Lawrence Wilkerson: America's Retreat From Europe & Middle East

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X /Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@GDiesen1 Support the research: 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 00:00 Introduction and Context of US Foreign Policy 06:04 Critique of Marco Rubio's Speech and Historical Perspectives 11:52 Existential Threats and Climate Change 18:11 The Shift in Global Power Dynamics 24:04 US Strategy in the Middle East and Relations with Iran 30:03 Israel's Influence on U. S. Foreign Policy 34:20 Regional Conflicts and Their Interconnections 38:39 The Future of Governance in the Middle East 40:31 The Role of Israel in Global Security Dynamics 44:45 Ukraine: Diplomatic Paths and Challenges 51:57 Shifting Geopolitical Landscapes in Europe and Beyond

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of State. Thank you for coming back on the program.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Good to be with you. You're one of the sane Europeans. They're dwindling. They're dwindling.

#Glenn

I sadly agree. I'm hoping common sense will soon return. I was a little bit optimistic to see two Scandinavian leaders actually reaching out to the opposing side—that would be the Russians—and engaging in diplomacy. So I'm hoping this signifies a return to normalcy, although I'm skeptical but optimistic. Where I wanted to start today, though, was with the U.S. That is, Washington appears to acknowledge now that the post-Cold War unipolar moment is over, but we still see that much of its foreign policy seems to be designed to restore that primacy.

So, one interesting development recently was that, back in January of last year, Marco Rubio argued in his interview with Megyn Kelly that unipolarity was not normal for the world. That's the word he used: "normal"—"not normal"—and that the world had essentially now returned to multipolarity. I interpreted this as signifying a huge shift in foreign policy—that the whole post-Cold War era was over. However, earlier this month, in October of 2026, Marco Rubio delivered a speech in Greece

arguing that the U.S. and the West should pretty much preserve or restore their dominant position in the world. I was just wondering, what do you make of this shift?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

First, I would comment that Marco Rubio's speech in Athens has been ripped apart and devastated by everyone from scholars of international relations to historians to people who just want to pick a bone with Marco Rubio. And I think most of their critiques of what he said are accurate. In fact, I think some of them don't go far enough. And in essence, to sum it up in a broad way, they said, "Man, were you mistaken. You didn't carry through on what you were talking about. You didn't talk about the helots upon whom Athens was poised—the slaves, in other words. Democracy built on top of slaves, kind of like the South, if you will, in the United States, although it wasn't quite for the economic reasons that the South did it."

And some of the actual, visceral beliefs of the South—I'm not sure that they can be attributed to the Greeks, except in the sense that that was what was done at that time. When you fought somebody and you beat them, you took their people—women, children, and everyone else—as slaves. And in the Greeks' case, they brought them home and stuffed them in the basement and called them helots and occasionally brought them up. Not a very admirable practice. And they didn't bother to talk about Thucydides and the Melian Dialogue and Syracuse and all the rest of the things, including how badly Athens treated its vassal states, from Corinth to Melos, toward the end of its empire, if you will, and many, many, many other factors.

For example, all of that he's extolling wouldn't even be ours if it weren't for the Arabs, because everything was lost. And the Arabs restored it, principally in the library in Alexandria, but in other places too, and translated it and passed it on. Otherwise, we wouldn't even have had two-thirds of what the Greeks had done, if we do esteem them and the Romans the way we do. And then the next point was that all you have to do is read The Short History of China, a really remarkable book, to understand that what Marco Rubio was attributing to the Greeks in all their glory, military and otherwise, was duplicated and bettered by China several hundred, if not a thousand, years beforehand.

So what an egregious speech to give. And I haven't even mentioned the most important contemporary point: that they've sold out to Bibi Netanyahu. He owns Athens, and he owns them in everything from doing things to disturb the Turks with regard to their traditional imbroglio over Cyprus to getting them to do whatever is necessary to show that the Europeans are involved, although the Greeks don't have a lot of power to show that with. Netanyahu owns Athens to a real extent because he paid all their debt off with our tax dollars. You can't make this stuff up, Marco.

How stupid can you be to go and give a speech like that? And yet the hagiography, the euphoria, the panegyric, and so forth are typical of a man whose culture, knowledge, and historical wisdom are about half an inch deep, if that. So I've finished my rant on Marco Rubio and his remarks in

Athens, which I thought were incredibly misplaced and incredibly wrong, and not the kind of thing to be doing at this particular time. I mean, what did he gain by doing it? And on your point about multipolarity, I don't like the term. I'm like Ambassador Chas Freeman. I think he's right. It's multinodality. Poles stick up. Poles have ends. Nodes are things that fit in and move around almost amorphously and connect here and connect there. That's where we are.

Nothing is proving this better than what's happening in Southwest Asia right now, particularly this meeting that just transpired, which was in the, you might say, shadow of the greatest economic power in the world, China. No longer will I say anything about that. China is the greatest economic power in the world, unquestionably so in my mind. So we're looking at a secretary of state who, number one, is not a diplomat; number two, gives terrible speeches; and number three, was speaking in terms that, as you indicated, seem to reverse some of the incredible policy chapeau that is over our current proxy strategy—our straightforward strategy in Southwest Asia. Though I don't think Trump even knew he was participating in this game, the policy goal was to reestablish American hegemony in the world at all costs, including using nuclear weapons.

That was the goal of the neoconservatives, the globalists, the behind-the-scenes deep state, whatever you want to call it. That was their goal. That was actually the goal of the 2002 National Security Strategy. Colin Powell sort of said, "Well, this is nothing different." And I said to him, "This is something very different. We're saying we're going to rule the world." That's what we said, and that's what we've been trying to do. And we've been failing almost everywhere we've been trying to do it, whether by proxy or straightforwardly, as Trump has tried in Southwest Asia. We're failing so badly there that we're being kicked out of Southwest Asia. So there's my tirade on it.

#Glenn

Just to go off on a little sidetrack, with the Greeks and Israel, is this essentially an anti-Turkish coalition? How do you explain how the Greeks folded in this way?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

This is Bibi's understanding. He's a political and, you could say, in some ways, a strategic genius in a very adverse sort of way, kind of like Elon Musk in the economic situation. But he understands the dynamics, and his next target is Ankara. And so, build your alliances and your relationships toward that end early and quickly and strongly and powerfully while you can. I think he also understands he's lost the United States. Now, that may take some time to materialize politically and otherwise, but it is coming to be, especially with people in their 40s and under. But he's lost the United States in the long term, I think, in terms of his big sugar daddy.

So he's got to find some other way to cope with that, if you will. And one of the ways he's going to do that is to find different people in the world who might be temporarily willing to ally with him to do what he needs to do. Then, of course, he'll turn on them if he needs to. That's his way of operating.

That may have suffered a significant setback, maybe even a permanent setback, because of what just happened on October the 27th. And that went on, I'm told, all the way to 10 p.m., maybe even later, as they kept the polls open because it was a historic election. More people voted than at any time since '77 or something like that.

And they were still coming. And yet those still coming and keeping the polls open did not help Bibi very much, because I think he's lost in the sense of the election. But look at what he's got. He's got caretaker status until he can form a new government. And in that caretaker status, he is in charge of national security. And he can wreak havoc from that position. And he's already said he's going to wreak havoc and named it "Roar of Judea"—however you want to say that. That's the operation he's started now in the West Bank. And I don't think he's going to stop.

#Glenn

Well, I've heard some talk in Israel about the need to begin to adjust to these new realities—that in the future, it might have to be able to go on without the United States. So I guess it makes sense to try to reorganize or create some new alliances or systems in the region to make this happen. But overall, in terms of not just Marco Rubio but possibly the whole Trump administration pulling back a bit from trying to accommodate multipolarity to resisting it, I mean, you served at the highest level of the American national security establishment. Why do you think it's so difficult for Washington to accept these kinds of limits on American power? I guess it's not just the United States. I think it's a historical issue for a former hegemon to accommodate rising powers. But is it ideological, institutional, economic, or how do you explain it?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

All those things, but I think we're in a new position. And I think one of the reasons I prefer the term "nodal" to the term "polar" is precisely that new position. We're situated on a globe that has tremendous existential possibilities. And when I say "existential," I don't mean the globe. The globe is going to be here. The planet is going to be here probably until it burns up in the sun four and a half billion years from now. Maybe. I don't know. But I'm not sure the human race is going to be here, and I'm very unsure that it's going to be here in its present configuration, or even anything resembling it, because we have two existential threats staring us in the face. I went to a webinar yesterday and listened to it intently.

People were talking about what's happening, which is very much outside the computer models—very different, in a negative sense, from what many of the computer models I've been looking at from NASA, from NOAA, and from the Europeans for almost 20 years have predicted. And we are not just behind the power curve. We're about twice as badly behind as we thought we would be if we didn't meet the global temperature limits, if you will. And we're not. We're not even close. But we're also seeing a whole fundamental array of factors we didn't take into consideration that are happening right now, deepening and widening the crisis we're in with regard to the climate.

Call it a climate crisis. Call it the planet doing what it's done throughout its history, but without 10 billion human beings on its surface. Call it whatever you want. But it is different because of that human population. Very different. And whether you're looking at sea level rise, flooding, extra-powerful hurricanes, or winds that aren't going to stop, they're just going to pick up in velocity with each year that goes by, greatly exacerbating forest fires and making it impossible to live on this planet. I think you probably are aware that 50,000 Europeans died this year from heat or heat-related injuries. 50,000. Well, look at that becoming a heck of a lot more over the next few years.

And what I'm saying is that the situation the models we were using 15 years ago told us was dire, particularly by 2065 and the years following, is now worsening much faster because of factors we didn't understand, didn't know about, and are only now discovering. We're doing things in Alaska, for example, like coring the soil, pulling out the cores, and finding that methane is coming out at much faster rates than we ever thought it would, and that its release promises to accelerate even further. Methane is more deadly than CO2. And we're looking at that possibility in other places, like northern Russia, as well as in Alaska, where it's being studied very closely right now.

I'm not so sure it's being studied very closely in northern Russia. So I'm saying all this to say we have bigger things to confront. So adopting the traditional globalist position on losing power, understanding you're losing power, understanding to whom you're losing it or to what you're losing it—it's both, really—and taking the usual imperial steps, which, as you pointed out, usually fail in the long run, is stupid to the maximum, especially when you have, on the other side of the power equation, a country that doesn't seem to be bent on that sort of performance.

Whether you trust them or not is irrelevant. They do not seem to evince the kind of attitude that you would expect from an empire that is going to whop you very soon and take over. They don't seem to be that sort of power. And their history—5,000 years of it, really—dictates, I think, that you understand that they're different. They're not like you. They're not predatory capitalists, for example, like you are. If you want to put it in their terms, in English, it's, "We are capitalists with Chinese characteristics," and those characteristics make a whale of a difference. They're not predatory capitalists. They are capitalists who understand that if you prey on something, you will wipe out what you are making your money from. And so they have a very different philosophy.

Wading into that philosophy and accommodating it in a collaborative, cooperative environment is what's necessary, particularly with those two challenges confronting us. And I didn't talk about the second one: nuclear weapons. It makes sense. It makes immense sense to me, and it makes sense to most of the people I deal with, too. But we can't seem to find the leadership in this particular empire, fading as it is, that understands any of this and wants to do positive things about it, let alone wants to deal with that massive two-thirds of the world that is rapidly coming to hate our guts viscerally. They're willing to side with anybody who is opposed to us and doesn't administer sanctions, for example, and has a better financial system, which is developing rapidly even as I speak. They're willing to accept that.

So we also have two-thirds of the world that is already saying, essentially, “To save my life, to feed me, to give me a viable future, I need something like what this power, China, is doing. I do not need what you're doing to the other side of the world.” If we don't change that attitude and we don't accommodate what is happening in the world in a very real, practical way, in the sense of the power that's shifting, I don't know what we're going to do, Glenn. I think we're going to disappear. That's a hell of a thing to say about the 340 million people spread over the vast territory of the United States. But we seem to be capable of maybe self-destruction, as well as being taken on by somebody who just gives up and says, “Well, we can't deal with them any other way.” I think Xi Jinping took away from that meeting with Trump a measure of Trump.

The measure of Trump, and the measure they already have of our political system, is that Trump may be a weird dude. He may be an aberration. He may be an anomaly. But he is nonetheless reflective of the empire's dissipation, of its incredible inability to deal with its own internal problems, of its colossal debt, and of the fact that it is badly led and has been badly led ever since the end of the Cold War, if not slightly before. And to take that kind of assessment of us and come away from it with any kind of thought that you can accommodate, you can adjust, you can live in the same world, you can cooperate on some of the bigger challenges, you can do things like have a nuclear weapons treaty regime that accommodates all the new nuclear weapons powers and the old ones and the aspirants and so forth.

And I've really been brushing up on North Korea right now and what they're doing in North Korea with Russian help. It's fascinating to me because, in my view, for the whole time I've been looking at North Korea—through all the Kims and all the turmoil, the Agreed Framework, the light-water reactors, the reneging on that by the Bush administration, the six-party talks and all that—I've thought, “This is not salvageable.” There's a reason we don't have a treaty on the peninsula after seventy-some-odd years. There's a reason we don't have peace. It's not salvageable because of the North.

I'm rapidly learning that that's not necessarily the case, that the Kim dynasty, even in all three of its compartments, if you will—all three of the Kims—has been trying all along to do something positive. And that's been thwarted, with the possible exception of the end of Clinton's presidency and Robert Gallucci and the six-party talks and what came out of that with the light-water reactors, which then got fouled by the Bush administration. Maybe that was a genuine attempt, the first genuine attempt by the big empire to do something positive about North Korea. But I don't see it now. In fact, I now see North Korea building out.

It will have a triad very shortly. The only thing they haven't mastered so far is firing missiles from submarines underwater. They're working fiercely on that. They're getting Russian assistance on that. And I don't doubt that very soon they will have a ballistic missile capability, incidentally, that will reach New York. They will have a bomber capability. They will have planes that can drop really big

atomic bombs. How far they can go, I don't know yet. And they already have submarines that can launch them, much the way Netanyahu does, but they're working on launching them from under the water, under the sea, and I suspect they will achieve that.

And we're not doing anything. We're not doing anything to tell them, "You need to be in this regime or that regime. You're already a nuclear power. We know that." But we're just ignoring them, except for what we're doing in the South, which is really making the South Koreans rapidly turn away from us, especially those under 40, because what we're doing is preparing Korea to be a redoubt for an attack on China. You know, we're just not doing the right things. We're not even doing the right things in accordance with what you were referring to: the traditional response, as John Mearsheimer would say, of a declining power to an ascending power. We're not even doing that smartly.

#Glenn

Oh, that is strange behavior. No, it doesn't make much sense. But it is interesting, the focus on China, because often that seems to be the main focal point. I mean, you've heard about all these ambitions of knocking out Russia using Ukrainians. As General Keith Kellogg points out, a key theme of that plan is, in his words, that it allows us to use our resources to confront China. And you also have the same rhetoric now: if we're able to knock out Iran, take its oil, then look how much China is affected by this, which is also cited as a key benefit from this second blockade on Iran. So China obviously is a key target. But when a lot of China's neighbors, be it the South Koreans, for example, look at what's happening in the Middle East, they're getting a bit worried, though, about what it means to be an ally, maybe.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You bet. They think they're going to be used that way against China.

#Glenn

Yeah. For good reason, I would say.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

My South Korean friends say, "What are you doing? And what are we doing? We're building Tomahawk missiles for you, and so are the Japanese. We're building them as fast as we can, and we're just adding to the peril we're putting ourselves in. Our economy is geared to China, majorly geared to China, and to a certain extent, theirs to ours. And here we are, making ourselves into a Kuwait for you to attack China. This makes no sense."

#Glenn

That doesn't make any sense. But if this is part of the thinking—that the U.S. is losing its ability to contain China—you can see it going two ways. One would be to escalate, to simply double down, which seems to be a favorite approach these days. Or, alternatively, to adjust to new realities by, you know, essentially, instead of going with Marco Rubio this year, going with Marco Rubio last year and accepting a post-hegemonic world. But, you know, translating that into the Iran war, I can't really make sense of what Trump is planning in Iran. I mean, is he planning to walk away from the whole thing, essentially accepting that the hegemonic era is over? Or do you see him doing the opposite—that he's actually preparing for war, that he will try to knock out Iran, and that will weaken the Russians and the Chinese and so forth?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's a huge question right now, I think, and I can't answer it. But I can say that, with Greater Judea going forward in the West Bank and probably not going to be halted, he still has the national security portfolio in his caretaker status, which I assume is going to be the case for some time to come. I don't know the system well enough in Israel to understand what that means, but I do know Bibi Netanyahu well enough to understand what that means. Nothing's going to change. And he will use the time, which might be fairly lengthy. Remember, the last time they had four or five elections before they finally settled on something. He might use that time when they're debating who is actually going to be in the coalition or whatever runs Israel. He's got caretaker status, and in that status, he's responsible for national security.

That's the way I understand it. So he's going to go ahead with this Roar of Judea operation centered on Hebron and moving south. He's probably going to continue what he's doing in Syria. He's probably going to continue what he's doing in Lebanon and maybe deepen it. And I think he still wants to finish off Iran. The huge question here, with 3 November looming, is what Trump's political sense is going to be, if he has any left. What does it mean at this juncture for a person who's just been disenfranchised, for all intents and purposes—Bibi Netanyahu—to have this kind of control and power and to go ahead, particularly with Iran? I don't know. Is Trump going to join him? If Trump doesn't join him and tells him so, is that going to deter him? Is he going to concentrate just on the West Bank? I mean, he's got a big enough problem there.

He could encounter some real resistance if the Palestinians ascertain that that's what's coming and wind up trying to oppose him with force. I mean, you could have an intifada, if you will, on the West Bank, and you could have Hamas elements feeding it out of the tunnels and caves and other places they've gone inside Gaza. So I don't know, but I don't count this as a very healthy situation until I see some sign that Trump is done with this war in Southwest Asia and is ready to do something diplomatically, which would be the smart thing to do. He's got cover now. This meeting that just occurred, I think, said a number of things, but the most powerful thing it said was to Saudi Arabia. And that essentially came from Pakistan and from Turkey and, I think, from the Iranians in spades: "Sorry about that, dude. You made your bed."

“Now sleep in it. If you want us to help you, then you've got to do the things that we say you've got to do.” And that's not going to be done by Saudi Arabia, not under MBS anyway. Maybe they'll get rid of him. And at the same time, there's the whole environment: the fact that they met, and they met peacefully, as it were, while Israel's flying jets all the way into the air defense identification zone of Iran and then turning back, as if, you know, what they were trying to do was to get Iran to launch a preemptive strike, as it were, and start the war. It didn't work. Iran was too smart for that. So now we're looking at a situation where I think the message was delivered, and it was delivered as much to Pakistan and Turkey, probably, as to Saudi Arabia. And it was delivered by the very fact that they did what they did where they did it, and said what they said where they did it.

And that is, standing beside Iran with an irrevocable promise not to let it be defeated by the empire is the greatest economic power in the world: China. Oh, is that all? No. Russia's there, too. Beleaguered, maybe, but still there and still a powerful element. Both have signed defense agreements with Iran. And I think one of the things Xi has assured Iran is that that's not just a piece of paper. That's the kind of stock he took of Trump, I think, in his last meeting. That was a disastrous meeting, I think. I'm postulating. I'm not getting a lot of input on it from my Chinese contacts, but I think it was a disastrous meeting for Trump because Xi, unlike Putin, doesn't have this compulsion to come to Washington and to renew relationships and so forth.

He would like to have a good relationship with Washington, but he doesn't feel compelled to do that. And if Washington is going to do the kind of stupid things it's doing in Southwest Asia right now, his compulsion is even less. And so he's standing up, and he's going to stay there. And his promise is that Iran will not be defeated. You cannot stand up to that, Donald. You simply cannot stand up to that, no matter how much you're frustrated by it politically, personally, and otherwise—if you even sense it and realize it. You can't stand up to that. And all you're going to do is degrade your country's security further if you do that. And yet, I wait with bated breath, as it were, to see what this guy's going to do.

#Glenn

Well, how do you see Israel? Because, again, they tend to be the elephant in the room here. How do you think they're going to try to influence the U.S. moving forward? Because they have, as you said, their own elections and their own problems. Do you see their policies towards Iran being influenced greatly by domestic politics? Or is it about a shift in the international distribution of power? I guess, not to overcomplicate it further, but how would the Israelis view this closer relationship between Iran and China?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, you're asking me, in a sense, to crawl into Netanyahu's head and try to think like Netanyahu. I've given up on that. And certainly I've given up on crawling into the heads of that 80 or 81 or whatever percent of Jewish citizens of Israel who are still very much for everything he and Gadi

Eisenkot or whomever will do in order to kill as many Palestinians as possible. So I don't pretend to know what Bibi is going to do. The premier is, I think, a supremely gifted politician, particularly in that system, which is really a difficult system to understand. I think he understands it better than anyone. What is he going to do in what is essentially going to be, as I indicated earlier, a caretaker status, where he still has the national security portfolio but probably is going to have to refer to the Knesset or others in that security panoply a little more than he would otherwise?

I don't know that. He might be just as arbitrary as a caretaker as he was as the, what, 15-plus-year leader of Israel. But it does give him some leeway, if you think about it for a moment, because he's got to make sure that what he does do in that caretaker status is perceived by that bulk of his population as truly necessary, almost as truly existential for Israel if they don't allow him to do it. And at the top of that agenda, I think, is Iran. There are other things, too, like the West Bank. I think he would really like to finish off the West Bank. He wants to finish it off and have it be Judea—whatever it is, Samaria and Judea.

He wants it to be Israeli territory, period. The only Palestinians there would be those who buckle under and say, "Well, I'll stay if you let me vote or whatever." It won't mean squat, but he wants to get a good foothold in Syria, stay in, and have leverage there. He wants to finish off Lebanon if possible. And when I say that, I mean his prime target is really finishing off Hezbollah, because he knows if they throw in their lot with Iran and there's a counterattack or even a preemptive attack by Iran, it's going to be devastating for Israel. So he's got a lot of things to think about. But the main driver is still the main driver, I think, and that's to finish off Iran.

#Glenn

So, again, I keep wondering whether or not the U.S. will follow this. But again, we don't have a window into Trump's mind either. But do you worry about the war spreading, though, across the region? Because all of these wars are very interconnected, whether you look at the Saudi war, the war against Iran, what's happening in Syria, or the possibility of Egypt deepening its involvement. Turkey, of course, has its own issues with Israel. Israel is linked to all of the above. I mean, yeah, how do you analyze such a situation, or what are people in Washington considering here?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

The first thing I would encourage—I have no idea if he's inclined to do it—is for MBS to meet the Houthis' demands, particularly with Sanaa. He's probably like a little teenager right now, really smarting, particularly because he's having to move around so much just to survive. If I were MBS, I'd meet those demands and see how far that went. I would see if that actually stopped their very devastating attacks on Saudi facilities, which are just picking up and getting worse, deepening the peril for MBS, Riyadh, and its regime. And the Houthis' ask, as I understand it—at least their upfront, stated ask—is to relieve the situation that the Saudis have caused with regard to the airport and the Houthis' use of it. I don't know if that would solve it.

I doubt it in the long run. Having tracked the Houthis since 1990 and seen them go through their different iterations and develop their consolidation, capabilities, and warfighting skills, I think they're probably getting quite a bit of support from China now. I didn't think that for a while, but I'm coming to the conclusion now that China is giving them very exquisite overhead support, for example, with their targeting and such. If you look at that, you think, well, their principal objective now is simply to unify Yemen and maybe, if unification goes well, extend that unification to parts of Yemen that were gobbled up by Saudi Arabia. And so they'd have a whole and intact Yemen, historically speaking, and one that is more or less ruled by their party, if you will.

And I don't know that that's compatible with anything Saudi Arabia would accept. So when I say that they should get busy and accept some of the Houthis' demands and see if that attenuates the attacks on them at all, I don't know that that wouldn't be just an intermission, and then suddenly it would pick up again. I do think the Gulf states are finished, with the possible exception of Oman. And when I say finished, I mean these totalitarian regimes, because that's what they are, that we have supported for years and years—decades—that we have helped keep alive. That black gold coming out of the ground has played a major role in keeping them alive, because they hoarded it and didn't let their people have it.

And now, if Aramco's head is to be believed, it's going to be three to five years before that comes back in the kind of quantities they're thinking about and are used to. They're done. I mean, with all that put together, it seems to me like this opportunity for change is going to be taken advantage of, and I have no idea why. Same thing I said when the Arab Spring was being lauded by everyone in the Bush administration, when Mubarak came down and Bahrain looked like it was going to collapse, and we saved it. But what do you do with a people, from one end of the region to the other, who have no legacy or history of anything but tribal governance?

And that tribal governance has a special flavor in Saudi Arabia, of course. It's allied with the most vicious Islamists in the world, the Wahhabists. How do you take that, destroy that whole ruling fabric, drive it out, if you will, get rid of it? Maybe you keep some of the revenue, if you can, and you get it restored and build a government in its place. How do you do that? I think of 1792 in France. You get Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, and ultimately you get Napoleon, and then you restore the monarchy. And then you go through what? Five republics.

And Macron looks like he's intent on another one. So I don't know how you pick up the pieces after that. But I do think we are not going to be there to help pick up the pieces, and this will be a positive, not a negative. Because I think we are going to be taught—or have it ingrained in our brains—that we were the biggest problem in the region. As Iran keeps saying, as others keep saying sotto voce, because they don't want us to hear yet, until they understand we're completely gone. I'm sure Baghdad would agree with this: you're the problem in the region. Israel is the problem because you're the problem.

#Glenn

The Iranians have become very explicit about that point, though. They keep making the point that, yes, the region is now being set on fire, but in order to fix these things, the problem, as they define it, is the United States. They can't have this external actor come in and try to dominate the region. Essentially, it's going to have to be the countries of the region that seek a security structure, a security architecture, to put it all in place. I'm thinking it could be in the U.S. interest.

If you go back to what Marco Rubio said in January last year, if he accepts many centers of power, then surely this would be liberating for the U.S., not to have to deal with what's happening in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. All of them are pretty much becoming a bit problematic. So I also don't see how the U.S. can go back to governing that whole region, especially after what's happened over the past few months. But I did want to just pivot a bit towards Ukraine. I was going to ask the same question there. Let me just say one thing. Go ahead.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You made a very important point there. Israel's the fly in that ointment. I mean, Israel's the fly in that ointment. Even if we accepted what you just described—and I think we're inevitably going to have to—then what do we do with Israel?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's like having a lion in the arena, and everyone else says, "I'm tired of watching the lion. I'm going away. Put the lion away." There's no place to put it. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

#Glenn

No, well, that's a good point. Because the U.S., you know, it's on the other side of the planet. It can pull back. But Israel is there, though. And I think that's the difficult aspect that the Iranians will also have to deal with. That is, unless they want to physically get rid of Israel altogether, when they call for an inclusive security architecture, at some point they will also have to find a way of accommodating Israeli concerns. I mean, I know for many that will be a difficult proposition, given that it's the one that sets all of these crises, all of these conflicts on fire. But a way of managing the security competition also has to accommodate the Israelis. Otherwise, I don't know, a whole new set of problems might emerge. Again, I'm not sure how these problems would be resolved. I haven't seen...

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think the Israeli-Palestinian Confederation has an answer to this. It's not me; I'm just a little tiny cog in it. And I don't know if you're familiar with it, but we have just hired Vocdoni, a very, very

competent Spanish firm, which has done all manner of things in the world in terms of online elections and things like that. And over the next two to two and a half years or so, they're going to run an election for us in Israel and Palestine.

And we're going to elect 300 parliamentarians, a vice president, and a president of a federal government that will be constitutionally founded and exist above any existing governments, whether it's the PA, Hamas, or Israel, of course. Over time, we'll forge a vision of peace and the right roads to that peace that will create a better situation, because we'll be the only government with legitimacy, with a constitution, with 300 parliamentarians, with a president and a vice president, that is interested in peace. Period. I know it sounds like a pipe dream, but I've been involved with it now for quite a while. Every other Sunday, we meet with people from Israel, people from Spain, people from Germany—all around the world—and we talk about this. And now we have hired this company to do this.

#Glenn

There are some possible solutions, yeah. Well, let me pivot to Ukraine again. If Marco Rubio's dream of last year was to accept that there will be many centers of power, then that would require a different peace than what you would demand if you're seeking to restore global primacy. So what do you see Trump currently pursuing in Ukraine? Because there's been a revival of the diplomatic path again. Is this a way of prolonging the war through deception again, or do you see something fundamentally shifting?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

If Trump sticks to his guns, whatever they are, I think he's doing what he should have done right after his inauguration, what he promised to do. He's doing it under less than savory circumstances, you might say. But nonetheless, he's doing it. He's doing it two million dead people late, but he's doing it. And the biggest obstacle I see right now to his doing it is Zelensky. And, you know, I almost feel like Henry II: “Won't someone rid me of that troublesome priest?” I think I'll dispatch a team of knights out there to take care of Zelensky, you know. Call it unsavory. That's certainly what the EU leadership is doing. Terrible thing to do. They've got 93 billion euros, I think, still waiting for Zelensky to tap. But I think that's the only way you're going to get an end to it.

And that's going to be a fractious 10 years at least, with a DMZ, probably with troops from Fiji patrolling the DMZ, because you're not going to be able to put any troops in there from any of the disputing countries. Certainly no NATO troops. And Britain can demand that all day long. Tough. It's not going to work. But you need to get it halted. And if Trump does it and it's ugly, so be it, as long as it halts it—and halts it on some kind of basis that gives Ukraine, rump state that it will be, not such a cold winter, not such a disaster in terms of what might happen if we go on further with this. Maybe access to Odessa and maybe the river in general, and an opportunity to heal and to use some of that 93 billion euros for rebuilding Ukraine, such as it is.

#Glenn

So you think there's still a possibility, then, for a diplomatic settlement? Because, again, they are talking now about peace. And indeed, some Europeans are actually talking to Russia, which is something we haven't seen for four and a half years. But at the same time, they're miles apart. The Russian demands are very high. They want a whole new European security architecture, which means reconsidering what we've done over the past 30 years. They're going to have to admit at some point to their own public, once they recognize it, that it's not about Russia seeking new territories. This was about European security. They're going to have to explain to their public why they lied, why they let hundreds of thousands die while boycotting diplomacy. I mean, it's going to be impossible. So if this can't be done, wouldn't it look more likely that the Russians would simply win on the battlefield instead? But again, I'm not sure what that would look like.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, I'm not either, except that there'll probably not be enough of Ukraine left to even worry about. You know, I think what you're looking at is what I used to tell my students in seminars on both campuses. Domestic politics oftentimes—and quite frequently in liberal democracies or republics that pretend to be the same—has a more significant influence on national security decision-making than anything else. That is what is happening right now. From Merz to Macron to—you name them—they all, particularly in the EU, have their political power base built on this business of Russophobia. That's what really pushed them into prominence.

I would have said, before the special military operation, that no one even considered this as a tool for their political survival. I didn't have much knowledge of what was going on from about 2014 onward with regard to Ukraine, and Europeans didn't have much knowledge of that—not accurate knowledge. They made it the tool for their political survival. Couple that with the fact that we'd been working on all of Europe and only failed with Spain, in my eyes. We succeeded with everyone from Finland to France in getting them to be afraid of Russia so they'd be more attuned to being members of NATO, or at least, if not that, sharing their territory with us for our bases and such. We succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. Those two things made Europe impossible to deal with in terms of diplomacy, and sound diplomacy in particular.

So you've got to get rid of them. Germany is doing it slowly but surely with that statuesque blonde. She is doing it, and Merz looks like a fool beside her in their own parliament. Will he be able to change his mind? Probably not, because his political foundation—and, to a certain extent, that of his coalition—is based on what they created, and that is fear of Moscow. When those people are gone and saner heads rule, I think we'll have a change. But you're right, it may be extremely difficult to get to that point.

#Glenn

Just one last question: let's say the United States decides to go this route, that is, to begin to pull back a bit from the Middle East because, I mean, it's more of a headache than it's worth, and to begin to pull back from Europe. And on that front, you see it actually being done. What do you see the Europeans doing under this scenario? Because, again, I think this is the main concern now for many Europeans: their entire geopolitical model, as well as their economy—everything—has been tied to their partnership with the United States.

There's a slow recognition that we're not going back to the old status quo after all of these wars. That is, in the Middle East, you're going to have a much more central role for Iran. And in Europe, there will be no more European security architecture based on perpetually expanding NATO and putting this military architecture around Russia. I mean, you can love it or hate it, but countries like Russia, Iran, and China will have a much more profound role in the new world order. And it's unclear what the role of the Europeans is going to be.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's a very good question, Glenn. And I don't pretend to have the answers, even remotely. But I do think what we're seeing in the Pacific is the building of a line to oppose China. We call it the second island chain or something like that. And it is going on even as I speak. Billions of dollars are being spent on it, all the way from Guam down to Papua New Guinea. I think we were trying to create that same thing in Europe, if you can attribute any sanity at all to our strategy—not necessarily with NATO, though we would have taken that as the appellation that went along with it, but in terms of European opposition to China through Russia.

So what's happened, I think, is that the Europeans in part, but mostly us, have caused that to fail. Ukraine did not really work in that regard. But what it did do was get the Europeans to—what are they up to now, 5% of GDP promised for defense? Yes. Even if they only get to three and a half or four, that leaves them in a pretty good fallback position. They could give the 93 billion euros, for example, to themselves and really create a European security architecture based on their own needs, much the way Powell and others envisioned at the end of the Cold War when we talked about the ESI, the European Security Identity, which would be separate from NATO. What does that do in my calculus?

What does that do to the approach we would then have if everything is focused on that second island chain and using Korea and Japan in a major way—and they know that now—and Taiwan in a major way—and they know that—to reinforce that island chain in the ways they can to fight China? In China's face. I mean, this is going to be in China's face. And the South Koreans are really roiled about this right now. They think they're going to be a pawn in this battle. They think it's going to be a losing battle. They think it's going to be economically disastrous for them.

Just wait till we get a government that is able to put that into political practice, and we probably will leave the peninsula at their request. So, you know, people say we never made the shift we said we

were going to make to the Pacific. Oh, we did. It's all happening right now, with Hegseth spending billions of dollars on it. Billions of dollars. People on the Hawaiian Islands tell me I don't want to come back, because there's so much money being spent there by the Defense Department on things that the natives in particular, as it were, but also the haoles, think are crazy. They're just tearing up Oahu, for example, to build this whole new complex.

A lot of it's going underground and on the other side of the mountains, where a lot of it already was. All I'm trying to say is that we are finally shifting—majorly shifting. You could say it was forced on us by this failure in Europe. Now the Europeans have to pick up on that failure and secure themselves. And with new governments, as I was saying, I think they might do that sanely and together, rather than separately and insanely. I don't know that, but I prefer that. And we would still offer our nuclear umbrella for whatever it is they create, so they don't have to spread the nuclear problem. Then we're focused that way. And that's what we've been saying for years.

And one of the things, Glenn—this is really interesting to me—one of the things that stopped us from fulfilling that was Southwest Asia. You know, we kept saying we were returning our focus to China, to the Pacific. And we kept staying in Southwest Asia with a major troop component, a major naval component, a major air component. And Israel, of course. So maybe we are finally doing what we said we were going to do: focusing on China. Now, you know what I think about that in military terms. Okay, fine to have yourself ready, but don't antagonize. Don't put it in their face. Don't make them have to build out their nuclear weapons complex to match yours, because that's what we're doing.

#Glenn

It is interesting for the Europeans, though, because they seem to be under the impression that the war, or proxy war, with Russia was going to cement the American position in Europe. It was going to make NATO stronger than ever. But again, instead, it only accelerated the US departure from Europe and, of course, brought NATO down with it. So these are extraordinary developments. Anyway, Colonel, I've already taken enough of your time. Do you have any final thoughts? No, I would just say that I think NATO is passé, and it's been passé ever since the Cold War ended.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

We just didn't figure it out, and we're figuring it out in a very tortured way, both of us—Europeans and Americans.