

Gilbert Doctorow: Dirty War Escalates as Endgame Is Coming

Dr. Gilbert Doctorow discusses how Russia retaliates during the diplomatic efforts. The assassination attempt on Russian General Vladimir Alekseyev represents another drastic escalation, possibly with British involvement, which also brings Russia one step further up the escalation ladder. Gilbert Doctorow's new book "War Diaries. Volume 1: The Russia-Ukraine War, 2022-2023" is now available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/War-Diaries-Russia-Ukraine-2022-2023/dp/B0F9VK1WM2> 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: <https://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 Gilbert Doktorov, a historian and Russian affairs analyst, to discuss the recent assassination attempt on Russian Lieutenant General Vladimir Alexeyev, who is the first deputy head of Russia's military intelligence agency. Thank you for coming back on.

#Gilbert Doctorow

My pleasure.

#Glenn

I should have said General Alexeyev. He's also part of the negotiation team. How do you make sense of this assassination attempt? Is it meant to sabotage the negotiations? Or is it simply an effort to target the head of Russian intelligence? How are you assessing this? Because this is, well, not your average assassination attempt—this is very significant.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, everything comes together in one place—that's the United Arab Emirates. He is the direct deputy of the head of the negotiations, so this is a very direct and pointed attack on the Russian negotiating team. Now, the Russians are saying that official Russia—if you take Mr. Lavrov as the embodiment of official Russia—is claiming this was an attempt to disrupt the negotiations and

perhaps to provoke Russia once again, as usual, into doing something drastic that could then be condemned by the world community. Progressive humanity would condemn Russia as being warlike and unwilling to pursue peace.

That is Mr. Lavrov speaking. I'd point out that on last night's Vladimir Solovyov program—your program—something very unusual happened. One of the regular panelists criticized Lavrov. That almost never happens. He's been sacrosanct; it's as serious as criticizing Putin. It doesn't happen directly by name—indirectly, of course, that always goes on—but here he was directly criticized. He said, "No, no, this had nothing to do with disrupting negotiations. It was a new form of hybrid warfare, and we in Russia should get used to it. We've seen enough of it. We've had three generals killed so far, and other important people have been killed."

We do not have sufficient security for these people, which is inexcusable. And we can anticipate that even if a peace treaty is signed, this type of activity will continue. Well, as I've said, the first remarkable sign of this is that the simple explanation Mr. Lavrov gave is being rejected. In fact, Mr. Lavrov himself is being rejected. And that's part of something else I hope we can get into. In my view, Mr. Lavrov is on the way out. The only person who doesn't seem to know that is Mr. Lavrov himself, who denies it and runs for every microphone he can grab these days, giving many interviews—all of which only demonstrate that he's in trouble.

But that's a separate issue. Let's come back to your main question. Officially, Russia is only accusing Ukraine. In the 20 minutes or so allotted to the assassination attempt at the start of the weekly news wrap-up—Mr. Kiselyov's **News of the Week**, which runs for about two and a half hours—the first 20 minutes were devoted to the assassination attempt and, of course, video clips of the culprit, the one who pulled the trigger, Mr. Korobat, who was being brought back from Dubai to Moscow, where he was received by the FSB and immediately taken in for interrogation. There isn't a hint in those 20 minutes of Kiselyov's material that anyone other than the Ukrainian intelligence agency was involved in the assassination attempt.

I came out a couple of days ago saying, you know, I think MI6 has its fingerprints all over this—and I'll explain why in a minute—but I was kind of a lonely voice until this morning, when I found, to my surprise and, I'd say, to my pleasure, that Russia's Channel 5—I think it's a Petersburg-based news station, one of the state broadcasters—had an online article titled **Attempt on the Life of Alexeyev: What Do We Know About the Killer and His Assistants?** Then there's a subtitle: **Standing Behind This Attempted Assassination of a Russian Military Commander Could Be Western Special Forces.** Regrettably, that article, which is about a page and a half long, doesn't develop that subtitle at all.

But it's exactly what I'm thinking, and I'll explain why. It's almost certain that when you look at this particular assassination attempt, it's different from the preceding three. It wasn't done remotely, by someone in Kyiv pressing a button to set off an explosive device—either on a scooter or somewhere in the immediate vicinity of a military officer leaving his residential complex. No, no. This was a direct, in-person assassination by someone with a gun and a silencer, who went up to the 24th floor

of the building and shot the lieutenant general as he came out of his apartment. So, it's a different maneuver, and there's no remote here.

I'm going with it being traceable back to Kyiv, other than what the suspect says in his interrogation. It's also more sophisticated. This gentleman got himself to Dubai. The question is—well, that's not so difficult by itself. There are daily flights from Moscow to Dubai, no problem getting out and getting there. The question is, what was he going to do after he got to Dubai? Was he going to try to kill the rest of the negotiating team? Or was he going to have cosmetic surgery and emerge with a different face and a different passport? This becomes very complicated. The possibilities suggest a much more sophisticated operation than just the little Ukrainian military intelligence. Now, who else could be in all this?

Who was in on the other assassination attempts? I'm persuaded it was MI6. They're very competent at murder—that's one of their stock-in-trade occupations. They're even more competent at false-flag operations. And the people they've been targeting in Russia—the military commanders—have been directly involved in exposing MI6's dirty tricks, as well as CIA dirty tricks. Going back to the first victim, Lieutenant General Kirillov, who was assassinated—blown up—in December 2024: Kirillov was accused, he was in charge, he was also at the top of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that level. He was responsible for radiological, chemical, and biological weapons, and for detecting them. He was charged by the Ukrainians with providing chemical weapons to Russian troops on the ground in the battle in Donbass.

Well, that's highly improbable, because if it happened—if it ever happened—it would have been in direct violation of international law. And the winner in a conflict has no reason whatsoever to expose himself to the opprobrium of the world just to kill a few more soldiers than he's already killing with perfectly acceptable, normal, conventional weapons. So the charges from the Ukrainians were absurd. But more to the point I'm getting at, he exposed the biological laboratories that were conducting illegal, illicit, and totally immoral experiments with Ukrainians in Ukraine for the purpose of genetic engineering of chemical and biological agents—against Slavs and Russians in particular.

So he would have had the CIA very happy to even the score with him. But he was also accused by the British—oh, not accused, actually, with good reason. They knew he was the man who exposed the false-flag operations that were made public by the White Helmets in Syria. The White Helmets were supposed to be the good guys, going in to rescue the poor Syrian people who were attacked by their own government with chemical weapons. That was the story, the narrative coming out of Washington and London. Well, he exposed that as a fraud—showed that these were staged events, and that the people, the children who were supposedly gassed, weren't gassed at all. Anyway, the Brits had a very good reason for not liking Mr. Kirillov.

That they could have had a hand in his murder? Well, why not? And so it is with Mr. Alexeyev—Lieutenant General Alexeyev. He was charged by the British with having supervised the Novichok nerve agent, the deadly nerve agent attack on the Skripals, and some other chemical attacks on

British soil. There was a tremendous hullabaloo about that in the UK. Can you imagine—the Russians killing people on British soil? Wow. Well, they put the blame on him, and so they would have had a good reason internally—if not factually based, at least propaganda-based—to do him in. And my case is that that is what happened with Lieutenant General Alexeyev. And perhaps Mr. Zelensky was once telling the truth when he said that we Ukrainians didn't do it.

#Glenn

What is the incentive, though, for sabotaging the negotiations when the prospects going forward look so grim? I mean, I don't doubt that they would, because Zelensky has been pointing to many things, trying to argue against the negotiations. He's been pointing to the turmoil in the Middle East, and I think he tried to use Russia allegedly breaking the energy truce as a way of disrupting the talks. I think he also wants to challenge the three-way format of the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine by bringing the Europeans in as well. But what exactly is it that he wants to achieve with this?

I've heard many times from different Europeans that they would like to extend the war—or at least they imply it. For example, the German intelligence chief said they need to keep the Ukrainians in the fight until Europe can get ready. The prime minister of Denmark said something similar, that it's better to keep the war going rather than have a bad peace. The defense minister of Sweden also made a similar comment, that it's very dangerous if the war comes to an end, because then Russia will have all these military capabilities, which are growing rapidly, and could then be used in the Baltic Sea.

Only two days ago, I think, Wolfgang Ischinger, the head of the Munich Security Conference, also made a comment that once the war comes to an end, it would have some negative consequences for Germany and Europe, because, again, the Russians wouldn't be preoccupied with Ukraine anymore. To be fair, he did say he still wanted the war to end, but that went against his whole argument, to be honest. My point is, you can also add to this that once the war is over, the Americans would likely pivot away from Europe. So there are a lot of arguments for why someone might want to keep the war going. But given that it's heading in the wrong direction for the Europeans and the Ukrainians, why this eagerness to sabotage negotiations?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, they want to draw it out. Total sabotage isn't possible—I know that. But they can have a pause, then come back and figure out where they're going to hold the next round. So it drags the whole thing out. The longer it's drawn out, the longer Mr. Slavinsky stays in power. It's obvious that if peace terms are settled, a truce is declared, and the Ukrainians withdraw as required from whatever territory in Donbass they still occupy as a first step before the truce or ceasefire, then they'll hold elections.

And there's no question where it will stand, particularly if the terms being discussed by Trump and the Russians—especially this vast investment in Ukraine and the rebuilding—reach the attention of the Ukrainian people. It's almost certain that Mr. Zelensky and everyone around him would be voted out of office, if not pursued for their crimes and for stealing the funds coming from the United States. So, for them, keeping this afloat—staying on long enough to profit from the 95 billion in loans that Europe is slated to give them, so everyone can keep drawing down this wonderful flow—that's the incentive.

I think that's sufficient incentive for Mr. Zelensky to behave as he is. But there were some peculiar things going on. Yesterday, as I understand it, when it became clear that the United Arab Emirates had given the suspect back to Russia, he went into a rage. From what I heard, he was saying, "No way will we continue to negotiate in Abu Dhabi. All these negotiations have to be moved to Miami," and so on. There's something peculiar about all of this. He knows something—why exactly Abu Dhabi is no longer acceptable, because they've given this murderer back to Russia. There's something else going on there that we don't know yet, but I imagine we will.

I'm delighted you have your recitation of the various responsible authorities in the West, including Glenn Diesen, who are making it clear how distasteful or how problematic peace is now, considering the need for the Russians to be preoccupied with Ukraine for at least a few more years so that Europe can prepare itself militarily without the United States. This was, again, a lone voice among us in the alternative media. And here it's being stated openly, flatly, without anyone expressing amazement that something as awful as that is the policy of major players in the West. So there are a lot of peculiar things going on. Not all of them are obvious, and I can't even be sure they will be obvious in the foreseeable future. But we have to feel our way and try to find logic in things, even when nobody is confirming our reading of that logic.

#Glenn

I've also, in the past, cited Yulia Tymoshenko, because she was the EU's and the Americans' favorite candidate for the presidency of Ukraine. And she also once tweeted something along those lines—that our worst fears have been confirmed, that the Europeans are just using us to buy time for themselves. So there's something brewing there, some concerns. But to what extent do you think the intention here for the—again, I have to point out there was an assassination attempt against General Alexiev.

That is, he was shot several times but survived and apparently is out of critical condition. So he seems to have survived this. But is the purpose then to provoke retaliation from Russia as well? If so, what is this supposed to achieve? Is it just to show that they're aggressive, or how are you assessing this? Just to add very quickly, I think it puts Moscow in a very difficult position, but it can't afford not to retaliate harshly either, because the amount of internal pressure about going soft is growing, as you and I have spoken about in the past.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, if you ask a patriotic Russian—not necessarily someone in Putin's circle, in fact, more likely to be critical of Mr. Putin for being too soft—he would say they'd like to see London leveled to the ground. He wouldn't hesitate for a moment to say that the British are the most provocative, most aggressive enemies of Russia, with hands red from the blood of fallen Russian soldiers. So, from that angle, the Kremlin is very careful not to raise the issue of possible foreign involvement—because foreign involvement would mean, who could it be?

CIA or MI6, or too many other intelligence agencies—well, Mossad—are capable of pulling off the kind of operations that have been so provocative, whether it's assassinations or arranging the so-called spiderweb attack on Russia's nuclear deterrent, attacking the bombers. The hand of foreign agents is clearly there, and the Kremlin is avoiding any indication that it's aware of that, in order to stay focused on the destruction of Ukraine, which nobody will shed a tear over—well, a crocodile tear, yes. Whereas if you were to identify England as being behind the assassination attempt, international protocol would require that you declare war on England. And Moscow does not want to do that. One war at a time is enough.

#Glenn

But I'm thinking back to that terrorist attack in Moscow that killed all those people. There were also some suggestions—again, no evidence—but suggestions that, if not just the CIA, MI6 was involved as well. When it comes to the British, they were apparently also taking the lead in the attacks on the Crimean Bridge. And, as you said, there was that very dramatic attack on Russia's nuclear bombers back in June. The FSB also came out and said this likely had MI6 involvement. How do you explain the, I guess, oversized presence of Britain in this, and also in areas that don't really directly affect the war? Is this an effort to firmly establish themselves as a leading military power in Europe? Is it to be America's junior partner? Or do they genuinely just see Russia as this eternal threat?

#Gilbert Doctorow

I think it's never-ending envy. The British lost their empire; the Russians didn't, and they're well aware of that. It's humiliating for them, I believe, to consider that their enemy—going back to the mid-19th century, the Crimean War—has survived so well, territorially, politically, and economically. Just as I think it's galling to the Germans when they read their own history and see how, in the run-up to World War I, their senior military advisers and political analysts were predicting that, in the 21st century, Russia would surpass Germany. It was galling for them to realize that, even in 1914, the Russian budget for shipbuilding and naval construction was bigger than their own. So there's a big—well, in the case of Germany, they've been rolled over twice.

They're a little more cautious, though their envy and revanchist feelings come to the fore from time to time. But the British, I don't think they have the same constraints. They're comfortable being

close to the United States. They still mistakenly believe that the U.S. would go to war to save them if they got in over their heads. I think if you ask Mr. Ischinger, he doesn't have any such illusions. So the British are spoiled by their belief in this "special relationship." And even though Mr. Trump isn't a very reliable guy, they all know he has a soft spot—at least on the maternal side of the family, tracing back to Scotland—even if he's less sympathetic to the German side.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, he seems to have a weakness for the royals as well. I'm not sure what's just about his narcissism and what's strategic in terms of wanting some recognition. What do you say, though, about Russia's retaliation? Because one could say they have to respond in some way, but to some extent we've already seen a retaliation, haven't we?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, it goes on and it gets bigger and bigger, while the Ukrainians' ability to defend themselves gets smaller and smaller. They've exhausted their supply of Patriots, as good as they were. Certainly, they're not much use against Russia's hypersonic missiles. But the damage being done is incredible. I think more than 70% of all generating capacity has been destroyed. The remaining generation capacity isn't easily destroyed because it's dispersed—that is, it's renewables. Ukraine does have a certain amount of green power, and since that's in small units, it's virtually impossible to destroy. You can only interrupt the distribution system, but not people's rooftop solar panels. You can't do much about that.

But they've done as much as they can, and there's still more. They're destroying the railway system, by the way—consciously. They're looking back at military records and seeing what was done in the 19th century. And yes, you know, lo and behold, destroying the whole railway network is a good way of finishing off the enemy. So that's the latest direction of their bombing, missile, and drone attacks. There won't be much left of Ukraine if this war isn't concluded soon. But I think it's heading that way. The news on Sunday was talking about and interviewing people who are closing in on Kramatorsk and Slovyansk. Those are the last two small cities that serve as defensive points for what remains of the Ukrainian army on the front lines.

And they are now being surrounded and subjected to artillery and drone strikes. So I think this isn't going to take months and months, because they're relatively small cities. When they're taken in the coming weeks or months, it'll be a clear drive to the Dnieper. Those who were saying it's a stalemate because the Russians took three and a half years to move from 19% of Ukraine that they occupied to 20%—well, it'll go to, I don't know, 25%, 28%, whatever it is they'll hold when they reach the Dnieper, almost instantly. And then the only thing left to negotiate with Mr. Zelensky's government, if it's still standing, will be what's going to happen to Odessa and Kharkiv. Will the Russians take those as well?

But we're close to the endgame. We're very close to the endgame, which partly explains the hysterics of Mr. Zelensky and partly explains the hysterics of Mr. Lavrov, who isn't there to be a party to the formal conclusion of the war. I'd like to spend a couple of minutes just looking at that issue, since so many of my colleagues—and not just my colleagues, but analysts and free spirits—have the highest regard for Mr. Lavrov. I'm not one of them, for specific reasons that have nothing to do with his personality, his erudition, or his mental acuity. I recognize all of that. But I have a much more solid reason for saying it's time for him to go. And he won't be pushed out by me; he's being pushed out by Mr. Putin.

It's clear as day to everyone but him—he's out of the loop. He's frantically seeking microphones to talk about whether the Americans are capable of concluding agreements, *договоры пособные*. And he's talking about things he no longer knows about, because he's out of the loop. But that's the special situation. I want to say something about the structural issue. I've had some experience with Russian ambassadors—some of them pleasant, some less so. Some were outstanding personalities; some were nonentities. I won't name where the nonentities were. I just want to say that my overall impression is that the diplomats I've met have been highly educated, highly motivated, very good professionals.

And in the 1990s, those whom I met here in Brussels in particular had a lot of power. They could do things—they had a lot of independent power to make life easier for friends. I don't mean personal friends; I mean the nation's friends, the nation's business partners, and so forth. Under the period of vertical concentration of power that Mr. Putin imposed at the federal level within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that system has been applied—and applied in a destructive way. The Russian ambassadors today are completely silenced. They cannot say anything that hasn't been scripted from Moscow. Their personal judgment counts for nothing.

That is a disservice to a major asset the country has, which is one of the finest diplomatic establishments in the world. And the fact that Mr. Lavrov has silenced people around him and below him is not a credit to the man. So, I think if he departs—depending on who succeeds him—there's a possibility that ambassadors will become ambassadors again, not just clerks, which is what they are today. And they are clerks in a very tough spot, particularly those serving here in Western Europe. They are socially rejected. Ambassadors always have an intelligence function; they should circulate in society, particularly high society, but not only there.

University, society—they should be all over the place. And the ambassador who just departed this past summer, Ambassador Cherkovian, in his early days as ambassador here, before the special military operation, was all over the place. He was meeting with everybody. And I'm sure he was a very useful source of information about the mood and who's who in Belgium for Moscow's purposes. Gone. Now these people are not invited anywhere, and so they have a difficult time in general. But then, to be so humiliated by their own administration and deprived of any real powers, I think, makes their life quite depressing.

#Glenn

Let's just ask one last question, then, about whether we're moving toward a massive miscalculation in relation to the assassination attempt on General Alexeyev. I very much agree with what you said—this whole argument that the Russian advance is slow, stagnant, that it'll take another hundred years to reach the Dnieper, whatever the headlines are suggesting now—it's very dishonest. Because yes, it took three and a half years to get where they are now. But that being said, during those three and a half years of a war of attrition, they essentially bled out a very large army—the manpower is gone. All the weapons stockpiles across the West, everything from air defenses to artillery shells, have been depleted. And also, very importantly, the fortification lines built over all these years since 2014 are now, for the most part, behind the Russians.

And so all of this suggests there's no reason to assume that this advance will be steady. It's the same as it's been in the past. Others would look at different indicators—be it the economy, which Ukrainian media is now also writing more about, being on the brink of disaster. We see the infrastructure being weakened—not just ports and bridges and all that, but now the electricity grid, the disruptions to the railroads. You can look at political stability. So across the board, there are obviously reasons to be quite pessimistic about the ability of the Ukrainians to continue this fight. But I guess it's fair to say that we're reaching the endgame of the war.

But as this is happening, I think it's also clear—from the response, by the way—that the U.S. desire to end this war, the desperation, as you suggested, is reflected in this reality. The Europeans' desperation to find a way of escalating and pulling in the Americans is also a good indicator. But a concern of mine is that everyone's saying the Russians have to be a bit bolder. Well, that's what they're saying in Russia—that Putin has been too restrained. However, it's also true that at the end of these wars, the winning side, which is Russia in this case, tends to be a bit bolder as they move forward, as they win—especially as the Ukrainian army begins to fall apart. It's quite predictable that they'll do more to restore their deterrent vis-à-vis the political West.

So it just seems that the Russians could also, I guess, take it too far. Well, it depends what you mean by "too far," but at least they're escalating against the West from where we are today. So why—I mean, if you were an advisor to Moscow, would you ask why they're still allowing NATO drones to fly across the Black Sea and pick out targets inside Russia, which are then struck based on decisions made by American military planners, using American weapons fired by American pilots? At some point, the Russians will take a much bolder stance than they have today, especially as the Ukrainian army is being, well, finished off.

So it just seems that at this point, when the Russians are prepared to escalate more, the Europeans are more prepared to escalate, and Zelensky has, you know, everything to lose, we might be heading into this very dangerous, chaotic situation—a possibility of a direct war. I mean, the way the

Europeans are talking about nuclear war now, it's as if it's no big deal, something that belongs to the past, not to be feared. I see an ugly end to this whole thing, is what I'm trying to say. Do you see this as a possibility?

#Gilbert Doctorow

It's not just you and me who would see it that way. There are Russians who even appear on Solovyov's program who see it that way. And although the name of the Supreme Commander is never mentioned, of course, that's who we're talking about. The contradictions in the economic policy are blatant and are attacked on the show every week by the deputy chairman of the Duma, Babakov, who is a center-left independent, not tied to any party. He was rather close to Mr. Mironov of Just Russia. So there are economic policies, and the interest rate policies are under constant attack, which is an indirect attack on the president.

The military issues you're raising, and the hazards misunderstood by the West—leading into the very war that Russia is trying to avoid with its “gently, gently” approach—are also appearing on these talk shows from responsible people, even reluctantly by someone like General Brzezinski, who is a very cautious man. But when he's pressed by someone like Solovyov—“Well, don't you think that we should be...?”—he acknowledges, in an embarrassed way, “Yes, of course,” because he's in no position to criticize the Supreme Commander. But what's happening is contradictory and inexcusable, frankly speaking. Just as you mentioned, it's being called out on Russian television by those who are paying close attention—only without naming the name.

#Glenn

Well, it just raises the question of whether the Russians are escalating too little or too much. It's very hard to, I guess, navigate these final stages of the war. The same goes, of course, for the European, American, and Ukrainian sides. It's a very complicated game they're playing, in which the costs are quite high if we get this one wrong. And actually, it could trigger something much larger, beyond anyone's escalation control. I always make the point that this illusion of escalation control is what's eventually going to be the source of a major war if we go down that path—the assumption that we can just, you know, escalate a little bit, do a small strike, kill a few people, you know, assassinate some politicians or generals, and then, if the Russians respond too fiercely, we can lower the temperature. The assumption that we'll have full control over this—I think that's the main threat.

#Gilbert Doctorow

The issue is relations with Donald Trump. One of my colleagues has been saying for some time that staying on the good side of Donald Trump has been President Putin's highest priority—and I think he's right. Is this a good gamble or a bad gamble? We'll know soon enough. Mr. Lavrov, in his swan song, so to speak, is saying that Trump is not reliable, which is exactly at odds with what his boss is thinking. We'll see who's right.

#Glenn

Well, as always, thank you for sharing your insights. I've been following your comments on a lot of different Indian TV networks, and it's quite fascinating to watch. For anyone listening, I'd recommend they also check out your Substack—at least, that's what I always do. So, thank you very much. Well, thanks for having me.