

# World War III Imminent | L. Kasradze & A. Kachikian

The Political West is risking it all. Under US leadership, the old colonial empires that never got over their loss of power are about to launch the largest global war since the 1940s. And for what? With Lasha Kasradze from Georgia and Arthur Khachikian from Armenia, I trace the risks, the fear, and the brutal logic of the failing western empire. Links: 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 00:00:33 South Caucasus danger assessment 00:09:27 Northern front against Iran 00:20:00 Gulf fallout and regional blowback 00:25:12 Armenia corridor and outside control 00:30:18 Georgia and the propaganda fight 00:35:35 Ukraine lessons and war warnings 00:38:45 China Russia and system balance 00:44:00 Democracy crisis and closing thoughts

## #Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I'm joined today by two of my favorite analysts from the Caucasus, Lasha Kats-Ratze from Georgia and Arthur Kachikian from Armenia. Arthur, Lasha, welcome back. Thank you so much. I'm glad to have you both on the same program for once—usually I have you separately. But today we want to talk about what's happening in general in the Southern Caucasus and, of course, in the border region with Iran. Can I maybe ask both of you first for your assessment of what we should be aware of as we speak today, on this 24th of March? Maybe we start with Arthur and then Lasha.

## #Arthur Kachikian

Thank you. I'll tell you what we should be aware of: it's a coming economic catastrophe. I'm not an economist, but from what I'm seeing in the news and the headlines, the prices for fuel, gas, oil—and then food prices—are going to skyrocket. We're facing a global economic crisis. In some Asian countries, there are already fuel shortages. This is going to spread. And we're looking at this madness, this project of occupying the Strait of Hormuz and the island of Kharg, which is going to further escalate the conflict, lead to American casualties, and make American soldiers sitting ducks for Iranian drones and missiles. So even militarily, this makes absolutely no sense. And even if it succeeds, it paves the way for the U.S. to go into Iraq- and Afghanistan-type scenarios—eight years in the first, twenty years in the second. I no longer know how to reason with people who make these decisions. That's, you know, in brief—that's what I would say in brief.

## #Pascal

Lasha, what is your main focus right now as you try to understand what's happening in and around Iran?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

Well, I share the pessimism. Unfortunately, I'm looking at the glass half empty here because, look, we know that this war—first the 12-day war and now this plan to destroy and dismember Iran and other sovereign nations—there's something much larger to it. Of course, there's a very strong, fundamental element here, which is, you know, Israel and the way negotiations have been taking place. I would go back to the early '90s, when Israel wanted to penetrate the region via Azerbaijan. That element cannot be excluded. But there's a larger picture here, of course. This is about weakening and exporting chaos into the wider region. And the aim here is Russia, the aim here is China—at the expense of the minions, the South Caucasian republics.

Of course, it's about this: if Iran falls, Armenia is not going to have a good day. Russia cannot afford to sit this one out like it did when Serbia happened in the '90s. It just couldn't do anything, and then it sort of unleashed its revenge on Georgia in 2008 and then eventually Ukraine. That philosophy of the West doing what it pleases didn't go down well with Putin. But at the same time, they couldn't do anything with Kosovo when Bush shaved off Kosovo, a historic part of Serbia. Long story short, I don't think Russia can afford to do the same. I think Russia is paying very close attention to what's happening. So is China. And the South Caucasus—it won't be good for the South Caucasus if Iran falls or gets dismembered one way or the other.

So, you know, if this war escalates, all three republics will come under pressure. I'm still sticking to my guns and saying that if Aliyev thinks this is some sort of triumph—well, there was a short-term triumph; we all know what happened with Nagorno-Karabakh. But there's no strategic depth and no strategic future, if we can appraise the situation that way, for either Azerbaijan or Armenia. So what is Pashinyan thinking? Maybe Arthur can give us a better take on that. I know that Georgia is staying under the radar to a large extent, very cleverly. But overall, I think this whole Iranian fiasco poses a potential disaster for the entire region, not to mention the economic effects and geoeconomic projects that are taking place.

## **#Pascal**

No, it does. Arthur, are you seeing any signs of panic coming from Armenia or the region in general? I mean, this is highly, highly dangerous for the South Caucasus as well, right? In addition to all the crimes happening daily with the bombardment of Iran.

## **#Arthur Kachikian**

Well, yes, I'll agree with my colleague—my esteemed colleague. If you look at the big picture, this is an attack on Russia and China. After Iran falls, all the north-south communications from Russia to

Iran and farther south will be cut off. So the isolation of Russia will increase—you know, Russia will become more isolated. And China will be cut off from its energy supply in the Persian Gulf. So this is an attack on Russia and China. Iran is a key ally to both of these countries. I agree with Lasha that Russia can't afford to do nothing.

But at the same time, Russia can't really afford to get involved, because it's already engaged in this very large-scale conflict with basically the entire NATO bloc in Ukraine. So it's hard to imagine how Russia could take on another region. The Caucasus as a whole is another powder keg. You can draw a parallel with the Balkans or the Middle East—it's like a second Balkans or a second Middle East. It can explode. It did explode in the '90s. If you remember, there was the war in Chechnya, the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia and then Ossetia, and the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Karabakh, which doesn't exist anymore. The population has been expelled.

So it is a powder keg, and it may explode. I think in this region, what we're looking at is probably the hegemony of Turkey and Azerbaijan. They're in close alliance. This will not go very well for Armenians. This person who was brought to power by third countries—this is not really our leader. He's an autocrat, a tyrant. He's arresting the leaders of our church, arresting journalists, beating them up, arresting and beating up lawyers—things we would never see in the West. But sadly, he's supported by the West. Not the first or last dictator supported by the West. This guy's strategy is total submission. He's basically surrendered Armenia. He's carrying out, executing every order he gets from our neighboring countries and from Europe.

His only objective is to stay in power, because if he's not, he'll have to answer a lot of questions about the disaster he brought upon Armenia. So Armenia has once again become a playing card—just a pawn, or a minion, as Lasha says—in the hands of the great powers. We have a lot of experience with this, and all of it is very, very tragic. It usually ends with Armenians being exterminated. The Kurds learned this lesson twice in the last eight or ten years, and we've learned it over the last 150 years. One of the reasons the genocide of Armenians happened was because they trusted certain powers to protect them, defend them, and, you know, tried to rely on them.

This is how it ended. So there's a big danger of this conflict spreading to the Caucasus. I hope it doesn't. There have been several pretty severe warnings to Azerbaijan issued by certain authorities—commentators including Professor Marandi—and somehow I suspect he probably knows something when he says this. Perhaps there's some kind of official position he's reflecting in what he's saying. I certainly hope that Azerbaijan does not get involved. So far it has been very careful, even after the drones fell on its territory. But it is a powder keg; it may explode. Things can get a lot worse if this conflict continues.

**#Pascal**

Hey, very brief intermission — I was recently banned from YouTube. 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](https://pascallottaz.substack.com). The link will be in the description below.

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

And now, back to the video.

## **#Pascal**

May I just ask—back in the very first week of the war, we heard that there were plans or at least talks about, on the one hand, Kurdish militias possibly intervening from Iraqi territory, and on the other hand, Azerbaijani forces maybe coming in from the north, from the Caucasus, right? But neither of those things really happened. So I don't know if that was just media chatter and rumor, or if some people in the background were actually working on it. Does one of you—maybe let's start with Russia—have any information on whether there's still something going on about this, like escalating the war from the north? Because at the moment, we're still mostly focused on the Gulf region, on the Strait of Hormuz, and the missile war. But is there a danger that there might still be some kind of land invasion coming—not by U.S. boots on the ground, but by people crossing the border from one side or the other?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

I haven't heard anything to that extent or in that detail, Pascal, except to say that the whole Kurdish issue has been a long-standing problem in the Middle East. Turkey has perhaps brilliantly used this to its own advantage. Erdoğan has played a good game, but how far his gamble will prevail and continue is another question. We remember how he used this to his advantage when Syria collapsed. But the thing is, Turkey is a huge element in this—an essential part of the whole issue. Right now, it's sitting on the fence, playing its regional balance, and it's worked out for Erdoğan. Let's be honest about that.

In terms of Iran, I don't subscribe to the whole idea of Iran's dismemberment and the Azeri minority—or if you can even call it that. There are actually more Azeris living in Iran than in Azerbaijan. But the whole notion of separation is very deeply etched in Iran's nationalism. So any disruption there is a higher-order issue. I mean, in terms of rallying Iranians—to join what exactly? To join Azerbaijan? To dismember? They won't like it. Sure, ethnically there's overlap, but nationally they have a very strong sense of identity as Iranians. And from some of the research I've done on that, they're just not going to separate from Iran.

Um, with Turkey—Turkey is interesting. It's been playing this sort of "I'm a member of NATO" card, taking care of the whole Kurdish issue, taking advantage of that, and resolving it to a certain extent.

But Turkey is playing a game, I think. It's gambling. What happens, you know, because the Turkish situation is—Turkey has this whole pan-Turkic idea that it has vis-à-vis Israel, vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, of course. I'm afraid that Turkey, down the road, might be left naked and abandoned, really. Yes, Turkey has said—I think before the—well, I'm just sort of veering off here slightly.

Before the invasion of Iran, if you remember, there was an article in Bloomberg saying that Turkey was willing to create a buffer zone within Iran if Iran fell. So those are the kinds of grand visions Turkey has, right? That whole pan-Turkic, Turan vision. And with Armenia—let me just go back to Armenia real quick—it's become falsely attractive for Armenia to get on this bandwagon. I'd also argue the same for Azerbaijan, because that strategy won't take either of these countries anywhere, in my view, if Turkey ends up abandoned. And I don't think—well, we also know about the Turkish-Israeli relationship. There's a conflict there. So to what extent Turkey is going to carry these two countries, especially Azerbaijan, is really a question to watch.

## **#Pascal**

But that's what Turkey did with Syria. I mean, we're looking at the Syrian model—several sides are thinking about Syria as a model for Iran—because Turkey did occupy a buffer zone in Syria. And from there, in the end, launched a goddamn assault. Sorry, pardon my expression—launched the assault in December 2024—that in the end toppled, what was his name, Bashar al-Assad, right? Arthur, what do you think, and what do you have to add, maybe, to this problem in the north of Iran? I mean, Iran is stable, but it seems that other forces are trying to work against this as much as they can.

## **#Arthur Kachikian**

First of all, let me say that I think the US got itself into a bad situation. It fell into this trap and is trying to find a way out. I think Iran has not been destabilized, has not been dismembered, and is now slowly gaining the upper hand. Thousands of Marines are on their way to the Persian Gulf, and apparently there's more news in the media now—three divisions are on their way. From what I'm reading, I have no access to secret sources, nor should I, but there are some media reports saying thousands more are heading to the Middle East. And if they seize Kharg Island or any part of Iranian territory, the conflict will expand. They're going to become an easy target for drones and missiles.

There are going to be paramilitary groups, terrorist activity. It's going to be Afghanistan number two or Iraq number two. We've seen it all; we know how this works. Now, as far as Turkey and Azerbaijan go, from what I've seen, there was an attempt to provoke Azerbaijan and Turkey. A drone fell in Nakhichevan, and then a missile, I think twice, was fired in the direction of Turkey. Iran says, "That wasn't us." Some sources say it was Israel trying to get them involved. Because obviously, the air campaign has been "successful"—if you call killing thousands of civilians and

children a success. And by the way, civilians are also being killed in Israel. We have to be fair; we have to look at both sides. So it's been successful, but you can't change a regime without ground troops.

And you need, I mean, to seize the entire territory of Iran—according to our military experts, you'd need hundreds of thousands of troops. I hope they don't commit suicide by trying that. If they just seize a small part of the territory, they'll become a target, and we're going to see deaths, casualties—high casualties among Americans. So they tried to get the Kurds involved, and from what I've read, the Kurds said no. "You tricked me three times—shame on me." They stopped; they said no more. I don't think Turkey would be interested in seeing Iran disintegrate completely, because then it would have to deal with the Kurdish problem. I don't know what will happen with the Azeris. I'll have to rely on Pascal Lottaz's expertise—they feel very loyally pro-Iranian. That may be the case; I simply don't know. I'm not an expert on Iran.

Or they may not. People's loyalties change. There's such a thing as propaganda. In my own little republic, for 30 years we thought of the people of Karabakh as our compatriots. And then, for dozens of years, Western propaganda taught us that they are not Armenians—that they're terrible people. Literally, this is what we were taught by Western-sponsored media. So if Iran falls apart, then the Kurdish problem surfaces again, and this is a very big problem for Turkey. I'm trying to think—what, 15 million Kurds living on its territory? So the scenario of Iraq is possible. In Iraq, the Kurds have their own autonomy, and they do seem to have some kind of working relationship with Turkey.

So they may try to do the same in this case. And then, of course, there's the question of what will happen to the Azeri population. It's a very large group—about 15 million people. They may or may not claim some kind of autonomy or self-rule, and then some sort of rapprochement with Azerbaijan may happen. Although at this point, we don't see any of that. So this is just speculation. Iran is staying pretty strong and solid. All I can say is that I hope the madness stops before another region goes up in flames, because it's not just the Armenians and Azeris—Azeris, Georgians, Ossetians, and Abkhazians are going to be at each other's throats again.

There are dozens of other ethnic groups in the Caucasus, and some countries will not hesitate to use this as a weapon against Russia. They did this in the '90s. Many sources report that there was a lot of support from the West—even from Turkey and some other countries—given to the independence movement in Chechnya. So the northern Caucasus may go up in flames. And, you know, this is pretty much like 1914. And Pascal Lottaz talked about Serbia in the '90s—there was also Serbia in the early 20th century. Russia doesn't have a very strong commitment to this region; it's basically sharing its influence now with Turkey and Iran, mostly with Turkey.

But again, it's kind of stuck, because it doesn't really have, you know, England and France as allies like it did during the First World War. And it's facing this entire Western bloc. But this is pretty dangerous because, like I said last time when I talked to Pascal Lottaz, all it takes is for China to get

involved in some way—maybe start making some noises toward Taiwan or get involved somewhere else—and then we have a classic world war. This is the definition of a world war: most great powers involved in many regions of the world. And I don't know when this train will stop.

## **#Pascal**

It just seems to me that the people who should be interested in stopping this, at the moment, are doing the exact opposite. I mean, we keep talking about this as if Donald Trump got himself into a quagmire, but it seems like this is exactly what they want. Like, take a region and just put a match to it—any powder keg you find, light it and watch it blow up. I mean, the entire group of friends in the Gulf region—Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait—they were basically sacrificed, right? He's like, "Here you go. We know they're going to attack you."

We know they're going to blow you up. We know your economies are going to be ruined. We know all your exports are going to drop. We know people will die—maybe even die of thirst if your desalination goes away. But you know what? We're willing to pay that price. So, I mean, if even the allies aren't safe from the United States, what can others do right now? I mean, Lascha, do you hear anything about discontent from the Gulf states and the Southern Caucasus?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

With the Gulf and the Southern Caucasus, every expert I've spoken to, and everything I've been able to read and research, they're worried. But this is not—remember, it's a very strange situation. The entire South Caucasus, as a geopolitical space, is in a very odd position to begin with. On the one hand, some see it as an extension of the Middle East; others see it as part of Europe. But it's never directly affected—it's always more of a fallout effect that influences the region, right? The main epicenter, of course, is the Middle East, traditionally understood. Just quickly, I agree with Arthur that Turkey does not want Iran to disintegrate and explode into a post-Assad-type scenario. It wants to weaken it, perhaps.

It does want it to be weakened so that it can have much more influence vis-à-vis Russia as well. But it's bugging me that everyone—there was this sort of conventional wisdom in international relations that three major regions, if I may just mention this point, are of vital importance to the security of the United States, right? Western Europe, the Middle East, and Northeast Asia—so, China. Right. And, you know, balancing or rolling back, however you want to look at it, the potential conflict with China or managing that issue. And yet here we are, seeing this—remember the first Gulf War with Bush Senior, immediately after Saddam Hussein foolishly stepped into Kuwait—and then we saw what happened there.

He was stopped immediately. The second time, Washington was not that forgiving. But that showed us there was a vital national security interest in the region. "Oil, oil, oil" was the mantra of the day. I'm very surprised to see today's Washington sort of waiting and seeing, and actually pressing and

being, you know, dissatisfied with the Gulf states—the way they're, quote-unquote, “complaining.” They'll become victims for sure. So far, it seems to me they're victims of American hubris and this maniacal sort of obsession with the Gulf. That whole strategy where, if anybody touched the Middle East or the Gulf states, America would act and protect them—and here it is, America subjecting all the Gulf states to major risk. And what do we see?

It's sort of a contradictory, paradoxical chain of events that's unfolding. They're at risk from Iran—Israel's and America's foe. To what extent that question applies in this particular situation, I don't know. Yes, of course, oil will be protected. And if we can imagine a large-scale protection—if China acted, and if we can fantasize a little about this, expand our horizons, and imagine China deciding to manipulate the Middle East to the point where it was going to kick the United States out—of course, the U.S. would act. But now we're seeing the U.S. sort of sacrificing these Gulf states. It raises a question in my mind that perhaps I'm completely wrong theoretically here, but maybe you could... No, no.

## **#Pascal**

I completely agree. I mean, we're seeing the U.S. sacrificing its allies, which in my view should actually increase the incentive for all these states around there to basically declare their neutrality in one way or another, to distance themselves from this. But Arthur, I mean—Armenia, Mr. Pashinyan—what is it now, almost a year ago? Eight, nine months ago, right? They did this, uh, this meeting, this kind of show in Washington where Armenia and Azerbaijan shook hands, and Donald Trump was like, “Ha ha, I solved the war.” And then they were going to do the trip, right? The Trump—this Trump corridor, the Zangezur corridor—on a U.S. 99-year lease, a kind of tutelage, a very, very 19th-century type of agreement. I mean, this is not signed, this is not a ratified treaty or anything, but the idea is still there—to give this corridor that borders Iran, Armenian Iran, to the United States under their control. Can— is it possible that Armenians, especially now, still look at this idea of Pashinyan and go, “Yes, go for it, that's good”?

## **#Arthur Kachikian**

We've been completely conquered and infiltrated. Armenians think what they're told to think. We're a small republic of two and a half million people. We have hundreds of bloggers who've been trained in the West or paid by the West. Our only television channel is completely controlled by the government. We have thousands of people who receive money from the West to brainwash our population on a daily basis. That's why I said this is the end of democracy. Democracy has become the art of manipulating people's minds through social media. This is informational colonization—an informational annexation of a country.

There's just a very vivid image. There's a certain type of wasp that basically infiltrates—it catches a bug and injects poison into the bug's head. The bug becomes paralyzed, and then the wasp lays its eggs in the bug's brain. The eggs start eating it alive, and it can't even move. It's a very unpleasant

image, but this is what happens to countries like this. You become informationally conquered—your brain becomes conquered. Armenians were convinced by these people that giving up their territory and basically becoming a colony—like you said, you were very polite in how you said it—they basically turned us into a colony.

And Trump is celebrating this as a victory—that for 100 years we've ceded our territory, 74% of it, to the U.S., and later it's going to become somebody else's. I think I know who. I think I know who. And now this is being celebrated as a victory precisely because we don't have a brain of our own anymore. Our brain has been conquered by Western-sponsored bloggers, journalists, and propagandists. They've trained them by the hundreds. So now our people are being told it's okay that our compatriots were expelled from Karabakh. I mean, nobody wants a war. I don't want a war.

I wanted a peaceful agreement that would keep these people there, some kind of power-sharing arrangement like it's done everywhere in the world. I'm not an enemy of Azerbaijan or of Armenians. I believe that human beings should learn to manage themselves. But this is a surrender. And we were convinced that surrendering is a good thing. We were convinced by all this Western-sponsored media. I mean, look, in the case of Georgia—Lasha can say this better than I can—the new government in Georgia was trying to have a balanced foreign policy, not get involved. From what I understand, they were even offered to start a war with Russia. Somebody told them, like, "Start a war with Russia."

According to one of the dignitaries from Georgia, he said, "Well, we can only hold on for a few days." And then he was told, "Well, then you can go and fight in the mountains." I've read this somewhere—I mean, Lasha can confirm if this is true. But in our case, Mr. Macron, who is a big fan of Charles Aznavour, who was Armenian by origin, basically signed a death sentence for 120,000 Karabakh Armenians. He was in Prague when they surrendered, sitting right next to our little Saddam Hussein. He told our government, "We would love for you to become a buffer zone against Russia." He said that openly. And a British MP also said they would be happy to defend Armenia against Russia, but not against any other country, basically.

So there's this open informational conquest of the Caucasus. And sadly, many people don't understand they're just being used as a playing card and will later be abandoned—like Georgia was abandoned in 2008 after that war was provoked, like Armenians were abandoned throughout the last 150 years, endlessly. And this only ended with one thing: they were exterminated. So great power politics is a very cynical game, and it's very dangerous to be conquered—to have this informational colonization of your country—because then your people can't think. A third power controls public opinion in your country. Do you understand what that means? They decide what your people think because they program them, like I can program my computer. They program the entire society.

**#Pascal**

This is exactly what Georgia has been working to shut down with the NGO law and so on. We talked about this the first time we spoke, I think two years ago or so. I titled that video \*The One That Got Away.\* I mean, for some reason, Georgia managed to learn that lesson in 2008 and then do something about it. How did that work?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

It's quite miraculous, actually—based on what Arthur said—how ruthless the international system can be, especially toward small, divided, weak states. Considering the previous decade or two after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and where Georgia was in terms of promises... And Arthur, what you said—I'll just call it basically propaganda, right? Just to simplify—you're spot on about being brainwashed, you know, having these countries radicalize their societies as much as possible between the Easterners and Westerners, and then basically kill each other, weakening the society to the point where a third party—say, the U.S. or Russia—comes in and says, "We'll take care of you guys."

Right. So, you know, the thing is, Georgia—yeah, miraculously. Now, I attribute that also, to a large extent, to the fundamental changes in the international system. For your audience, and to simplify this, let's just say the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity gives, on average, small states a better chance to balance and survive. No guarantees, still—but I think the literature on this topic suggests that during a multipolar, or balance-of-power, climate, small states have a much better chance. So, you know, we all know that, and history sort of proves it, because during the unipolar moment, Georgia stood no chance.

Idealism was given primacy. It's amazing how paralyzed Georgian society has become over the decades. Words like realism, pragmatism, realpolitik, and national security interests have been distorted—they weren't even heard much until, I'd say, a few years ago, when this kind of realist language started to enter Georgian society and become politicized. That's a tragedy in and of itself. So yeah, Arthur is spot on when he says these countries have been used up to the advantage of great powers—not because they want to do some nation-building in Georgia or Armenia or the South Caucasus, and not because they want to develop or modernize the region, but because they have a visceral hatred of Russia.

They still look at Russia as a major strategic foe. That turned out to be false. But in the meantime, who cares if we can weaken Russia—use these minions as battering rams—and if Russia then, you know, again does some crazy thing like invade Georgia, shave off Abkhazia or South Ossetia, or this time recognize those two regions as separate countries within a country, so be it. We'll tell them they're brave, freedom-loving folks fighting against this monstrous Russia. When all of it—come on—we can't forget Ukraine here, right? The 500-pound gorilla in the room.

That's exactly what happened with Ukraine. You know, we can use all kinds of words—provoked, foolishly, whatever. We could have avoided this. All of those are true. But imagine, think about the

time when we're talking about these issues—always post-factum. It always happens. And then we always apologize in the West. We always say, "Oh sure, this could have been avoided." Well, there are plenty of clever people in Washington and Brussels who could have said, "Let's prevent this madness." You know, Russia will never allow Georgia—let alone Armenia or Ukraine—to become members of NATO on its borders.

### **#Arthur Kachikian**

I'm so sorry, I have to jump in because you're making such a great point. They did say that—yes, they did say that.

### **#Lasha Kasradze**

This is the hypocrisy we have to deal with.

### **#Arthur Kachikian**

Was it François Hollande—the one who used to visit his mistress on a bicycle? How French. I think he was the one who said that, wasn't he? It was Hollande and Merkel who said Russia would never accept this. "Let's not do this." In 2007, was it?

### **#Lasha Kasradze**

2008, Bucharest. 2008, Bucharest—of course.

### **#Arthur Kachikian**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Professor Mearsheimer keeps talking about it all the time. It's a well-known fact.

### **#Lasha Kasradze**

And Merkel admitted it. You're right.

### **#Pascal**

Arthur, keep talking. I mean, this is the thing—we knew it. We saw it. It was predicted by Mearsheimer and others, and it was well understood. And still, it goddamn happened. And just like with Iran, it's predicted. We know this is going to be either a bloodbath or mass murder, or both—on all sides. And still, it's happening. Arthur?

### **#Arthur Kachikian**

First, let me say that my heart breaks when I see the deaths—when I see young Ukrainian boys, young Russian boys killed. I see thousands of graves. I see these poor people being dragged into the street, forced to be conscripted. It's heartbreaking. They're screaming as they're put into cars to be sent to the meat grinder. These are people who lived peacefully, for better or for worse, with all the problems of being part of an empire—if you call it an empire; there's no debate about that. They lived peacefully, and they didn't deserve to be killed in such numbers, because the numbers I'm hearing—from the New York Times—are saying over a million and a half. Are you joking? Do you understand what you did?

This is World War I. These are World War I numbers. It's unbelievable. And Georgians, Armenians, Azeris—the thing is, I think when people make such decisions, they're not guided by ethical or moral considerations. They're guided by interests—interest groups, the same interest groups that pushed Trump into this horrible war, into this trap he's now trying to get out of. These are interest groups, certain organizational procedures for decision-making, personal biases. Like I said, when I was in the Soviet Union, I was the most pro-Western person. I was very, very sympathetic, and I have a lot of friends. And I really love the Baltic republics.

I love Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia. I have a lot of friends in Poland, in Czechoslovakia—what it was at the time. I completely understand that these people had their trauma, have their wounds, have their scars from the past. It's legitimate. It should be addressed. Certain, you know, apologies should be offered. I'm with you on this one. But hate cannot be perpetuated. You cannot perpetuate hate. And when you attack Russia right away for everything that went wrong during the communist period—which it did—and when Russians were also victims of the communist regime, and you're forgetting that, there is a way to end hatred and move forward. And we didn't have the wisdom to do it. We live in a time of emotions.

You know, people express emotions. And now we're run by people who are like toddlers. They're driven by emotions. They're like fanatics. I mean, I quoted Pete Hegseth the other day—you know, a very macho, men's man type, with a large following, probably mostly among women and a small percentage of men. But he speaks like a toddler. These people speak like children. I don't know how to convince them. I don't know what to tell them. You're causing a global famine. A representative of the United Nations said we're looking at millions of refugees, potentially, and a global hunger crisis comparable to 1929. And they still can't stop. So I don't know how to argue with these people.

## **#Pascal**

Lascha, do you want to take over from here? Because, I mean, it's very, very bleak. This entire war—first the one with Ukraine, and now the one with Iran—are just about as large red stop signs as they get. The only even larger red stop sign is the one with China, and that's the one they're gearing up

for, trying to make it as heavy as they can. If we follow the argument by Brian Berletic, then all of this, including Ukraine and Iran, is being done in order to have a war with China before it becomes irreversibly bigger and more powerful than the United States. Can you make anything out of that?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

Yes, I think, quickly on geopolitics, the three countries will basically stabilize the situation, realizing that they can't kill each other because they're all nuclear powers. So the triad of the United States, Russia, and China will eventually come together, and they will dominate the international system. Right now, what we're seeing is a kind of use of the peripheries—the world's peripheries, if you will—to test how far each state can take this. Again, of course, there are some variables we can't ignore, meaning Israel's hatred and concern—putting it mildly—about Iran, since it views Iran as an existential threat, right?

That plays a huge role. Of course, we can't discount that. But overall, I think, from a grand strategic point of view, the three countries will come together at the end of the day and will, to a large extent, stabilize their national security interests. They'll declare their vital national security and economic interests—for example, China going through Central Asia, the Caucasus, all the way to Europe—in an effort to strengthen the Belt and Road Initiative and make more money. So the geoeconomic projects will come into synergy with geopolitical interests. And then, I think, these three countries will, in the end, stabilize the situation.

Yes, we've heard about the World War III scenario. You know, mathematically, sort of logical positivism here doesn't work, in my view. We can look at history all we want, but I don't think the current environment is a World War III environment. With nuclear powers, there would be an Armageddon—it would just end the world if that's what they're thinking. So I think, yes, there are mad folks, ideologically driven people—in Brussels, even Moscow, of course, and then Washington. These ideologies, to a certain extent, are fighting for and implementing their respective foreign policy views. But I do think that geopolitics and national security interests will prevail.

I don't think this is going to be a clash of civilizations, even though I think Huntington's thesis comes closest, right, in terms of resembling what's happening here. There's a kind of biblical sense in how Israel is approaching the Middle East and the whole Palestinian issue—greater Israel, and then Iran, of course. But I think hard power politics will prevail. There's an irony there, because hard power politics is basically, "I need what I need, at all costs." But then they'll be balanced by the other two. So, yeah. I just want to finish very quickly with a popular example. I watched your previous recording, Arthur and Pascal Lottaz. It was great.

And I think we're all closeted liberals, let me tell you. Because when Arthur was talking about remembering the early '90s—look, my grandmother, I remember it like yesterday, listening to the Voice of America. That's how it was. And now we all know what USAID and Voice of America turned out to be, right? But the thing is, we all innately believed in the Western project, in the peace

dividend. The peace dividend didn't give us many dividends, unfortunately. I said, that's the tragedy of the West—they messed up on their own. They could have managed Russia. They could have managed China. Although with China, you know, it's a regional hegemony. Russia was never going to be a regional hegemony. They chose not to do it.

## **#Pascal**

They chose not to do it. There was an option to do it, but—Lasha, you and I talked to Ambassador Jack Matlock, you know, someone who said, "Don't do this, Arthur." I mean, the disappointment that comes through in your voice with this whole liberal dream—it didn't just collapse in front of our eyes, it was shattered by these people. What do you make of that? I mean, did we just believe too much? Yeah, Arthur—sorry, can I ask Arthur?

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

Arthur, go ahead. Okay.

## **#Arthur Kachikian**

I think every time human society goes through a certain transition, it invents a system that's conceived as fair, non-corrupt, ethical—you know, just. And then, inevitably, a certain group of people finds a way to abuse that system. I mean, Pascal used the example of Napoleon. You can use Oliver Cromwell—the leader of the English, you know, what we call the revolution. They call it the Civil War in England. I mean, he became the new king, basically, of England without actually officially becoming a king, but he even used the same stamp. It looked pretty much like the king's official seal, the official state seal. Human beings invent systems meant to produce justice and morality, and then they invent ways of corrupting them.

Democracy in the '80s and '90s—I just remember it as a teenager—and it seemed to me like the promised land. But now it's certainly been corrupted. So something needs to be done to balance the influence of private interest groups, because, like you said, Pascal, they hijack democracy. They should be balanced very quickly. I can see we only have a few minutes, so I think, first of all, that Trump is probably not going to stay in power. There's a high chance the Republicans will lose the elections in the fall after all of this. I think there's a high probability it will be a Democratic Congress.

And I think, in that case, the chances of an impeachment proceeding being initiated are pretty high. I think there's a good chance he will be impeached. But then we'll have our wonderful Democrats in power. And then—if they continue in the footsteps of the previous Democratic administration—the Democratic crusade will continue, this ideological crusade of spreading democracy by force. And like we said during our first interview, Pascal, that's not the way to do it. If you want to convert people, convert Lasha and Arthur the way you did in the past—by your influence, by your example. And my final point: I think what we're seeing now is peripheral.

We are drifting toward a peripheral World War III. It is a World War III, but it's peripheral because the big powers can't fight directly, so they fight each other in these regions indirectly. It's a proxy World War III—that's what we're heading toward. All we need is China to join. When China joins, that's the classic definition of World War III. And my final, final sentence is this: what I see happening—one way this could stop—is if Russia and China drift closer together and reach an understanding with the U.S. that they're going to maintain equilibrium, that they're going to balance it. Because, after all, the stability of the Cold War was the stability of equilibrium and deterrence. Can they do it? We shall see.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, but that doesn't depend on Russia and China. It doesn't. It depends on the United States being willing to accept equilibrium. Because if they say, "Oh yes, let's do that," and then just use it to stab them in the back whenever they can—well, you know, we've seen the United States time and time again using diplomacy, using this beautiful, rosy language as a way to strike another day. And Iran is the prime example of that, I guess. But Lasha, the last words—one minute goes to you.

## **#Lasha Kasradze**

I love my liberal democratic system in the U.S. domestically, but on foreign policy, it doesn't work. I strongly disagree with it—lies, propaganda, you know—and I think it should be all about realism and restraint. But I, you know... let's just go back to classic liberalism. Let's not add the "neo" prefix to it. Let's just look at and respect classic liberalism of the Western world—Western civilization, Western Europe—where America... why America became America, what its views were toward colonialism. And let's just hope those ideals will come back. But in foreign policy and international relations, I think going around and educating folks on how to live their lives, how to conduct their cultures, and trying to conform them—let alone to the crazes in Brussels and, to a large extent, in Washington as well—just doesn't work.

I think that's a disastrous policy, and sovereignty has to be respected. But for us living in America—me living in the States—I do see enormous value. What was the Churchillian saying? We can't come up with anything better than democracy. So I think we do have to defend it and cherish it. But unfortunately, in the past three or four decades, it's been, well, really violated, and something has gone horribly wrong. We can't pinpoint it exactly, but we do have a pretty good idea of what it was. And so I think we have to be ever more careful. And I just want to very briefly send condolences to the whole of Georgia for the passing of Ilia II, the patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church. So thanks for allowing me to do that, Pascal.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, my condolences on so many fronts—also to the Iranians and everyone who's suffering right now. To everyone who's suffering, that's correct. A sad note to end on, but thank you very much,

both, for your analysis and the thoughts you've shared. Arthur Kacikian, Lasha Kazratze, thank you for your time.

**#Lasha Kasradze**

Thank you very much. Thanks.