, at least I can't see it anywhere. I do see the blackmail taking place, though—the kind of blackmail that took place with Ehud Barak during the Oslo talks.

#Glenn

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I saw that one.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah.

#Glenn

Well, when the dust settles, we're going to have to talk about the Epstein files, I think, because the political significance is immense. So, Walt, thank you very much.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

The breadth of them—it's just astounding how many people were involved in this. You might say the cognoscenti, the rich and famous of two continents. Yeah, I mean, it wasn't just Prince Andrew.

#Glenn

No, I think every country in the world now is rocked a little bit by which one of their politicians was pulled into this—what's a good word for it—an influence operation.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Club Med for the world—only one Club Med.

#Glenn

Pretty much. Yeah. Well, thanks again.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Take care.