

NATO Integration Accelerates as US Completes Vassalization of Europe | Nel Bonilla

Is Munich signalling a transatlantic break, or a tighter lockstep? Well.... Slogans of "European autonomy" are clearly just a cover for deeper NATO integration. Today I'm joined by researcher and writer Nel Bonilla, who runs the Substack Worldlines and is developing a "bunker state" framework to describe a shift from public welfare planning to permanent securitization. We use Munich 2026 as a window into burden shifting, elite unity behind staged disagreement, and the pressure campaign toolbox used against states like Iran. Links: Nel Bonilla Substack (Worldlines): <https://themindness.substack.com> NachDenkSeiten: <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch & Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction and topic setup 00:01:33 Bunker state framework 00:04:51 Munich as synchronization ritual 00:09:04 Open burden shifting and integration 00:17:01 Russia China and elite cohesion 00:24:23 Feudalism to capitalism roots 00:37:10 No reverse gear after the Cold War 00:48:04 Iran and non-kinetic warfare tools 00:57:01 Building alternatives and closing remarks

#Pascal

Hello, everybody, and welcome back to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz. I'm an associate professor at Kyoto University, and today I'm joined again by our great young colleague, Nel Bonilla. She has a fantastic Substack called *Worldliness*, where she writes about issues of global affairs. Her greatest gift is that she's able to take a real bird's-eye perspective on current affairs—how the elites are interlinking with each other and what this leads to in mass psychological terms. At least, those are some of the topics she explores. Her latest article is really worth a read and should be read by everybody. It's called *Munich in the Bunker: The Munich Security Conference 2026 and the Simulation of European Sovereignty.* So this is what we want to talk about today. Nel, welcome back.

#Nel Bonilla

I'm glad to be here again.

#Pascal

Thank you. I just had to load your article, which I forgot to do at first, but luckily we found it. You wrote this about the Munich Security Conference, and I've had a couple of talks on my channel about it. You know, we all circle back to colonialism because, obviously, Marco Rubio. But you're connecting it with your theory of the bunker state. Could you maybe, for the people who haven't heard of the bunker state, first outline very broadly what you mean by that concept, and then explain how it ties in with Munich, please?

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, of course. So I'm currently developing a theoretical framework I'm calling the bunker state. What I mean by the bunker state is that Western or European transatlantic planning within states—within countries—has changed in the last, let's say, 20, almost 30 years. Yeah, about 20 years. Before, we always had planning in such countries—planning in the sense of planning for the common good, for social welfare, for better urban spaces, green spaces—so planning to improve the quality of life of citizens. I'm not saying it was always perfect and so on, but it existed. Democracy, in the traditional sense, had more weight. There was more permeability between the working classes and the elites, and so forth.

Now, what I would call the qualitative change so far, which I'm calling the bunker state, is that democracy—these normal avenues of democracy, like voting—no longer influence planning for improving life, which I guess most people want. Instead, there's been a shift where other parts of society—what I call the securitocracy, like military planners, think tanks, military contractors, and so on—have much more weight in this. They create such plans on national and regional levels, through NATO, which I'd say is a key actor here. And their goal is no longer to improve the quality of life of citizens in this or that country, but rather to militarize society, territory, and resources. This is why there's also all this talk about dual-use infrastructure, and so on.

And that's why we also feel that if we go and vote and so on, we no longer have any real influence on improving our lives or changing anything. Instead, we see more militarization, more talk about so-called security, defense, deterrence, and so on. So this is the qualitative shift—or at least parts of it—that I try to describe with this bunker state framework. In this sense, there's a kind of planning by the Western elite, let's call them, to avoid losing their status as hegemon, as the unipolar powers, specifically on a U.S.-led basis, though it's really a transatlantic elite. And so, how does the Munich Security Conference tie into this, or how do I read it? In my essay **Munich in the Bunker**, I didn't just look at Marco Rubio's speech but also at several different panels to see, okay, what's going on here?

What I found, as a kind of summary, is that it's not really what many people say—that there's this split between Europe and the U.S., that the U.S. wants to pull away or leave NATO, and that the Europeans don't want the U.S. to leave, and so on. I mean, you could think of it that way if you look at the Munich Security Conference just on the surface. But if you look at the whole thing, from start

to finish, with the documents and all, you can see a different narrative. Instead of a split, it's more like a story of how we, as Europeans and the U.S.—or let's say the allies, NATO and the U.S.—are actually working together to create plans for more securitization, more deterrence, more militarization.

So, in effect, the Munich Security Conference is more like what I call a ritual of synchronization. What is there to do, for whom? Who will do what in this situation? At this stage, what role does everybody have? I also argue that the European partners specifically—but maybe other allies too—are actually integrating more. I mean, if they haven't been integrating enough, they're now integrating more into U.S. military structures, command structures, but also the industrial base and so on, and maybe even in a political sense. So this is the key argument: it's a continuation of the process of securitizing NATO societies more and more, in order to halt, stop, or even destroy multipolar development—or what one might call that. Yeah.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this could happen again at any time. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack—that's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link's in the description below. And now, back to the video. Yeah, I mean, you're pointing out something very, very important again—that we might be misreading things, or maybe missing the forest for the trees. Because yes, okay, Marco Rubio gave this very colonial kind of speech. And yes, you can read it as a way of going back to the old days, but in a sense, they're doing something new, or continuing what they've been working on, which is dividing the world through this ritual—just figuring out who does what in the team play. And the team play isn't going away at all.

And actually, a good part of Rubio's speech was about reassuring the Europeans. But maybe that's not even necessary, right? It's kind of a matter of course that you continue within these elite circles on the path you're already on. And it's not new people coming in. It's not Jeremy Corbyn delivering a stunning reversal of British politics. No, it's—what's his name—Trudeau? The Canadian prime minister is very much an archetypical figure of the system in North America, in Canada, right? So why would we even expect that something big is going to change? In your bunker framework, then, what do you think was the importance of Munich? Was there a difference from previous Munich Security Conferences? Is something genuinely new, or is it really just a continuation of what's been going on for the last 20 years?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, so I would say there is something new in the sense that, I mean, in a way, there are many things—many factors—that are not new, but rather a kind of radicalization, or you could say an intensification, of what has already been happening. On the one hand, there's this idea of burden sharing, or burden shifting, which was talked about more openly at the Munich Security Conference.

Again, this isn't a new concept. It's something that's been researched even within the U.S.—in government think tanks and so on—where they think about how to best coerce or persuade their allies to share the burden, using their own territories as forward bases and so on, for potential military conflict.

So this was new in the sense that it was totally out in the open. In fact, there was a kickoff event in Berlin—not in Munich—but it was tied to the Munich Security Conference. The NATO ambassador, Whittaker, said something that really surprised me, and I was surprised nobody anywhere picked it up. He said, "We still love you. You're still allies, but we want you to grow and become what you can become. Autonomy—we're not asking for European autonomy; we're asking for European strength. We just expect you to do more, not to be independent." And I think that's the problem: just because you're strong doesn't mean you're independent. In fact, the interconnectedness is more important. So this is something he said at that kickoff event.

#Pascal

He literally said, "We don't want you to be independent."

#Nel Bonilla

It's like, it shouldn't go that far, guys. Let's not overdo it here.

#Pascal

Wow, you're right. That should have been picked up.

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, I'm like, why? And I linked it in my essay so everybody can listen to it and see it. And he actually says, "We don't want you to be independent. We want you to be strong. And interconnectedness is more important." So what is he saying? He's saying what it is—there it is. And I think that's from Pascal Lottaz.

#Pascal

Strong, but not independent.

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, yes, yes. And it's really like, how can this be? But anyway, the point is, he said it out loud at an event that nobody picked up. Actually, there were some media outlets that talked about the kickoff event, but nobody quoted this part. Well, anyway, what is this part saying? Something that, again, is not new. They're saying they want Europe—not only the European Union, but Europe as a whole—to

become strong. In what sense? In the military sense. And not independent, which means they integrate themselves, that they follow the lead of the U.S. elites in a way. So that is the aim. And they say this out in the open.

And not only that—they also, for example, with this talk of burden sharing, invited Albert Colby, who's a leading figure in this, always publishing papers about burden sharing and so on. I mean, he was less direct. He said things where I was like, "Why doesn't anybody talk about this?" Like, the U.S. will be everywhere—something like that, he said. But we need buffers of assurance territorially so that we can concentrate—in his case, or in the U.S. case—they want to focus on what they call the Pacific, meaning China. And I would say this is the qualitative shift: they've become very direct, even with the Marco Rubio speech itself.

It was absolutely direct about, in essence, what I call—well, you could say it's an ideology, or I call it a meta-framework. It's this underlying idea, these underlying assumptions, not only from today's transatlantic functional elites, but as an undercurrent with historical roots. I'd say it actually comes from the transition from feudalism to capitalism—that's where it took root. It became this ideology that justifies carrying out violence, allowing the elites to justify it to themselves and to others. But here it became, again, I think, a qualitative shift—also on the part of the Europeans who were there.

While you saw many apparent disagreements between them—like, you know, the conservatives, the nationalists, and then the very liberal types and so on—it was more like, "Oh no, you can't say they're barbarians," or, "Oh no, we can't carry out this policy," that kind of thing. But those were minor disagreements. After all, they all still converged on the same points: Russia is a threat, China is a strategic competitor, and we need to do more for NATO—become more resilient, stronger. So in the end, even Denmark, the French—I think even she said something like, "Let's become stronger with NATO," basically. And other Europeans said, "Oh, this thing about Greenland—well, we should be grateful; it was like a wake-up call."

The U.S. is actually right—we need to become stronger, but not independent. I think the new thing here is this directness, this openness, because in reality, many of these ideas and policies actually come from the post-Cold War period, like the 1990s. If you look at NATO papers and research reports, many of them talk about burden sharing, about Russia as a threat even back then, and about how we cannot integrate it. And even Europe cannot become independent; it needs to remain under a U.S.-led NATO, and so on. So all of this already existed in the 1990s, but now it's absolutely out in the open for everyone to hear and see. That's the change.

#Pascal

Yeah. Yeah, so even to a good extent from the European side, there's this submissiveness—like, "Yes, you're right, we are the problem." And on the American, on the U.S. side, there's this clear, outright dominance—really establishing the order within which the marching should take place. Why is it, in your framework, in this bunker state, that Russia is necessarily—and China seems to be

necessarily—the other part of this system? Why is there no integration with them among these elite circles? And maybe, hand in hand with that, how do you interpret the revelations from the Epstein files? You know, the way we saw that these elite circles have very deep ties with each other, but also try to get kompromat on each other, spy on each other.

But at the end of the day, somehow it works together as a system. Like, you know, the lockstep just seems to be working. And as you said, there are minor differences in the approach that these individuals want to take, but it's a little bit like a squabble over who's captain of the boat, while it's utterly clear what the course of the boat is, right? The destination seems clear, even if one wants to do a little bit of this and the other a little bit of that. But the course seems clear within the epistemic bubble. Um, how do you see that?

#Nel Bonilla

So I would say that, for your first question—Russia, China, why is that? Well, I think if we go back in time, like to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, what I argue is that what happened there was that an elite with technological and military advantages was able to impose capitalistic social structures. And for that, they used what I call a dichotomous framework—one that differentiates between black and white, barbarian and civilized, and so on. They used this to justify the violence they employed, and also toward those they were trying to oppress or exploit. So that was the first use of it. This is also why I focus on elites themselves, because many might say, “Oh, it's about the West,” or “It's about the U.S. and Europe.” But these frameworks—these cognitive frameworks—are not so different.

#Pascal

Geographical frameworks, mostly, yeah.

#Nel Bonilla

What I'm observing, rather, is that it's more like a framework—let's say a cognitive framework—that a specific social group has used over and over again. It has carried itself forward because it was successful through the development of capitalism up to today. So that's one thing. And within such a framework, the West—or the European-coded West, the elite European-coded West—is at the top. This means that other countries that are not part of this are seen as the enemy, especially if they try to contest this exploitation and so on.

So, in the case of what we now call multipolar development—in my essay, I said there was a kind of multipolar shock around 2014 or so. But the multipolar shock wasn't so much about Russia and China developing industrially or raising the quality of life for their citizens. That wasn't the shock, because since the end of the Cold War there was already, from the start, this understanding that Russia couldn't be integrated into NATO or the European Union, couldn't be an integral part of the

OSCE, and so on. Because that would mean Europe might then work with Russia, and there would be another sphere of influence—let's call it—that isn't the U.S. and isn't led by the U.S. And why?

Because—and they say it openly—Russia is such a territorially large country with so many resources that you cannot expect it to truly behave in a way that subjugates itself, to be pressed or controlled. It will always have these advantages. And also, because of the Soviet Union, it had novel research resources, technological capacity, and so on. You just cannot, even if you want to, subjugate it or use it purely for your own gain. This is what, in U.S. papers of the 1990s, you can read—similar arguments about China: it's just too big, you cannot oppress it. So, Russia and China, then in the 2010s and so forth, the U.S. thinks, "Okay, they're now also developing militarily, industrially, and so on—now we really have a problem." So, like, this is, um...

#Pascal

Sorry, so just so you know, you cannot have real partners within the alliance. You cannot have real, equal partners within the system, because the system is built upon hierarchy, right? And the top dog doesn't look for partners—it looks for, well, implementation, uh, aids, satellites, or whatever we want to call them. And so you have to "other" them; that's the only way to deal with them. And then, ultimately, fight and defeat them, and then figure out what you do with the rest. The way that, you know, once Yugoslavia was broken up, the leftovers were very much manageable for the alliance, right? Is that how we should understand it?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I would say yes, absolutely. Because, again, it was—or still is—about this idea of wanting, even if they don't say it out loud, kind of like in the Marco Rubio speech, to dominate the world. You know, here they say, "Oh, let's do it with Europe." But the core idea is always having this U.S.-led system. So yes, it's about making these countries smaller so they can be managed. And yes, then you have to "other" them, because there's no other way. I mean, there's no other way to militarize your own society so that, in a potential military conflict, people will say, "Oh, okay, this is the enemy." You need that. And again, it's also for their own peace of mind—they need a script for that.

#Pascal

Sorry, I just need to ask—this approach to international affairs is something I most closely associate with the term "neoconservatism," the neocons. But you're actually going further, right? You're saying we have to look for the origins of this in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Why is that? Why should we look for the origins of the neocons there?

#Nel Bonilla

Well, it's not only about the neocons, but, yeah, one could say yes. But why would one want to look there? Because, I mean, we need to understand—okay, if we just look at U.S. policy since its inception, it started as a capitalist country, not only capitalist but also, from the get-go, with a lot of violence. So, genocide, slavery, settler colonialism—all of it. It started from the beginning with such practices, which also means with such a mindset. They needed to have a specific mindset to constitute themselves as a state like that. And I mean “they” again—not everybody, but the U.S. elites, their project, they...

#Pascal

The political structure—the political project—of the United States, right? What happened, and how this plot of land and this group of people then governed itself and others, and integrated those who didn't want to go along with it. We're including the slaves, obviously, right? And that then creates an economic and social system. But that's already a step too far, right? Because you said we need to look at the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which is actually pre-1786, right?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, yeah, of course, because this is also important. This is why I say this Europe–U.S. argument isn't so good. Because, yes, it started with the transition—from feudalism to capitalism. We had, of course, or I mean, we needed to structure or restructure societies in such a way that people didn't produce, work, and live like they did before, but in a totally new way. In this process, everything was immersed in violence too, which meant there was violence against peasants, the enclosures, and the loss of common goods that had existed under feudalism. There were also the witch hunts, which is another topic—women as a sort of symbol of these social structures that were more about cooperation rather than domination.

And so this is where it starts—in medieval times in Europe. Then, with colonialism, this mindset is carried even further. They find new people to, well, exploit, because again, apart from having a different religion and culture—or let's say, different social structures—these societies were also organized differently. So what they did was destroy, or try to destroy, these cultures, religions, and ways of life too. That meant they needed to impose a new narrative. And the new narrative in this case was based on religion—but that's not the main point. The point is that this religious narrative said, “Okay, these are maybe not humans, they don't have a soul, and here we have the humans who do have a soul.”

We have the right to do this. We can exploit, and so on. So this is why I say that these mental frameworks originate in the transition from feudalism to capitalism—because that's where they were born. That was also where they faced maybe less, one could say, contestation or resistance—not because there was none, but because technological development in warfare, armament, and so on

was already beginning there. And specifically, in the case of colonialism, the others didn't have the same kind of weapons, not to mention, of course, the whole issue of diseases and so on. So this is why I say these are the origins. And then, with colonialism, came the settlers and so on.

And then the U.S. was also consolidated, but it consolidated itself later—with this mindset in an almost pure form. But again, it's also, one could say, an inheritance of European history, and it carries on until today. Because why? Because we're still in capitalism. And not only that, there are still transitions, still points or historical processes where we see contestation to this type of organization of societies. So with this talk about multipolarity, we could say, well, these other societies—other countries like China, for example, but others too—try to structure society in such a way that it's not only about profit and capital, but a bit more about the social good, social welfare. And that's where I'm going with this.

#Pascal

No, no, I think you're absolutely right. We see such examples every once in a while from China, right? A country that's willing to crush an entire industry—like their gaming industry—when they decide it's not socially desirable, that too many young people are addicted to games, so they do something about it, right? And people are just a little bit flabbergasted by how they also intervened in the housing market. In the West, this is often interpreted as a sign of emergency and imminent collapse, but it turns out to be completely, utterly wrong. So we don't even need to go there.

So do you then view the contest that the—how should we call them—the bunker state people are getting into? Is it a civilizational thing? Is it like this Euro-American civilizational conglomerate that's now gearing up again for a fight against these other civilizational projects—the Russians, the Chinese, the Persians? I mean, as we speak on February 27th, the war, or rather the fighting, hasn't started yet, although you have a very important argument we could talk about—that the war is already on. But we could talk about that. Is it a civilizational contest, is that how we should understand it?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, I wouldn't—no. I mean, I wouldn't say so, because in my view, civilizations are a very fragile and dynamic concept or structure. And again, Euro-U.S. American civilization—I wouldn't say that this is what's happening right now, this militarization and so on. Because in effect, the only reason why, in this whole historical process, so much violence was needed—and apparently still is used—is that there's always resistance to it, including within the U.S., including within the European territories themselves. There is resistance to it, and there always has been. I mean, we just need to think about the origins of socialism, capitalism, communism as a concept of ultimate cooperation, one could say. So there were always other models, other alternatives.

Even in the times of colonization, there were people who said, "No, what we're doing here is wrong. We shouldn't murder everybody; we need to actually talk and live with them." So there were always different types—one could say modernities—different models for society, even in what we call the West, or U.S.–Euro civilization, or whatever. So this is why I say that even a contest between civilizations is not necessarily the right way to see it. Rather, this is an elite or ruling startup project—yes, from the West, from the U.S. and Europe—and it has won, unfortunately. But that doesn't mean this is what the West, or what Europe or the U.S., truly is. In the case of other parts of the world, I would argue that they indeed have a long history and maybe were able to resist colonization, or were never colonized, and so on.

So they have a history of different modes of thinking, modes of organizing society. And they still have this memory, and they use it even today for organizing their societies. And again, in the case of the U.S. and Europe, it's more like this project—specifically since the U.S. superseded or almost enveloped what there was of alternative projects within the West, or tries to crush them even today. It still happens. So that's why I would say it's not like a clash of civilizations or anything like that. No, no, it's rather a specific project from the ruling strata, yes, coming from a specific historical process. And it's still ongoing. And we're now here, thinking about what we can do so that it doesn't turn into chaos and more violence.

#Pascal

Yeah, exactly. That's what we're doing. I mean, we're still, you know, despite everything and all the years of analysis, just trying to scratch the surface of understanding what exactly this process is that's happening. Which is why I think your analysis is so good—because you're using a very proper framework to understand not just the particular, but the arc of what we're likely in. You know, two people I admire very much here on YouTube are Alex Christoforou and Alexander Mercouris, because they provide, in my view, very valuable daily news updates. And one of their points is that this group of people—and I think we're largely talking about the same one—some call them neocons, and some, like you, have a broader definition.

They keep saying they have no reverse gear. They never go back; they always double down. Whenever something fails, whenever they hit a brick wall, they just try to hit it again slightly differently—even when it looks as if they're going back. One of the examples that, by the way, Brian Berletic often uses is the physical "reset" button that Hillary Clinton gave to Mr. Lavrov back in—when was that? 2009? I forgot. Or 2012, I'm sorry, I forgot. It must have been the second term of Obama, so maybe 2012 or 2013. Anyway, she carried that to Lavrov, and then they pressed it together and were all smiles—"haha, now our relationship's going to be better."

And it turns out it was just a way of gaining a little bit of time to gear up again—and then 2014, Maidan, and so on and so forth, and hit again. Now, what do you make of this process? It seems to be incredibly difficult to convince these people that there needs to be a reverse gear, or a change—

of course, a change of trajectory—or to dislodge them from power, because it also seems that they keep coming back in different guises. I mean, we're seeing it right now with Donald Trump, who was the peace candidate, right? He had all the right talking points and all the right momentum, and is now completely subverted and went into that no-reverse-gear type of, "Okay, fine, let's go to war with Iran." Why do you think that is?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, so in my opinion, or from what I've observed, I see it as a really long historical process. That's why I say, well, neocons—I'm not sure. At least since the Russian Revolution, maybe even a bit earlier, with the technological revolutions of steamboats and telegrams and so on, there was more—how do you say—more ability for these types of ruling strata, with these kinds of ideas, to converge and to interact with each other more, to consolidate their worldview even further, and to find more ways to exploit resources, people, and all of that. So it's a larger historical process. And not only that—one could say, okay, what about the Cold War?

Weren't there more people who were open about dialogue and peace and so on? And yes, that's true. I'd even say that was exactly because there was so much resistance and contestation—both from outside, from all these socialist countries, and from within as well. There were workers' movements and others that were socialist or even communist. They really had a strong base. So it was a real time of contestation, and these ruling strata had to find ways to incorporate people so as not to lose their power—to soften their approach and think of other ways to get back to business, to get back to exploiting more again.

So it was rather an anomaly. When the Soviet Union collapsed, they saw another window opening to think again: how can we get back to exactly what, basically, Rubio said—colonialist practices, more or less? How can we get back? And even in the 1990s, there were still different factions. Not everyone was saying, "Oh, let's expand NATO." There were also those who said, "No, let's not expand NATO." And on the European side, some said, "Let's integrate Russia. Let's have more organizations focused on peace, peacemaking, cooperation," and so on. So these tendencies already existed in the 1990s.

But the ruling strength—they lost out, yes. And even there, the ruling strength, the one we might call the neocons, said, "No, we cannot do this. We can neither let Europe be independent, nor can we let Russia become strong again, or even exist the way it does. We cannot let this go on." So even there, they lost out, yes. It was a gradual process—a political process, a symbolic process, a financial and industrial one, but even a military, kinetic one when Nord Stream was destroyed. I'd even say maybe after the financial crisis there was a kind of reset, in the sense that we had more technocratic leaders, you could say, coming from banking and finance and so on.

And nowadays it's even more so—we have more of them. All these mechanisms ultimately weeded out, or filtered out, all these intra-elite, one could say, alternatives. And now we again have this

almost pure form. I mean, it doesn't matter if you listen to liberal transatlantic elites or conservative ones—they all have the same idea that Russia and China are the threats, even if they don't say it directly. They say, "Oh, they're strategic competitors." It's the same thing. So I'd say it's a large historical process. And for some reason—I don't know why—the strength that is the most violent, let's say, is the one that has won so far. And, yeah.

#Pascal

Thank you. This makes eminently good sense, because the most violent strain is probably also the one that's most willing to use dirty methods to get rid of other ways of trying to organize things. And maybe, you know, we have with us living examples of how this separation also happened within this stratum. I mean, within, let's say... currently, the most vocal opponent of how these things work is, of course, Jeffrey Sachs. And Jeffrey Sachs was part of that very young kind of elite class that went over and was part of the group that structured Russia in the 1990s in a way that then led to a sell-off. But he very much turned, and he didn't turn back.

I mean, at some point he just said, "No, this is the wrong way of approaching it. This is not why we did it. We didn't do this to dismantle Russia; we did it to help and to rebuild." And once it became clear that that's not where things were going, they actually started speaking out and saying, "No, no, wait, we need to do this differently." In Germany, we have Ulrike Guérot, who once told me in a conversation that she was—how did she put it?—the last person who still believed in the narrative of the European Union as a force for good, for liberty, and all that. And she kept promoting that idea and was paraded around as the leading intellectual of the European Union until she finally said, "Guys, what you're doing has nothing to do with how we thought the project was supposed to work."

And then she was dropped like a hot potato. And now she's very much part of the intellectual resistance. So, in a sense, you see how the violent strain of this project of dominance keeps winning out against the nonconformists and the people who actually want to work together with the rest of the world, not against them. It's quite fascinating that it takes so much time until it crystallizes, right? Until it becomes clear. Is this maybe one of the shimmers of hope we have at the moment—that at least, for all the bad things that are happening and all the violence we now see, we're getting a little more clarity about the different camps within the general sociological development?

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, I mean, I hope so. I try to analyze these things and ask myself, why do I even do this?

#Pascal

Everybody listening right now is probably wondering that. Why are we even doing this? It's such a depressing affair. But somehow it feels like, you know, if we're really driving this ship—if we sail it into the goddamn iceberg—then I at least want to see the iceberg. I mean, at least that. I at least want to know where it's going. I'm not okay with the goddamn fog.

#Nel Bonilla

Yeah, yeah. No, no, no. When I ask myself this, I come to the conclusion that I hope, at least, that maybe if we see a bit more clearly—yeah, as you say—if we turn away, no, not turn away, if we...

#Pascal

Blow away the fog.

#Nel Bonilla

Blow away the fog. If we blow away the fog—exactly—and see if it's clearer, maybe we can see where the weaknesses are and where we can actually do something and resist better. Likewise, if we can't, and if a crisis—I mean a real crisis—happens and people survive, then we'll know what not to repeat. So I think there are these two avenues: if we understand what's going on better, then we know better—not only what not to do, yes, but also what maybe to do right now, and what is, for example, conducive to a solution and what isn't.

I mean, I don't want to be super pessimistic, but, for example, voting—I'm not sure that right now voting, at least in Europe or in the US, is super conducive unless the structures of this other party are, how to say, super organized and bring in a lot of people who really have the back of this new party, for example. But if that's not the case, then voting wouldn't be, at least right now, the kind of avenue that could change anything. So this is why I say, if we see better, we can also understand a little better, react better, and maybe find effective ways to counter this—or at least, when a crisis happens, not repeat any of it again.

#Pascal

Then again, unfortunately, the Europeans are like kings and queens of repetition.

#Pascal

I mean, we even number the goddamn wars, right? It's like—

#Pascal

Just to make sure we know which one is the next one we're going to start. But you're absolutely right, of course. I mean, desperation is not a strategy. So the...

#Pascal

The good news, though, is that I do believe there's now a bit more clarity about the process among us because of this analytical work you're doing. Can we, in the last five or so minutes, talk a little about what's happening with Iran right now? We have about ten minutes, so—because you're actually framing it in this longer fight that's being fought, right? And you kind of predicted that the United States would probably not go into a kinetic war, but that it wouldn't matter, because there are these other ways in which our dear West is trying to break Iran. Can you explain that a little? Besides the question of whether or not it's going to go kinetic—what have you been observing?

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, yes. So what I've observed in the case of Iran—but not only Iran—is that the approach is that of a bunker state, right?

#Pascal

How the bunker state approaches it.

#Nel Bonilla

Exactly. Yes, that's a good way to frame it. Let's say the approach of the bunker state—how it's dealing with these other countries. As I said, the goal of this bunker state of the West, so to speak, is not to cooperate in any meaningful way with countries like Iran, China, Russia, and others—right now, Venezuela and so on—but rather to weaken them as much as possible. I mean, the goal is to weaken them so much that they eventually give in and make themselves more receptive to whatever the U.S. elites, in particular, want for their aims. So, in the case of Iran, it's about trying to blockade them, trying to intimidate them. Even the whole talk about diplomacy is, in my opinion, unfortunately not really about diplomacy. I mean, in a way it is, but against the background of... uh...

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, it doesn't look real. It looks like a charade from the start if you try to package the demand for a complete military surrender as a diplomatic negotiation. I mean, they're doing it right now in Geneva as we speak, on this Friday. But there's very little hope that what the American side is trying to sell as diplomacy is actually meant as such. So what is the approach? Let's suppose,

actually, that a little miracle happens and it doesn't go kinetic—that something happens and the U.S. doesn't actually fire, either directly or through Israel. So how is the bunker state further approaching this problem of a potential non-compliant entity?

#Nel Bonilla

Yes. Well, first and foremost, one of the tools is sanctions—sanctioning the countries, governments, and other entities that could be helpful. Sanctions, but not only that. Also, for example, what's been going on recently with ships and vessels that are intercepted with oil—so, uh, trying to also kind of blockade or block oil shipments. And, um, what else? Ah, yeah, also trying to destabilize from within. That's another avenue—finding a position that could somehow destabilize these countries from within. So all of these are ways to, in a sense, bleed out these countries. If you have too many sanctions, and on top of that the physical way of trading is also blocked—or there's an attempt to block or impede them—then, well, that's the strategy.

And so then you'll have more and more problems within the population of such a country. And if there are also attempts at sabotage or other kinds of acts like that within these countries, all of these things are meant to create destabilization and to stop further industrial or military development. So, don't see them only as isolated countries, but as links or nodes between all the other countries that are part of this multipolar development, if one can call it that. And then, I also think it's about looking at what's possible and what can be done right now. It's also about not stopping—so it's not like, "Oh, we'll now start to sanction Iran," or, "We'll now start to impede Iran trading with other countries," and so on and so forth.

Or we will now lead a sabotage campaign in the form of civil unrest. No, no—and then it will stop. It's about continuously doing this with low resources, or not with so many resources, to create this, how do you say, incessant instability. Also, another factor, I would say, is creating credible scenarios of a threat—yes, a military threat too. Now, does that mean, I can't say if they will or won't attack, but either way, if they create such scenarios that are credible for the other party, then this also means that the other side will have to constantly be on the lookout and constantly use resources, and so on and so forth. So all of this is an attempt to weaken. And yes, I would say this is also warfare—it's what they call hybrid or gray-zone warfare.

#Pascal

The funny thing is that they accuse everybody else of doing that against them, when they're obviously the queen and kingpins of the approach—implementing this for half a century or more. It's a kind of war, a non-kinetic war of attrition, with actually a lot of people dying. Next week, if everything goes right, I'll interview one of the researchers on the recent *Lancet* study that found the number of annual deaths from U.S. and EU sanctions between 1971 and 2021 to be about half a million people per year—people who died because of sanctions, related to the economy, and especially to health.

These countries, like Iran, can't even properly import medicine and so on. And even if they could, they couldn't pay for it because they're cut off and so on. I mean, it's a horrible instrument of bringing death and destruction, but it's very much in line—and it's even popular in countries like Switzerland. Sanctions are popular because they're seen as a way to punish the "baddies." And this is fascinating. I mean, it's horrible, it's despicable, but it is fascinating that it works—that people, again in the name of doing something good, end up bringing death and despair to much of the rest of the world.

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, yes. And as I say, they're trying to legitimize it—trying to find a way to say it's justified because the other countries are evil, basically.

#Pascal

Yeah, and we just want to help, right? We're coming and bringing you sanctions to help and elevate your women and girls, get them into schools, empower them, and, you know, free you from a horrible regime of repression. So... it's very sick and perverted, but you can see how you need to dress the devil in an angel's costume for it to go down, because people don't want to be bad—they want to be good, actually. So you need to dress things properly. It's just kind of sick.

#Nel Bonilla

Exactly. And this is what's happening. Yeah.

#Pascal

Let's end on a positive note. Nell, give me one optimistic takeaway from your analysis of what we can do.

#Nel Bonilla

Okay. Yeah, yeah, there are ways. So I would say what we can do is, as I said before—or as I always say—whatever kind of resistance or actions we take need to be thought of not as based in one country, but transnationally. That's one avenue. The other one is, of course, first of all, becoming aware of what is happening, how these people think, and why—because then we can know what we should not do and what we should not engage in. And the other thing I always say, and write about, is that all of these projects—these elite projects or whatever—are based on social practices. So that means we ourselves also need to engage in social practices: create spaces, experiences, our own biographies—everything.

This is a different alternative from what's happening now, which we don't want. Ours should be based on peace, cooperation, and all of these things coming together for good. We need to think about these alternatives and build them right now. And also, again, create these spaces in the material world so that people can see there are others who think like this. What I think is really, really important—and I don't know, I think this is a process, a collective process—is to think about how to create alternative institutions and ways of organizing society right now. How? That's a collective process. That's why we also need to create these collective meetings, not only among us as citizens, but also with others. If there are dissenters who were diplomats or whatever, they should do this too. I mean, they probably do. Everybody needs to do it.

#Pascal

I had an interesting talk a few weeks ago with a diplomat—I'm not going to say where, who, or what—but he's from a Global South country. And he told me that it's interesting how diplomats from the West can talk to you about things that, from your perspective, clearly come from a colonial mindset, right? But you just let them politely talk, so you can keep listening to how they think and operate. You go, nod, drink tea, and nod along, right? So, in a sense—I don't know if this is a hopeful thing—but one hope I have is that there are a lot of people in the world who actually understand, both from the Global South and within our own societies. There's a time to go along and nod, and there will be a time to speak up and say, "You know what? Me?"

Maybe not everybody shares your perception on this one. Maybe what we need is not deterrence—maybe what we need is friendship. Maybe we should try to change the approach, my dear friends, and at some point we might even get there. Nell, thank you very much. This was, again, a very fascinating talk. I'm really in awe of your ability to connect the arc of historical development to the particular, and I hope you'll continue to analyze and publish. People who want to find you should, first and foremost, go to your Substack—Worldliness on Substack—and subscribe so they get your emails. Is there another place where people should go to find you?

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, yes. I also write for Nachtseiten, if anybody speaks German—Nachtseiten. And other than that, I'm on X and Bluesky. Yeah.

#Pascal

Okay. They'll find you there. Nell Bonilla, thank you very much for your time today.

#Nel Bonilla

Thank you.

