Schönbach: Head of German Navy - Forced to Resign over Ukraine War

Kay-Achim Schönbach is the former head of the German Navy, who was forced to resign in January 2022 after arguing that Ukraine would not regain control of Crimea and that it would be wise to show respect for Russia. Please like, subscribe and share to keep the channel going! Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Kai-Achim Schönbach, the retired Vice Admiral and former head of the German Navy. Thank you very much for taking the time. Thank you, Professor. As I understand it, you were the head of the German Navy until January 2022, when you were essentially pushed to resign. The reason for this—I found it astonishing, as did many others around the world—was that you made some remarks during a meeting in India that were considered controversial. You argued that Ukraine would most likely not be able to retake Crimea, and that it would make more sense to treat the Russians with more respect. I think the quote was that Putin "deserves respect."

So, from my understanding, this wasn't even a normative position about whether Russia should keep Crimea. It was simply a recognition that there was no chance of taking Crimea away from Russia. I thought that should have made sense—a lot of sense, common sense at least. It would be an acceptable position or argument, since recognizing reality is often very important for pursuing the best policies. And in retrospect, I would say that many lives could have been saved if people had listened to people like you. But instead, you were forced to leave your position as head of the German Navy. I was wondering if you could explain what happened in those days—what was given as the reason, for example, for being pushed out?

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

First of all, should I address you as Professor, or can I say Glenn? Glenn? We can be informal? Yeah, I think your introduction was perfect—already a perfect statement. Okay then, for those who might not know, because as you said, it was seen as controversial—however, the German government didn't really have a clear position at that time regarding this issue. It all had to do with the fact that I visited New Delhi in 2022, as you said, in January, during the voyage of the German frigate *Bayern*. It was the first time in ten years—ten years since the last time a German frigate or any

German ship had paid a visit to East Asia. On the way back, they stopped in Pakistan, then in India, halfway home before returning to Wilhelmshaven, in the northwestern part of Germany.

They were in Mumbai. After meeting with the foreign minister in Delhi and attending various other appointments, I was invited, at relatively short notice, to what you could call a double meeting that lasted about three and a half hours in total. It involved two think tanks in a suburb of New Delhi. At the second appointment, I was asked to give a lecture and hold a short Q&A session, which was only supposed to last a few minutes. The lecture itself had been coordinated with the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense in Berlin, of course. During the short Q&A session, a young woman in the room—remember, it was during the Corona times, so we were separated into different rooms—

She asked me what I thought should happen next with the Crimean Peninsula—you can see this in the video. I replied that I didn't really know, but I wouldn't expect the Russian Federation to voluntarily return the Crimean Peninsula. I said something like, "Crimea is gone, it's not coming back." However, this statement was interpreted in the German media as me agreeing that the Crimean Peninsula should remain part of the Russian Federation, and that I approved of Russia's actions. Please forgive me for saying this here on this channel, but that interpretation of my statements and my position was complete nonsense—simply bullshit. Of course, I did not hold that view.

I had already given a presentation in favor of Ukraine on this topic at the OSCE in Vienna just one year earlier, at a hearing on the subject in my capacity as head of the German delegation. As a result, I was awarded a high Ukrainian order, and even after this so-called scandal, I received the Medal of Honor from the University of Kyiv. So in this respect, Glenn, you can see that I in no way wanted to see the status of the Crimean Peninsula as anything other than part of Ukraine. The second question, the one you mentioned later when I said "Putin deserves it," came from a participant who asked what I believed the Russian Federation or President Putin wanted or expected. I said, in essence, that I didn't know, of course, but if I had to speculate, I would assume that the Russian Federation and its president want to be treated as equal partners.

I subsequently linked this to the word "respect." I said that if I was asked what Putin wanted, it was probably respect. What I meant by that was respect for Russia's right to represent its own security interests on its western borders. But crucially, I meant respect. What I did not say—and did not mean—was that one had to comply with Russia's demands or accept everything it wanted. Later I said, "And even he deserves it," but that was not meant personally for Vladimir Putin; it referred to the president of the Russian Federation. I then went on to say that if that was all it was—just respect in this regard—then it could be achieved at low cost or even no cost. Now, this video, which showed only a very small excerpt from the three-and-a-half-hour lecture and discussion, was leaked without the surrounding context.

Among the experts in the room and in front of the cameras, there was no need to repeat every two minutes that we didn't support Moscow's actions. It was absolutely clear. From this leak, which

included only one of three audio loops, I was then accused of being a Putin supporter and Russian sympathizer. As a result, it was framed that way. The German media put a lot of pressure on then-Minister Christine Lambrecht—she was a female minister—so she felt compelled to remove me from office. I then resigned myself. I saw that the minister and my military superior, the chief, were more or less helpless and didn't want to fight for me or at least dispel this untrue framing and support me. Yeah, that's life.

#Glenn

Well, what you described, though, is something that's also been seen among journalists and in academia. For example, people like Professor John Mearsheimer and others have made the point for the past 20 years that Russia's main security concerns were tied to its fear of Ukraine ending up in the NATO orbit. And as Mearsheimer argues, if you didn't recognize or respect those security concerns, then, well, that was necessary to protect Ukraine—because if Russia's concerns were ignored, they would likely respond in a way that would destroy Ukraine.

So again, when people like Mearsheimer made this argument, it was considered a pro-Ukrainian position. That is, if we ignore Russia's security concerns, then essentially Ukraine will perish. In the same way, if you were to put a Chinese military base in Mexico, you'd have to respect America's security concerns—otherwise, Mexico would perish. So the pro-Ukrainian or "Mexican" position would also be to take that into consideration. One can, of course, disagree with this analysis, but what I find astonishing is that you're no longer allowed to make it. Essentially, if you want to be sympathetic to Ukraine, that now seems to mean ignoring everything else and just steaming full ahead. I was wondering how you make sense of this.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

They were really turning it around, and, um, like, I think it was the Deputy Secretary of Defense of the United States who said this was a childish reaction from the German government—or the German defense minister. But to be honest, it wasn't the minister of defense. She formally expelled me, yes, but it was coming from the Green side of the new coalition. The coalition had just been formed a couple of weeks earlier. And Mrs. Baerbock, as you know, she's now running as head of the General Assembly in New York at the United Nations—she was the one. She said, "Okay, I don't want to have him any longer in the armed forces." And, of course, what you want in a coalition, especially at the very beginning of your time in government, is silence.

You don't have any kind of problems. And so I was the minor victim—they kicked me out. Okay. What's interesting is, of course, I'm not bitter about it anymore. I think the first year was hard, but now it's four years ago. The fact is, just a year or two before that, I was on German TV because I had quite a good standing in German military politics. I pointed out that we had a threat in the Baltic Sea, especially in the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea, from the rearmed Russian Baltic and Nordic fleets. And so this guy who was really saying, "Hey, come on, here's the threat, please concentrate

on that," was then, overnight, through some kind of radicalization, suddenly labeled a Putin supporter. I think that was very ridiculous. And I'm still not. But, well, that's life.

#Glenn

Well, what I find extraordinary—and your case really makes that point clear—is this inability now, I've noticed, to even discuss security concerns. Not just Russia, but Iran as well, or China. The whole idea of treating rivals with some respect—that they're not evil, that they have security concerns and interests—seems to be a new development. I mean, you joined the Bundeswehr, I think, in 1984, and during the Cold War we were able to discuss what the security concerns of our adversaries were. Not because we had to cheer for them, but because if you recognize their concerns, then you understand what our policies and reactions might cause.

And so we don't do that anymore. We don't talk about security concerns, but also about how we talk about foreign leaders. You said there's a need to respect Russia as well. But these days, the way we talk about leaders is completely different from the Cold War era. It's very emotional, full of morally loaded terms. All our adversaries are autocrats, tyrants, dictators, thugs. I mean, we didn't have this during the Cold War, and I'm not sure why. It doesn't seem to benefit diplomacy. Is it posturing at home? How do you explain this transition? You were there from the '80s into the '90s—do you know why we started speaking in this manner? Oh, that's a good question.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

I think I can just say, especially for Germany, it has a lot to do with morals and moralism. We were really changing from this idea. In the armed forces, we always said, take a step back from the table and have a broader view. And of course, we had good—well, not very good, but good—moral and sufficient trading relations with the Soviet Union at that time. In Germany, we had this saying: as long as we trade with each other, there's the possibility to have an influence on the other side—mutual influence—for the benefit of peace and stability. But now in Germany, and I think in large parts of Western Europe, probably also in the United States, though not to the same extent as in Germany and France, it's always a question of morals.

And they're not talking about strategy; they're talking about operations or tactics. It's always about morale, but not about accepting reality. And as I'd say in this context—okay, I probably don't like what President Putin and the Russian government are doing. I don't like what the Iranians are doing. But I think it was on your channel with Colonel McGregor, whom I'm an absolute fan of—he said that more important than being dominant, than dominating another country or a world region, is having stable conditions. Stability is imperative. It's more important to have stability—a stable relationship with other countries and regions—instead of saying, "Okay, now I'm placing armies all over the world in so-called beachheads, and then I try to dominate this region."

No, a stable condition—that's it. What is it all about? I think we've lost that understanding. Now it's… I don't think what we had in the '50s or '60s was really black and white. The Russians and the Warsaw Pact nations were on one side, and we were the good ones on the other side. It was black and white. And we lost that in the early '90s. I don't know—probably it's like ancient Rome, which needed, with Carthage, a kind of adversary, an enemy to define itself. And when the enemy was gone, after the third war against Carthage, Rome began to decline. And I think, more or less, we see the same thing now.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's a good point. I often think that after the Cold War, when we essentially redivided Europe, we also needed a new normative framing of "us." Who are we, and who are they? We had to define everything as liberal democracy versus authoritarianism, because I think it was kind of comfortable during the Cold War—both sides accepted what the ideological dividing lines were. We were the capitalists; they were the communists. We were the Christians; they were the atheists. But then, of course, after the Cold War, when it was unilaterally imposed, it maybe took a cruder form. What I find fascinating is that you're not the only one in Germany, among the German leadership, who's been concerned about this development.

I was speaking with a colleague of yours, General Harald Kujat—former head of the German army and also the highest military representative within NATO. He also makes the point that it's been a mistake to ignore the security concerns of adversaries—Russia, in this case—and to reject diplomacy. It's an interesting development for Germany, though, because it had a kind of unique role during the Cold War. It was the country of *Ostpolitik*, which suggested that engagement and mutual understanding could be an important path to peace, as opposed to simply trying to defeat the adversary. That kind of diplomatic engagement was meant to reduce security competition and strengthen peace. Do you see a shift away from this? Because, again, I'm standing a bit outside Germany.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Yeah, but you just mentioned General Kujat. I can only agree with him—I personally hold him in high regard. Both of us, as well as the other military experts you mentioned, have repeatedly pointed out and demonstrated that disregarding the security interests of the Russian Federation is not a sign of strength. It's indisputable that the NATO countries, including those that joined the alliance during its expansion, were in a stronger position. When both Georgia and Ukraine were identified as future allies at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, it shouldn't be forgotten that Germany and France were the two countries that initially opposed Ukraine's membership in NATO at the time.

Today, people like General Kujat and me are often compared to supporters of the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, who, in negotiations with Adolf Hitler shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, believed that the policy of so-called appeasement could prevent Germany from entering the war. So now, back to your question: recognizing that the Russian Federation has legitimate security interests on its western border has nothing to do with appeasement, but rather with strategic foresight. In my view, a different image of the Russian Federation has been cultivated in some Western capitals—and especially in Washington—for a long time, as I said, with this black-and-white thinking.

The West had won the Cold War, as we say now, and it was just a matter of expanding further east and keeping the Russian Federation small. However, as I've learned in many conversations with politicians from NATO countries, many did not expect the Russian Federation to recover so quickly and so sustainably, both economically and militarily. And now the Russian president, with the support of his people—we should never forget this—has made a clear demand that Russia's security interests on its western borders be respected, as I said back in India.

And I think you're absolutely right that Germany used to be a significant diplomatic power, with a kind of bridging function. Unfortunately, it's not just with Foreign Minister Baerbock or now with Mr. Wadephul—we've forgotten that in Berlin, and in other countries as well, but especially in Berlin. And today we once again have, yeah, an unfortunate—how can I say it—an unfortunate tendency in certain circles to disregard the security concerns of other states, not just Russia. The same goes for China, Iran, and Israel.

The political personnel—and I'm not talking about stupid politician-bashing here, don't get me wrong—the political personnel in Germany, and I think also in Norway, you can check that, but also in some other nations and in the European Commission, are not of the caliber to always make the right decisions in these difficult and dangerous times. When asked why we are not discussing Russia's security concerns, or why we have stopped discussing them, I can only say that my impression is that, following its victory in the Cold War, the West believes it now has the right to determine the fate of all nations in Europe, including Russia, apparently. This has proven to be a fatal mistake, given the support for Ukraine, which I still find incomprehensible.

Once again, it's not a sign of weakness on the part of the Western world to accommodate the Russian Federation on certain points. I think the ultimate goal—our ultimate goal—should always be the national interest: peace, reconciliation, balance, and good trade relations. It cannot be our goal to ensure that the Russian Federation, or other countries like it, is weakened to such an extent that it feels compelled to strike back, which is what we're facing right now. What we need are talks at the highest level—and I think we'll come to this—ceasefires and peace offers of all kinds. And again, I'll say it: acceptance of new realities. I understand that must be very difficult for any Ukrainian patriot, to accept the cession of territory from their country to the Russian Federation.

Even though I'm only marginally involved—I just mention that because I was asked about it in an interview yesterday evening—I can understand this very well and would probably think and react in a similar way if I were Ukrainian. But now it's a matter of ending the deaths and the suffering, and that's not just a saying. There's no alternative to it. In this respect, looking at the missed opportunity in Istanbul, from the Istanbul papers in April 2022, Kyiv must once again ask itself whether handing over the Donbas region—or the remaining part of the Donbas region not currently occupied—to the Russian Federation is a painful contribution to peace, but I think a necessary one.

#Glenn

Well, it's interesting what you said about this—no one expected the quick recovery of Russia. That was a key theme, I remember, many American leaders were discussing in the '90s in the context of NATO expansion. The idea was, well, we just have to manage Russia's decline, essentially. But you had leading statesmen like George Kennan making the point that Russia would not remain weak and that it would recover. And when it recovered, it would again push to have its security respected. He predicted that we would then simply call Russia evil and imperialistic. And the same with Clinton's Secretary of Defense, William Perry—he said he even considered quitting his position because this would predictably lead to a conflict with Russia.

So again, the reason I bring it up is because these things were acceptable to discuss openly, as opposed to now, when people are forced out of their positions for making comments that should be common sense. And as I said, in 2008—these days we're not even allowed to say that Russia might have felt threatened by NATO expansion. That's seen as evidence of being pro-Russian, and then you're labeled anti-West or something. But Angela Merkel herself made the point that the reason Ukraine couldn't receive a Membership Action Plan was that Moscow would interpret it as, quote, a declaration of war. And Burns, the CIA director, also said in his famous memo that this would probably start a civil war in Ukraine, and then Russia would militarily intervene—which it didn't want to do.

Again, even former CIA Director Robert Gates said that pushing into Georgia and Ukraine was really taking it too far. It was reckless and didn't take Russia's security concerns into consideration. "That's something we failed to do," he said. I mean, who would call Robert Gates a Putinist or a *Putinversteher*? It's so absurd. And you also had the British ambassador to Moscow, Roderic Lyne, who said the same thing: if you want to start a war with Russia, then trying to bring Ukraine into the NATO orbit would be the best way to do it. Again, not as advocacy, but as a caution. So all these things were allowed to be said—but now, it's all over. It's very strange to watch how quickly this happened, I guess.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Indeed, as you just listed, there were so many voices—not just from smaller states like Austria, Switzerland, or France, but even from around the Washington bubble. So many wise people said,

"Come on, don't cross these red lines." And we just mentioned the Bucharest summit in 2008, the first time the Russian leader attended that meeting. And there he said it: "Don't do this now." Okay, he said more than just that, but still—don't do this. This is, for us, a red line.

And although everybody knew it—and probably the reaction of France, the French president, and Mrs. Merkel, our chancellor at that time, reflected that—they still went along with it, probably knowing in the back of their minds, "Okay, maybe in the future we'll push them forward." But everybody knew it. Everybody heard it. Everybody saw it. And it went on. And this is, I think—yeah, okay, now it's in German—what means, "Okay, now the time is over. You can argue and argue and argue, but now we are in this war, and this is the end of the development, and we don't know what comes afterwards."

#Glenn

Well, I think it maybe goes back to what you said before—that all the language has now shifted from strategy to moralistic language. You know, this was in Machiavelli, 500 years ago, in *The Prince*, where Machiavelli wrote that men tend to see the world as they wish it to be, and that this is their destruction. So, in other words, you have to accept reality as it is. But when you have to speak in this normative language all the time, the opposite will be seen as treason. We walk into dangerous territory. But on that point, you argued at that meeting in India that Ukraine would likely not be able to regain Crimea anyway—it wouldn't be able to retake it. And as I said before, this was intended as a statement of fact rather than a normative argument suggesting that Russia should have it. But why did you think it was evident that Russia would never surrender Crimea?

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Now, I would say it wasn't even a normative statement—it was really a military one, first of all, because I was sitting there in uniform, as you can see in the video. From my perspective, the reason why Crimea—and not many people know this—is that even the provinces of the oblasts, as they're called in Russian, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and others, were given from Russia to Ukraine just to help it survive, because the Ukrainian SSR at the beginning was absolutely not able to survive as a republic. So they were given those territories. For historical reasons, I think that was one of the motives. And, first of all, many Russian people—ethnic Russians—are living on the Crimean Peninsula.

And as you recall, we already had a referendum in the '90s, and then we had another one—yes, after bringing in the "green men," those soldiers at the beginning—after taking the Crimean Peninsula and then integrating it as a new province, or new oblast, into Russia. I think the people living on that peninsula have always been striving to be reunited with Russia. Of course, since the Helsinki summit, we know it's not allowed—there's no permission—to change borders by force. However, I think after it was taken, and again, that was in 2013–2014, now, six or eight years later, we're still talking about bringing Crimea back to Ukraine.

And just by the war starting in 2022, this became a new goal—or rather, a reminder: don't forget about Crimea. I think we have to accept reality here, and the reality is that the people who live in Crimea want to stay with the Russians. I don't believe that anyone in Europe or in NATO really thought Russia would accept Crimea—with Sevastopol, with the Russian Black Sea Fleet—as a small enclave surrounded by NATO countries. That's unbelievable. You can't convince me that the people in Brussels, or in Mons, or in Washington really believed that could work. And that's why I think they'll stay with us, and there's no way back.

#Glenn

Yeah, the power dimension is interesting, because I think this is the main reason they took Crimea, of course. Well, it's not controversial that they couldn't afford to lose the Black Sea Fleet. If they had lost the Black Sea Fleet, their footprint in the Black Sea would have been almost diminished or gone. And again, for the past thousand years, this has been one of Russia's main challenges—to have reliable access to the seas. So, in the northwest, they always had those three waters: the Arctic, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea. And the main concern was that the major maritime powers—the hegemons, whether the US or the UK—would seek to contain them by cutting off this access. So, you know, there was a lot at stake here, and the idea that they would surrender it—I just don't see it.

And as you said, even a lot of Western polls and media pushed polls about who wanted to join Russia. And, you know, it wasn't just ethnic Russians—ethnic Ukrainians, Tatars—they were all in favor. I remember this clearly because, I mean, in Norway, when the referendum happened, we had journalists there from national TV who reported on the celebrations, saying that almost everyone wanted to join. But that was then. Now they're not allowed to say this anymore. So, you know, reality always has to give way to the narrative. But again, to recognize that they want to doesn't mean one has to say it conforms with international law. It doesn't mean one has to support it or legitimize it—it just means this is reality. But, um, no, I find it… sorry.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Just to step in on this, because I think it's become a standard phrase we hear now in all discussions and interviews—and you see it, of course, in the media—when we talk about the international rules-based order or international law. It's interesting to see, and we see it now in Iran, and we're talking about Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine or eastern Europe. It's interesting to ask, what can we really say about international law? International law is good for peacetime. I know what I'm saying right now, and if we were sitting in a bigger room, they'd probably throw eggs at me for saying it.

But the point is, international law and the international rules-based order have, of course, since 1945, been dominated by the West. And now the West is relatively in decline. Europe isn't gone forever, but at the moment it's really down at the bottom. And Washington is now just fighting the

late wars of a declining nation. But I think we should really start in Germany, in Norway, in Western Europe. We have to start accepting reality. I know it sounds naive—it's easy to say that, easy to demand it, easy to think it's something everyone should accept. But we're always fleeing. I see this in the political class in my country—it's always fleeing.

We are challenged, and then we start turning and pivoting away. But from a moral standpoint—from a kind of non-realistic moral standpoint, from the standpoint that we're talking about an international rules-based order—this should be so and so and so. And although we say that, nobody is listening to us. They just go on with it. Washington is doing this, Moscow is doing this, Beijing is doing it in the Far East and now coming closer and closer to the Middle East. And probably other countries like India, or in the near future Indonesia, will do the same. We're standing more and more on the sidelines, just giving marks. I think that's not the right thing to do. I'm sorry to interrupt.

#Glenn

No, I think it's an important point to make. But I did want to ask you—how do you assess it now? Because this was back in January 2022. Now we're in March 2026, four years into this war. What do you see Russia wanting to achieve? What are its main objectives in this war?

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Hmm.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

I think most aspects we've already touched on, but to sum it up, there are many reasons for this. What I don't believe is that Putin woke up one morning and decided, "Hey, now I'm reestablishing the Soviet Union." I think that's nonsense. There are undoubtedly political reasons following the Maidan coup, in which Russia felt it had been sidelined without being consulted. There are historical reasons, as we just talked about, because we never forget these provinces—like Crimea, which, as I said, was originally given to Ukraine by Russia under Secretary General Khrushchev. That was mainly for economic reasons, to make Ukraine viable. But there are also ethnic reasons, which we're just talking about.

But I think the most important aspect—the most obvious throughout its history—is that we're not just looking at Crimea, but also at the Donbas. Triggered by its experiences, Russia has always wanted to have a buffer between itself and potential conquerors. And the conquerors in their past were always coming from the West—not from the South, not from the East, nor from the North. Of course, Ukraine as a neutral country was acceptable. They even said it during the negotiations with the U.S. following the meeting between Putin and Trump in Anchorage, Alaska. They could say,

"Okay, Ukraine could be a partner of the EU, or even a member of the EU. This could be acceptable." But a possible staging ground for NATO partners on its western border—this is completely unacceptable.

And this was the reset in 2008 in Bucharest. So, in summary, I believe that this conquest was—I don't know, I wasn't there—but it seems it was not seriously planned. It was too amateurishly executed for that. But now it's a matter of containing NATO in Eastern Europe. I think this is their main goal: forming a buffer again. Let Ukraine be a partner or a member of the EU, and that's it. I don't want to jump to the next question, but to another field. This is the same thing that was negotiated in Bucharest—Georgia. We already had the Russia–Georgia war. If NATO had gone ahead with Georgia, we would have had the next problem. I hope we have wise people in the capitals not to do that.

#Glenn

Yeah, restarting that one again—I think it would be a massive mistake. But again, we've learned enough lessons from this war, or hopefully the right lessons. If you were to propose a solution for this—because I know, and many have argued—I know that a German in the EU Parliament, Mikael von Schulenburg, has written these letters, signed by General Harald Kujat, about how they envision an end to this war. Do you have any perspective on how you think we can bring this to an end? Because I know the sentiment is often that, well, now the war has started, so it doesn't really matter what caused it.

You know, we're in this mess now. But on the other hand, if you want to solve a conflict, you have to address the root causes. And again, the Russians have signaled very clearly that they're not interested in any temporary ceasefire that doesn't address the security concerns or the security competition that triggered this war to begin with. How do you see a possible end to this? Because once the war has been going on for four years and has manifested itself as a territorial conflict, it's very hard to reach a settlement.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

I can't do that. You asked, and I think this is what we really have to do before we start talking about—not "we," but before talks start on—how to win peace, a lasting peace. We really have to look at the lessons of what we did wrong before. I think some time ago, you know, former U.S. General Ben Hodges—quite a right-leaning figure, I think he was the head of the U.S. Army in Europe—said that even the small Finnish army could wipe the Russian army off the battlefield. Wow. In other words, my first lesson when looking at the end of this conflict, which must always be learned and could have been known beforehand, is that the biggest mistake is to be arrogant and underestimate your opponent. To do so again at the outbreak of war was a serious mistake.

Another mistake we must prevent—and we're seeing this not only in the West but also in other regions of the world—is to disregard, as we've discussed, the security concerns and interests of other countries. Arrogance, self-righteousness, and conceit are the great enemies in diplomacy, strategy, and warfare. We must all learn that we are witnessing a profound shift in power, not only in Europe but across the world. Europe, and perhaps the entire West, must understand that the days of acting freely, without resistance, in all regions of the world are over. And the other thing is, relying 100%—or even more than 1,000%—on our American friend and partner for all eternity... I think we must be very, very careful with that.

So Germany and other countries—and I think this is relevant, even if it's not a direct answer to how to end the war, but rather about what we have to do ourselves—and you in Norway have already done this, while Germany and others still have some catching up to do in this regard. Most of them should focus on their own strength, their own armed forces, and the resilience of their societies. In my opinion, this includes reintroducing universal conscription. Our defense minister, Boris Pistorius, introduced the term "war readiness" to make it clear that Germany has some catching up to do, as I said. And I think, in the current conflict, only through negotiations conducted in parallel with events on the battlefield—with the mediation of the United States and a Gulf state, I think it was Oman—can both foreign parties reach a mutual compromise on the contentious issues.

It is to be feared that Ukraine will have to cede territory. And Russia—if I were advising President Putin, which he never asked me to do—would also be well advised, if only for the sake of external communication and the period that follows, to make concessions that would ultimately allow all parties to sign a peace treaty. Later on—and I touched on this before—can Ukraine become a member of the European Union? Yes, possibly, even though this has not yet been decided. Admission to the EU would place an enormous burden on the other member states, especially Germany. Ukraine is not ready for accession. And I don't mean to say that I don't want it to join. I know what people will say when they hear this: "My God, he's against it." No, I'm not against it.

They are not. They're not fit for membership. And please, in addition, consideration must also be given to the states that have been preparing for so many years. They are on the waiting list to meet the accession criteria. Can Ukraine become a member of NATO? No, not at all. I firmly believe that the demand made by Foreign Affairs Representative Kallas and other European states—that Ukraine's admission to NATO is non-negotiable—together with the territorial question, is the main reason why a ceasefire or peace cannot be achieved. The Russians don't want a ceasefire; they want peace directly. I think a way must be found by both sides, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, to address their respective security concerns, guarantees, and expectations.

If European states really want to play an important role—and they don't play one at all, at least not a useful one, in the peace process—then military confidence-building measures are not nearly enough. I think they will have to bring forward concrete proposals that defend Ukraine's interests while giving Russia reasons to compromise. This could include phased demilitarization—um,

demilitarized zones along the contact line—interim security arrangements that address both Ukrainian and Russian concerns, and creative formulas for contested areas that enable reconstruction and the return of refugees. I think, in summary, and to conclude this, I believe that the steps that must be taken initially involve intensifying negotiations—not in public, but behind closed doors.

Because if you have too many people watching this, I think you ruin the whole thing. Nations all over the world have to be found that are willing to station contingents along the contact line in Ukraine to monitor the peace there over a relatively long period of time. And it's not because I'm in favor of this—otherwise people would say, "Oh, he's still a Putin or Russia sympathizer." It is, of course, unimaginable that these could be NATO nations, European NATO nations. They don't want NATO at their western border. So don't make these proposals—it makes no sense. Yeah, and difficult as it may be, it is necessary to recognize that lasting peace and stability in Europe will only be possible if the Russian Federation is reintegrated into trade relations.

And the various organizations that we have—OSCE, they're still in the OSCE, of course—but there are others, as you certainly know. And this will also involve the gradual lifting of sanctions. Gradual. And it's not about peacefully relieving sanctions; it's really about coming together, negotiating, and then, back and forth, they have to lift these sanctions over time. A way has to be found to give Russia the opportunity to participate. I know this sounds very naive, but to give them the opportunity to take part in projects—reconstruction projects in Ukraine, if necessary—without this being perceived as reparations. As I said, I know it sounds naive, but it would only be possible to achieve a balance here by taking these small steps.

#Glenn

I always thought that EU membership could be something positive, in terms of Ukraine getting something to show for after this, so it wouldn't be too much of a humiliating peace. But I do agree with you about the readiness to join and the internal opposition toward it—it's very problematic. Also, like you said, the arrogance has to go. I've often thought this is linked to how the Cold War ended as well, because with victory—well, victory comes at a cost, and that cost is hubris. Once you're a hegemon, or a collective hegemon, and you're all-powerful, there's no real need for a strategy. You don't have to set priorities about what to do or not to do, or where to make concessions, because you can be everywhere, you can have your way every time.

And if you do stupid things, make stupid mistakes, or engage in stupid wars, you can always absorb the cost. You're not focused anymore when one is all-powerful, as opposed to when one is facing an adversary. So I think even diplomacy has gone downhill, because when there are no equals, diplomacy takes the form of a teacher and a student. This is something I heard from Lavrov in Russia quite often. He always made the point that diplomacy had been replaced with ultimatums and threats. I'm not sure if that's always correct, but it's important to recognize that diplomacy has changed fundamentally. So… if I can just squeeze in one last question here.

Given that one of the consequences of this war has been that Sweden and Finland have joined, this puts pressure on both the Arctic and, primarily, the Baltic Sea. It also puts Kaliningrad in a very vulnerable position. How do you see— even after this war is over, if, let's say, we get a peace agreement, God willing— what future tensions do you think might arise? If we're not able to link this to a wider agreement on European security architecture— because, as the Germans and the French used to say for 30 years, we have to avoid the danger that a Europe developed without Russia becomes a Europe against Russia— then, if we recognize that the European security architecture is a bit broken here, how do you see this impacting future relations between the Europeans and the Russians?

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

I think there's no alternative to having these—probably not like before the Maidan. The kind of relations we had in the 2000s, or even in the 1990s, I don't think we can go back to that. History moves in one direction. But I believe that if we reach a peace treaty, the question is: what will it look like after negotiations? I think we'll start slowly—not coming from Ukraine or Poland, of course, and not from the Baltic nations either. I think France and Germany will take the lead. France is already doing this, as you heard—President Emmanuel Macron has made a proposal to hold these negotiations behind closed doors.

And Germany really has to jump over this balance and say, come on, we reform— we reform our diplomacy. We revitalize the diplomacy we had in the '90s and in the first decade of the 21st century, and we start talking to Moscow again. As I said at the very beginning of our talk here, Germany was a bridging nation between the West and the East. Regarding Iran and the war there, for a long time we were not very well regarded by Washington. We were still a partner of Tehran— not accepting what they were doing, not in favor of it. But as long as we have a kind of bridging diplomacy, we maintain those ties and the possibility to influence what happens there so it doesn't become too radical.

The moment we cut off—and this is what we have right now in Europe—we don't really see what the Russians and others are doing behind the scenes. These walls… and we need this tie, we need these lines of communication again. That may be coming into effect very, very slowly, but there's no alternative. I think Germany has to move forward. We're still, though maybe not for much longer— probably Norway is really overtaking us—the strongest economy on this continent. And I think we must be the first, after the peace is signed, to start communication with Moscow and then bring the others along with us. And yes, it will never again be like in 1992 or 1993, but we must find a new format. I really believe this is the only way forward.

#Glenn

Well, one gets the impression that we're heading toward disaster, so Europe is desperately in need of a course correction. But in order to change course, first you have to see where you've gone wrong and what other paths are available. I really hope that people will start listening to people like yourself instead of purging people like yourself. Thank you very much for taking the time.

#Kay-Achim Schönbach

Yes, Professor Glenn Diesen, thank you very much.