

Gilbert Doctorow: Attack on Iran Hardens Russia's Stance on Ukraine

Dr. Gilbert Doctorow discusses why the attack on Iran will harden Russia's position. Putin's approach of a slow war of attrition and diplomatic engagement with Trump has met increasing opposition, as the arguments advance for more aggressive alternatives to put a quick end to the war. The attempted decapitation strike on Iran has sent shockwaves through Moscow, as there are no more rules, and there is a belief that allowing the weakening of Russia's deterrence has become an existential threat. 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: 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 by Gilbert Doctorow, a historian and international affairs analyst, to discuss how the Iran war is impacting Russia. Thank you for coming back on the program.

#Gilbert Doctorow

It's a pleasure.

#Glenn

There's a lot of discussion about how the Iran war impacts Russia. Some say this is an opportunity for them — with air defenses and weaponry being diverted, and international attention shifting elsewhere. Others point to energy prices. Those who are more critical, arguing it's not in Russia's interest, focus on the instability and the possibility of Iran being knocked out. But if you look at it from another angle — how the Russians view the United States as a negotiator, how they see the war of attrition and aggression — some might be thinking that perhaps they should have restored their own deterrence too. How do you assess the way the Iran war is shaping discourse within Russia?

#Gilbert Doctorow

I completely agree with this second set of impacts you've described. That is to say, it's not a question of whether the Russians will profit from higher oil prices or whether the Europeans will come begging for gas. These are petty things. The real issue is the change in psychology among the elites in Moscow. They're shocked out of their skins. What they saw was a disaster scenario for Russia itself, and it unbuttoned lips. There's been a big, contentious issue in the broader commentary community over Mr. Putin as the only adult in the room — Mr. Putin, the man who's saving our necks because he doesn't respond violently to provocations, and so forth.

There are a lot of people among my peers who view Mr. Putin as God's gift to humanity. I'm not one of them. This is a situation that's developed over time. I took readings over four years, and I've come to conclusions. But that I came to conclusions is not relevant. That the Russians have come to conclusions — that is very relevant. You know, I worked for a large company called ITT in the 1980s. We had factories all over Europe, and my job as a country manager was to meet with their export managers and technical personnel at the factories in these various locations, and to discuss our strategy in the markets for which I was responsible — which were, at that time, Yugoslavia and Poland.

I visited Sweden several times a year. They were selling some very interesting, very high-technology radio equipment to Yugoslavia. I was just one of the guys. We'd have lunch in the lunchroom, not in the executive rooms, and we chatted. Everything was fine. They were happy with life, happy with the country, and so forth. Then Olof Palme was assassinated. And you know what happened? These fellows who thought everything was fine with their country said, "They finally got the son of a bitch." That's what conformism is all about. And that's the switch that's just changed in Russia — like flipping a light on and off.

People who had their doubts about the wisdom of the "go slowly, negotiate a settlement, keep the Americans separated from the Europeans" approach — that is, all the features of Mr. Putin's policy — have now had an electric shock, because they've seen where it's all headed. They saw, in what Trump has done to Iran, what Trump can just as easily do to Russia. You know, we all remarked on the assassination attempt on Putin about a month or two ago, at his Valdai residence. All of the incoming drones were shot down. Everybody was happy, and they made light of it. Some people made light of it.

But I think when they saw what happened to the Ayatollah, Russians of serious mind stopped making light of it. Mr. Putin is not always in Valdai, surrounded by the world's best air defense, nor is he always in the Kremlin. So if the Americans want to do a decapitation strike on Russia — with Putin and all of his buddies — they can do it. And that sank in. Russians got very frightened, and they wondered, what the hell is Mr. Putin doing? When they saw how, in three days, Trump had virtually destroyed the senior leadership — military and civilian — the air defenses, and a large part of the critical infrastructure, ports, facilities, and so on.

#Glenn

And I asked, what the hell are we doing?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Why isn't Putin doing that to Kyiv, to Lviv, to Dnipro, and to all the other cities where there are command, control, and policymaking centers — which Putin, from the start of the special operation, said would be targeted if red lines were crossed? Those red lines were crossed, and they were crisscrossed. You and I have discussed the three components of deterrence, of which probably the least important is military hardware, and the most important is the will and readiness to make clear to the adversary your determination to use it. That's what's been missing. As an example, on Vladimir Solovyov's evening show two nights ago, it came up in the panel discussion. The panel was completely against everything that Putin's policies had been.

Everything was said, except the name Putin wasn't mentioned. But everyone understood — any mature person understood — who they were talking about. And they said, "My God, how are we conducting negotiations with Witkowicz, at the same time that American spy planes are on the coast of the Black Sea, on the Barents Sea coast, and all along our borders? And we know what these are for — they're for preparing a preemptive strike, just like the U.S. did on Iran. Why don't we shoot them down? Man, we shot down the U-2, Gary Powers was captured. Why don't we shoot these down? I know you're going to object that these are in international waters. So what?"

So if they're one kilometer away from the border, so what? Who's going to be able to say they didn't cross into Russian territory? Nobody. And what's the United States going to do about it? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. So while the Russians are furious, what is their government doing to protect them? And I think... the fist loosened lips — I've never heard a program like the one two days ago, and I probably won't hear one like it for a while. Because the next day, the same Solovyov started out with a 20-minute soliloquy about how our president is tirelessly working for the nation — he's up until three in the morning doing the state's work. He's like a monk, he's like a saint.

I won't go on — you get the idea. He made reference to the "sycophant-in-chief," the journalist Zarubin, who has a program called *Kremlin. Moscow. Kremlin. Putin.*, which has been running for maybe five years and is the most despicable exercise in a cult of personality. And here — here Solovyov was suddenly praising him: "Oh, our wonderful journalist." Of course, Zarubin is a protégé of both Kiselyov and Solovyov. And the program is awful; it's leading Russia in completely the wrong direction. Anyway, this all came out the day before — criticism, when just yesterday they were licking Putin's toes. So what's going on? What was happening in and around the Kremlin?

And we had the first tip-off — you and I discussed this back, I think, in November or December — when Sergei Ryabkov, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, had a very stealthy look on his face during an interview. He said that the spirit of Anchorage had exhausted itself, that further

negotiations were not useful, and that the war would be decided on the battlefield. He was immediately reprimanded. I don't think it was Peskov who came out with remarks, but a little later Lavrov, his boss and minister, made some critical comments. Well, time passes and thinking changes. As you know, in the last few weeks, Lavrov himself has been fiercely critical of further negotiations.

So there's a war going on. I'm very hopeful that Mr. Putin will rise to the challenge as a good politician, listen to the best advice of his colleagues, and not persist in a policy that's leading Russia to doom. Now, why should you and I care about Russia heading for doom? Because it would be our doom as well. If Russia fails to exercise its deterrence—well, one way or another, Mr. Putin won't be in office forever. And one way or another, whether he's carried out feet first or walks out, someone else will take over and try to make up for all this. Again, just in the last week, I heard remarks on that same program that I couldn't have imagined being said about Gorbachev.

They said openly that he was a traitor — not mistaken, a traitor. And a traitor because he withdrew Russian troops from Germany and Central Europe without getting any concessions in return, without demanding the dissolution of—well, he dissolved the Warsaw Pact, and he should have asked for the dissolution of NATO. He didn't ask for it. I'd never heard Gorbachev called a traitor on state television before, but he was this last week. That is the fate Mr. Putin will face in X days, weeks, or months, when, if it must be, he listens to reason and to the best advice of his serious professional team. Yeah.

#Glenn

Well, it's hard to deny, though, that the deterrent—of course, we've spoken about this in the past—has definitely weakened. If you think back to the Cold War, it would have been completely unthinkable for the Americans or Soviets to attack each other directly. There were always some proxy wars—well, at least semi-proxy. You know, the Soviets assisted the Vietnamese, and the Americans had, I guess, a much greater role in Afghanistan against the Soviets. But there were some set rules. Where does the boundary lie between a proxy war and a direct war? I had a conversation with John Mearsheimer, and he kind of made the point, "Glenn, why are you calling it a proxy war? We crossed that boundary a long time ago. This is a direct war now." And I just feel that the longer a war goes on, the more the rules of proxy war change.

As we remember from the beginning, sending Abrams was a bit problematic. We couldn't really do that. HIMARS wasn't good. F-16s, as Biden said—well, that's World War III. And then, you know, we jump forward to now, and we see long-range strikes into Russia—U.S. contractors pulling the trigger, sending U.S. missiles at targets inside Russia, picked by U.S. intelligence, as you said, with U.S. drones flying along the Black Sea coast, identifying those targets. And, you know, only recently we had the Munich Security Conference, and I watched the German chancellor sitting there,

boasting about how we, in the history of the world, have inflicted untold costs and casualties on Russia. He had the Danish prime minister arguing that we have to get rid of all red lines and start striking deep into Russia.

This is rhetoric of war. And, you know, they justify themselves with these moral arguments—like, well, it's justified because of this or that. But in the real world, what they're doing is essentially eroding even more of Russia's deterrence. You can openly not just attack them, but then rub it in their face as well, saying we have to hit even harder. And this idea that Russia's restraint has emboldened the West—I mean, that's hardly Russian propaganda. You can go through our own media, and they'll say, "Well, why can't we send more weapons? The Russians had many red lines; they never do anything anyway." So restraint is definitely interpreted as weakness, and that's very bad for our side too, because at some point the Russians will have to do what the Iranians did. People were so surprised by the Iranians.

Why are they striking all the American bases? Well, you can't just have the Americans bomb them every six months. If they don't succeed in regime change, they just put a pin in it, give it a break, and come back in six months for another go. I mean, if you grant the adversary this level of escalation control—when to start a war, what's an acceptable target, when to pull out, when to finish the war, and when to go back again—eventually you'll perish. And I think this is a dangerous lesson the Russians are being taught, and it's dangerous for us. It's time for them to get their deterrent back. The irony, I think, is that in NATO they keep daydreaming about building opposition to Putin.

But the opposition is—those who argue, and they've been saying this for the past 20 years—that he might be too moderate, too liberal, that he has too much optimism about the possibility of integrating with the West, especially since 2014. Why isn't he preparing more for war? NATO isn't looking for a settlement; they're looking to build up a Ukrainian army. This is what his generals were saying, and what very influential military commentators were saying as well. It just seems reckless, but I don't see any critical commentary. If there were any critical commentary on this—on the incentives being created in Russia—it would be censored in the West as pro-Russian comments. But this is something that should terrify us.

The fact that Russia sees its deterrent as being squandered—thrown away by being too weak—and now it's almost existential, it's time to rebuild it. And of course, the attacks on Iran. I mean, why wouldn't the US or NATO do a decapitation strike against Russia? They might not do anything. I mean, this is... it's really weird—or not weird, but absurd—that we've gone to this length. But how do you see the Russians possibly looking now to reassert their deterrent? Because I see their rhetoric definitely changing. More and more, it starts to sound a bit like Dmitry Medvedev, who now wants a very hardline approach toward the West. It was a devastating critique of Putin's foreign and military policy.

#Gilbert Doctorow

It's on Russian state television. My interview with Judge Napolitano yesterday, where we went through many of these issues, was translated into Russian two hours later. It was on YouTube. This doesn't happen by itself—Russia keeps a fairly close watch on its media. As I mentioned a moment ago, Mr. Savioff was forced to eat his words, which is a sign, unfortunately, as one reader wrote to me, that he's not listening and not ready to make compromises or change direction. People think, "Oh, Russia has a vertical of power." Wait a minute—what happened to Mr. Gorbachev? He was arrested.

He could have had a pretty miserable fate if it hadn't been for the patriots in Moscow who stared down the tanks and reversed the removal of the president. Why don't we think something like that is possible today—not by bastards, but by real patriots removing a man who's simply not up to the job anymore? Now, I'm not giving recommendations to anyone, but ignoring this would be a failure to do our job as analysts, as people who understand how Russia functions. And somewhere in this discussion, I omitted mentioning Alexander Dugin. I've never been a great fan of Dugin; I don't think he's a very high-quality philosopher—but that's just my personal opinion.

A lot of people think a great deal of Mr. Dugin. It was said at one time that he was a close adviser to President Putin, but that doesn't mean much—many people have been called close advisers. Dugin is known to the broader Western world because of the tragedy of his daughter, who was assassinated four years ago in what was probably an attempt to kill him, but instead killed her. She was an activist journalist, a patriotic Russian, and a fierce critic of Ukraine. That's incidental. The point is, everyone knows who Dugin is after that, and since then, Dugin has been untouchable in Russia. Maybe Mr. Putin can shut up Solovyov, but he sure as hell cannot shut up Dugin. And Dugin came out with an essay a couple of days ago in which he said the same sort of thing.

#Gilbert Doctorow

That's what I heard on Solovyov—a devastating critique of everything Putin is doing with this war. The only thing is, he didn't name Putin specifically, but everyone knows who he meant. So something is afoot, and I don't believe Putin can hold on to power if he keeps being stubborn and fails to do what he must if Russia is to survive.

#Glenn

It begs the question of how they view the issue of diplomacy, because what the past week has proven is that there are no more rules—all the rules are out the window. And with Iran, this should have been evident a long time ago. But, you know, the kidnapping of Maduro also sent shockwaves—this is not normal, to go in and kidnap presidents. And with the Iranians, the fact is, first it was the Americans who walked away from the JCPOA, the nuclear deal. Then there was the first surprise attack in June, and now a second surprise attack.

And surely the Russians must see some parallels, because in 2014 you had the European governments negotiating a unity government in Ukraine, which was supposed to move away from Yanukovich and bring together the opposition to find a compromise. And again, that was toppled. Then they had Minsk, which was just taken advantage of. As Angela Merkel said, it was an opportunity to buy time to build a Ukrainian army. You had Istanbul, with the sabotage there. And of course, now we're seeing very open statements by many Western leaders about a long war. And even now, I get the impression the U.S. isn't really looking to end the war anymore.

I think they just want to transfer ownership over to the Europeans—especially the cost, and also the drones. Remember, in the first attacks, those that were smuggled into Russia were used to target its nuclear deterrent. Then the same thing happened to the Iranians during the first surprise attack on them. At some point, though, if I were advising the Russian government, I'd start to be very skeptical about whether there's any authenticity here, or if this is good-faith diplomacy. It doesn't feel like it anymore. And especially now, they're engaging with other parts of the world.

It doesn't seem like there's any diplomacy. There's no willingness to make concessions. There was supposed to be a deal, as you said, made in Alaska, but that whole spirit was just abandoned. They came back from Alaska saying, "Well, okay, there won't be a ceasefire; we're going to address the underlying issues instead." And then, a week later—almost right after meeting the Europeans—we're back to talking about a ceasefire. You know, I go back and forth so many times I lose track. But how do you see the appetite for diplomacy now that it's in Moscow, now that it's facing, I guess, fierce opposition?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I think diplomacy is poisoned now for any reasonable, objective, patriotic Russians. And if Mr. Putin persists in this, I don't see how he can hold it together. It's so obvious that the Americans are duplicitous, utterly untrustworthy. And the problem with the Maduro escapade is that it fed into the latent hubris of Pete Hegseth, the Pentagon fellows, and the so-called state senator Marco Rubio. They were certain they could do anything now—that they could change reality. And that's been a very dangerous shift in American foreign policy.

Mr. Trump will go with the flow when it looks like it's moving in a direction he likes. So he stopped being a peace president and doesn't have any problem being a war president. Now, in Russia, the impact of this was devastating. But we've also been talking about another dimension—China. China is nowhere. Chinese equipment was supposed to save the necks of the Iranians. What happened to it? My colleagues who are military experts were all speaking glowingly of the Chinese assistance to Iran just the week before the attack. Oh, the Americans are getting battered.

#Glenn

Absolute nonsense.

#Gilbert Doctorow

The first day, America established complete air control over Iran. So either there's something wrong with the Chinese equipment—it doesn't work at all—or something was short in what they supplied, or Lord knows what. But I think the Russians' view of the Chinese as an important ally in their contest with America went down the rat hole after the American strikes on Iran. That's a very big change. Oh, Putin has relied on some backing from the Shia—forget it, that's history. What Mr. Trump has done in his attack on Iran has changed everything in the perceptions of the Russians and their foreign policy establishment. And, well, that will come out—not today or tomorrow, but in the short term, it will come out. And I think it will create a tidal wave that Mr. Putin cannot resist.

#Glenn

I've seen media reports in Europe saying that whenever Russia strikes Ukraine hard with their drones, the commentaries often go, "Oh, this would anger Trump. Putin may have made a mistake." It's very strange. I mean, the Americans are deeply engaged in this. The Americans are still attacking Russia—they're at war with Russia—and yet a Russian strike on the American proxy, oh, well, we can't do that because it might anger Mr. Trump. It's very strange that this is how it's seen. It seems we're very close to a possible direct war, and they make it sound as if Russia's first objective should be to make sure they please Trump.

I'm just wondering if the Russians see the same thing—that Putin isn't just being cautious and pursuing a war of attrition, but that he's also too worried about what Trump might think of him. Because Trump is playing these games anyway—seeing which side can bow more to his will—and whoever bows the most, he'll then direct his anger in the other direction. In this way, he gets everyone to, you know, dance to his tune. But do you see that as a key problem? Or is it just that the whole war of attrition is becoming a bit grotesque?

Because by having a war of attrition where two sides essentially stand toe-to-toe and pound each other, it's causing not just massive casualties in Ukraine, but the casualties in Russia are also ramping up. I mean, this can't be popular. A lot of fine young men are gone. So how... I don't know. I can see why the war of attrition would seem very dark to many in Russia. But is this— which of these components—is this just aversion to this four-year-long war of attrition? Or is it the issue of being... well, essentially starting to bow to Trump too much, like the Europeans? Or how do you see it?

#Gilbert Doctorow

As I said, the biggest trigger here is the change in thinking among serious analysts and the political class who appear on these talk shows. They're starting to see Russia's vulnerability, and that it's opening itself up to the kind of attack the United States carried out on Iran. I've heard there are a lot of people—people based in Tehran—saying, "Oh, it's not so bad, we've really struck a television

station." Listen, I'm not a military expert, but I certainly respect Russian military experts who have no reason to give a biased account. There's no favor to be gained. And when one of the most responsible of them appeared on *60 Minutes* two or three days ago, with an ashen face, he said, "The Iranians have lost the war."

And he explained why—how everything's being degraded there. Sooner or later, many of these caches of missiles will be exhausted. And he said, "I'm not being an apologist for Trump; I'm just telling you how it is." Now, before our viewers get too depressed, let me explain. I don't agree with the overall conclusions he reached. Yes, on a military basis, sure, Iran has lost the war. And in the same way, if you want to turn it around, on a military basis, Russia has won the war. And what do you get for that? We know they don't get much in Russia right now, and the United States won't get much for having a military victory if the Iranians persist with what is their winning hand—economic and political warfare.

By that I mean closing the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off Europe and other major importers of both natural gas and petroleum from about 20% of global supplies. We've already seen how, in Europe, the price of natural gas has skyrocketed. And right at the moment when Europe should be buying for the next season, they're all afraid to do it because the prices are wild. That's just the beginning. We're only a few days into the shutdown of Qatar's production and exports. And with petroleum, it's the same story. The Iranians are counting on the political defeat of Trump, and I think they've got their hands on something very serious.

In his State of the Nation address, Trump boasted about gasoline at the pump in the States having dropped to \$2 or even below per gallon. Well, I think it's about \$3.50 today, and it's going to head toward \$5 or \$6 in a matter of a few weeks. Even though the United States is 85% to 90% self-sufficient in petroleum, it isn't enough. Producers in the States will export to meet demand at vastly higher prices, and there will be shortages that will raise prices at home. So Mr. Trump is going to be devastated politically when his words from a week ago turn out to be foolish. And Americans are very sensitive to gasoline prices.

So that's one aspect of closing the Strait of Hormuz. The other element is destroying the economies of the Gulf states, which have hosted all these U.S. military bases. The attack on the refinery in Saudi Arabia wasn't massive—it wasn't a hypersonic missile, just some drones—but it did the job. It put it out of action. And it's exactly for reasons like that that the Saudis agreed to restore diplomatic relations with Iran. That was about a year, maybe a year and a half ago, with Chinese brokerage, because they wanted to pull themselves out of the Yemen civil war. No, that's Saudi—that's the least of it. We're looking at resources. I'm looking at the whole economy there. I was in Dubai; you've probably been there too.

And you know that 80% of all international business—which is what all those skyscrapers in Dubai are about—is run by expats from various places. A lot of Brits, about 130,000, applied to their government to get the hell out. Hmm. I've been through periods of change like this. In 1988, during

the great crash in Russia, I saw how these abrupt and very adverse shifts led to dramatic policy changes at the board level in major corporations. With reason or without reason, even if recovery could come in two or three years, the companies in the West behind all those lovely offices in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and the rest of it—they're going to close down. The prices of all those fabulous apartments in Dubai will collapse within a few weeks.

They'll crumble because they're literally built on sand. And that's the point the Iranians are making. They're going to cripple them with just a few drones—they don't even have to bother with their hypersonic missiles. People were saying, "Oh, why are you calling it terrorism—the raids on hotels and office buildings and so on?" They were all directed against CIA and other military people who were in those places. Rubbish. That would be valid if they'd actually killed people. There were broken windows and some fires. And already you've got 130,000 Brits fleeing, heading for the hills. This is what terrorism is all about—it's the change in the psychology of the broader public. They've done it, and they'll do it again, and Mr. Trump will be finished.

#Glenn

Yeah, the condemnation of Iran is a bit interesting, because the attacks they carried out were quite restrained. I mean, if you look at what the Americans are doing—with the assistance of the Gulf states, indirectly—it looks almost like carpet bombing. Maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration of Tehran, but still, these are some massive bombs they're dropping now in populated areas in the middle of the city. You know, Iran hasn't done anything like this against its neighbors yet. So there's still a long way they could go up the escalation ladder. But I very much agree: these Gulf kingdoms—the lack of natives, the number of foreign nationals, what that means for real estate prices, the dependence on oil and energy—all of that matters.

I mean, all of this can be shut down quickly—as it has. So if this especially is prolonged, there's going to be a massive shift there. That is, the U.S.'s closest allies in the region will fall away, fall apart. And again, the ramifications are difficult to predict. But in terms of—just as a last question—in terms of Russia's possible direct or indirect support for Iran, what do you think the Russians are currently doing for the Iranians? Because the support by the Chinese and the Russians seems tepid, or risk-averse at least. I'm assuming they're giving some intelligence, probably some air defenses and other weapons. But now that the war is spreading as well, I saw a drone allegedly from Iran hit Azerbaijan today.

There was some talk of a missile heading toward Turkey that was intercepted. Again, I'm not sure how much of this is real or if it's just meant to widen the coalition situation. But how do you see the possibility of drawing Russia in to a greater extent? Of course, they wouldn't fight the Americans, but now that the Americans are going to use the Kurds, could the Russians do what they did for Syria in 2015 and help knock out America's proxies, at least? It's just... what's most frightening about this war is how many areas it could escalate into—not just in terms of how Russia would fight Ukraine and NATO from here on, but also how it could get drawn into the Middle East.

#Gilbert Doctorow

This brings up another important dimension—the shock that the U.S. attack on Iran has created among the foreign policy establishment in Russia. They see Iran’s weakness and its failure to conclude their mutual defense pact with Russia, which the Russians wanted, going back to the fall of 1925. The Russians wanted it, and the Iranians didn’t. So, the one thing you can take out of the equation is that there’s no feeling of guilt or embarrassment in the Russian foreign policy establishment over their failure to provide material assistance to Iran up to now, or their unwillingness to do so going forward. Now, why do I say that? Because they see in Iran exactly their own problem.

That's why this is such a terrible indication of what's wrong with the way Russia is being governed—and has been governed, in a certain respect, a very limited respect, but right now a terribly important one—by Vladimir Putin. That is, the longtime tolerance of the Zapadniki, the westernizers, the liberals with a capital L, two of whom are, from the standpoint of patriotic Russians, still throttling Russia and holding it back in the war. Namely, Nabiullina, a liberal with a capital L at the helm of the state bank, and the minister of the economy. These are liberals. And what is the problem with Iran? Liberals. Going back two, two and a half years, Iran had a Russia-friendly prime minister, Raisi. And he had an “unfortunate” helicopter crash. That was not an unfortunate helicopter crash—it was a Mossad-MI6 assassination.

#Glenn

A man who was willing to make a pact with Russia was removed.

#Gilbert Doctorow

In his place eventually came Bezhashvili—a weak link, let’s be clear about it—and a Zapadnik, a man much more interested in making a deal with the United States and getting the sanctions lifted than in forming a defense pact with the Russians or resisting further American aggression against his country. There have been too many Iranians sympathetic to the States and antipathetic to Russia to do what was necessary, which was a defense pact with Russia. It wasn’t concluded in December, so the Russians owe the Iranians nothing. They also have a long memory of how Iran crushed its Communist Party. Nobody forgets.

You and I may not have known about it, but I assure you, the Russians know about it. And it doesn’t make them terribly sympathetic to Iran. The fact that Iran refused to conclude a mutual defense pact—that sealed the relationship. Many of us were waiting, and I won’t say I wasn’t one of them, hoping with some optimism that the Russians would step in. No, they didn’t, and they had good reason not to. I don’t know about the Chinese—that’s a different story. They’re the most interested party; they had fifteen percent of their oil supplies coming from Iran. And what have they done?

Where were those wonderful military exercises at sea? Remember that? All my military colleagues in the States were talking about it—oh yeah, the stuff with Iran, China, and Russia, their ships standing up to the American armada. Did it happen? No. I don't know where all those ships went, but nothing happened. So the Russians have a strong feeling of being deceived or disillusioned now with China. They have no regrets about Iran, because Iran didn't want to be helped. But they're in shock over what it all means for themselves and for the way their country is being governed.

#Glenn

Well, I'm wondering if some of this pressure that might be building on Putin is going to force him to shift a bit. Because now that we see the Ukrainian front lines have been weakened, much of the defensive line is now behind the Russians. And again, the weather's getting warmer, and there's a lot of talk about a massive spring offensive coming. I'm wondering to what extent this pressure on Putin to escalate the war in Ukraine in a big way might actually come forward—not as a way of abandoning his position, but at least showing that the war of attrition isn't forever.

This is what's now opening up the opportunity to move more into maneuver warfare, or essentially to escalate in a big way, partly to please some of the people who are pushing back. But it remains to be seen. As I was saying, for our opponent—Russia—this is not the message you want to send, that we don't respect their deterrence. Because if you want us to respect your deterrence, you'd better escalate in a big way. I think we've reached that point now as well. So, yeah, unfortunate times, I guess—hard times ahead. But thank you very much. Do you have any final thoughts before we wrap up?

#Gilbert Doctorow

No, I wish you weren't such a pessimist. As I said about Iran, it doesn't look as bad as people think. As for Mr. Trump, I think it looks very bad. I don't see any way he can survive the November elections, in which case he'll be politically neutered—which isn't a bad thing, because with the hubris we've seen after the Maduro capture, he really needs to be reined in. So things could be worse. I think that, one way or another, Russia will firm up its resistance to Western provocations. I just hope Mr. Putin does this voluntarily.

#Glenn

Well, that's a problem. Just a final thought: what you never want to do is put large or great powers in a strategic position where it's all or nothing—where they risk everything and feel like their back is against the wall. And I see almost all of these powers now in that situation. As you said, Trump has a lot to fear now. If this war doesn't work out, it's hard to see him surviving it. The United States, as a country, could see its entire credibility as a great power—with seemingly infinite resources—on the line. So it has to win this.

Iran is also fighting an existential war. It has everything to lose, so it should lash out and fight with everything it has. And, of course, Russia also sees this as an existential threat now. You know, they could fear an American decapitation strike. Everyone is put in a situation where it's essentially all or nothing. And now is the time to either defeat the enemy or defeat ourselves. This is a horribly, very, very dangerous position to be in. But no, it's very hard to be optimistic. Still, I appreciate—not the optimism, but your candid analysis. So thank you.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, thanks for hearing me out.