

John Mearsheimer: World Changed Forever as Iran Defeated the U.S.

Prof. John Mearsheimer argues that Iran's victory over the U.S. will transform the international system. The U.S. alliance system is in decline, NATO is done, and Project Ukraine will also be impacted. John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, where he has taught since 1982. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdiesen Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Today is Friday, the 10th of April, and we are joined by none other than Professor John Mearsheimer. Thank you for coming back on. It's always my pleasure, Glenn. These are crazy times indeed. We saw that Trump threatened to wipe out the entire Iranian civilization, with its 90-plus million citizens. Then he embraced the sudden ceasefire, which he seemingly undermined almost immediately afterward. Then he claimed victory and began to distance himself from some of the key requirements of the ceasefire deal. It's confusing, so I was hoping that if anyone can shed some light on this, it would be you.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah, I think it is somewhat confusing, for sure. And I think because President Trump, you know, frequently contradicts himself and says outrageous things, it sometimes feels like it's hard to make sense of what's going on here. But I actually think it's quite straightforward. If you look at his two tweets on Monday, they tell you a great deal. Now, what exactly am I saying? I think, from an overarching perspective, you want to understand that President Trump is desperate to end this war. He fully understands that we are close to going off a precipice—that if this war is not shut down, we could end up in a global depression worse than what we saw in the late 1920s—and he wants to do everything he can to avoid that.

So you get two tweets on Monday—one in the morning and one in the evening—and they're very different, for sure. But they both show evidence of desperation. In the morning, he says he's going to wipe Iran off the face of the earth, that he's going to destroy Iranian civilization forever. This is a genocidal threat of the first order. It's the kind of language you'd expect from Adolf Hitler, not from an American president. What's going on here is that he's desperate, and he's threatening to

annihilate the Iranians to get them to throw up their hands before he has to attack them that evening. He wants them to concede defeat.

By the end of the day, he does a 180-degree turn and says there's going to be a ceasefire. But most importantly, he says the ceasefire will be based on Iran's 10-point plan. Now, you have to understand that there are two plans on the table. One is the 15-point American plan, which includes all the maximalist demands of the United States and Israel. And then there's the Iranian 10-point plan, which includes all the maximalist demands of the Iranians. He says the negotiations will take place on the basis of the Iranians' 10-point plan. This is really quite remarkable. He says the 10-point plan provides a workable basis for an agreement. And again, these are the maximalist demands of the Iranian government.

He says, furthermore, in the tweet, that almost all the points of contention between the two sides have been resolved. Again, remarkable. What's going on here? He's basically found the off-ramp, and the off-ramp is to concede defeat. It's the only off-ramp. He's long had two options. One is that he could go up the escalation ladder, which is what he was threatening to do in the morning. But as I've argued for a long time, he can't go up the escalation ladder because he loses at every step. And the idea that he's going to obliterate Iran—this is not acceptable. This cannot be done. So he can't escalate. He's got to find an off-ramp. But the only off-ramp is surrender, to concede defeat.

And what he does in the second tweet—again, he reverses gears, goes in the opposite direction, and concedes defeat. He says, "We're going to negotiate on the basis of the 10-point plan." This means none of our demands are going to be achieved. None of the big four demands that we made before the war started and after the war started are going to be realized. And we're going to negotiate on the basis of the maximalist demands that Iran has put on the table. So what I'm saying to you, Glenn, is if you look at the morning tweet and you look at the evening tweet, you see that Trump is desperate. He's desperate to end this war. He wants to get a ceasefire as quickly as possible, and then he wants to start negotiations.

#Glenn

But it seems like he wants to have it both ways, because yes, he concedes defeat—he'll accept that Iran will set up a toll on the Strait of Hormuz, will agree to a ceasefire that includes Lebanon, all these things. But then, once the ceasefire is in place, he still seems to want to claim victory. So now his tweets are about, "Well, you know, you better not put any tolls on the Strait of Hormuz, and Lebanon's not included." It looks like he wants to have it both ways. He concedes defeat to get the ceasefire, but once he has the ceasefire, he wants to make this victory claim. I noticed that Pete Hegseth also tried to do this victory lap—just reading out all the people who are dead, all the people they killed, as a way of suggesting that this was victory. But did you see it in a similar way? Did you see the attempt to claim victory here? Because, you know, given what they had to agree to and what they're claiming, there seems to be a massive gap there.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, first of all, Glenn, they don't have a ceasefire. Because to have a ceasefire, the Iranians have to open the Strait of Hormuz. And the Iranians have refused to open the Strait of Hormuz because the Israelis are bombing Lebanon and attacking Hezbollah inside Lebanon. The Iranians say there will be no ceasefire—the Strait of Hormuz will not be opened until the Israelis stop attacking Hezbollah. And that hasn't happened. So the Israelis are undermining the ceasefire. You have to understand that, first of all, there's the ceasefire, but then there are the negotiations to end the war. But before you can get to the negotiations, you have to get a ceasefire. And we don't have a ceasefire. That's the key point to understand.

And the question is whether or not President Trump is going to be willing to lean on Netanyahu in a really serious way to get him to stop attacking Hezbollah. And then we'll get a ceasefire. Then the strait will be opened. But in terms of Hegseth and Trump declaring victory, this is putting lipstick on a pig. Come on, it's clear we've lost. Just think about it—we went into this war with four demands. One was regime change. Two was that Iran would get rid of its nuclear enrichment capability. Three, that Iran would eliminate all its long-range ballistic missiles. And four, that Iran would stop supporting the Houthis, Hezbollah, and Hamas. None of those four demands have been realized. None. Furthermore, Iran now controls the Strait of Hormuz, which gives it enormous leverage.

Furthermore, Iran still has a huge inventory of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones, which allows it to attack American bases and forces in the region, as well as the GCC states that are allied with the U.S. So Iran is in an excellent position today compared to where it was on February 27th. And furthermore, as I said, President Trump, in his Truth Social posts on Monday night—this was April 6th—said we're going to negotiate on the basis of the 10-point plan that the Iranians have put on the table. This is a clear defeat. And by the way, it's an even bigger defeat for Israel. In Israel, there's all sorts of talk to that effect. The Israelis fully understand that if you look at where this train is headed, this is a catastrophic defeat for them. And of course, it is for President Trump as well.

#Glenn

Well, in the future, if Israel or any of the Western states want to attack Yemen, attack Lebanon, or commit genocide against the Palestinians again, then Iran could just shut down or increase the toll. They have different steps up the escalation ladder they can take. They can block some ships. I don't know—this gives massive instrumental power to the Iranians. I mean, they seem like they'll come out of this conflict maybe not as a superpower, but at least adjacent to a great power. This is quite an instrumental power they have. And as you said, they didn't have this before the war, so...

#John Mearsheimer

Well, there are two points to be made. First of all, I think you don't want to overestimate how powerful a position Iran is in. Because of years of sanctions and because of the destruction we've

wrought on Iran since February 28th, Iran, in a very real way, has been devastated. This is a country that's been wrecked in a lot of ways. So the idea that they're coming out of this war in great shape is wrong. They're going to have to spend many billions of dollars over many years to recover, or even come close to recovering, from all the damage that we and the Israelis have inflicted on them. There's no question, though, that given the fact they control the Strait of Hormuz, they have a huge amount of leverage.

And I'd take it a step further, Glenn. You have to remember that the Houthis are their allies. They're one of the three groups the Iranians remain very close to—the Houthis, Hezbollah, and Hamas. And the Houthis can shut down the strait that leads out of the Red Sea, as they've done in the past. So the Iranians, working with the Houthis, have the ability to shut down traffic coming out of the Red Sea through the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, and they also have the capability to shut down traffic coming out of the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz. So they do have enormous leverage—there's just no question about that.

And this is going to present huge problems for the Israelis moving forward, and for the Americans as well. And by the way, Glenn, just to take this a step further—if you look at the maximalist demands of the Iranians, one of them is that all American military forces leave the region. I find it hard to believe that that will happen. But I would note that we have 13 bases—well, let me put it differently—we had 13 bases in the region on February 28th. And The New York Times reports that of those 13 bases, all of them have either been destroyed or badly damaged. You just want to think about that. Our presence in the Gulf has been seriously undermined by this war.

The 13 bases we depended on are basically gone, or almost gone. And then you have to ask yourself: are the Gulf states that hosted us on those bases going to want the United States to come back and rebuild them? As I said, there's also the question of whether we're going to want to do that, right? And then there's the point that the Iranians want us out of the region. So what our military presence looks like when all the dust settles is hard to say, but we're not going to be more—we're going to be less influential, with less power and less power-projection capability in the Gulf when all is said and done than we had before February 28th.

#Glenn

It's quite extraordinary how horrible this war was. But again, it was a defeat—and I'm not sure what else Trump could have done other than accept defeat, because there was obviously growing desperation. I'm just wondering where you think most of the pressure came from. Was it that they were running out of missiles—interceptor missiles, in other words, the military? Was it the massive economic pressure, especially the rising oil prices? Or was it the political havoc at home, the loss of voters? What other dimensions to this disaster do you think we're missing?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think the secondary factor is that, militarily, we couldn't figure out how to win the war in any meaningful way. A ground invasion didn't make sense. We couldn't use the Navy to do much of anything. We just didn't have many options, and I think that was becoming manifestly clear. And remember, in that rescue operation where they got the second pilot out, we lost more aircraft that day than we had lost on any single day since the Vietnam War. Think about that—since the Vietnam War, we had never lost as many aircraft in one day as we did in that rescue mission. It just shows we were not doing well militarily. So I think that was of secondary importance.

I think what's of primary importance here is what's happening to the world economy. I think the Chinese and the Russians are very scared about what the long-term consequences of this war are going to be for the world economy. That includes the supply of food around the world, as well as oil and gas. I believe the Chinese put pressure on the Iranians and talked at great length with the Pakistanis about getting Iran to come to the negotiating table, to work out a ceasefire, and then start talking about settling this war. I think the Chinese understand full well that this will have disastrous consequences for everyone—and I want to underline that word, everyone. If this war continues, it has to be shut down.

If you look at what's happening in East Asia—and this includes countries like South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and the potential for really grave damage in China and countries like Russia over the long term—everybody understands. And I believe the Trump administration understands that we have to shut this one down. So I think you see Trump trying to do that. It's Trump who's actually been pushing hard for some sort of exit option, some way of settling this war. No question that Trump is deeply interested in doing that. But the Iranians, as I've long argued, have a vested interest in stringing this out. The Iranians don't want to settle this war quickly, because the longer the war goes on, the more damage is done to the international economy, and the deeper the panic that Trump is in, the more leverage the Iranians have.

So it's no problem, I think, from the Iranian point of view, if the ceasefire doesn't work out, because as the conflict goes on, their leverage increases. But nevertheless, I believe what happened here is that the Chinese, working with the Pakistanis and directly with the Iranians, put great pressure on Iran. They might have even brought the Russians in to put pressure on Iran to go to the negotiating table, because this one has to be shut down. So I think as you look at the situation today, you go back to those two tweets from President Trump on Monday—this is April 6th—and you move forward to the present, and then project out into the future. I think it's the global economy that's really driving the train here.

#Glenn

Yes, probably true. I think even now that, well, even if the war ends now, the amount of damage already done is quite tremendous, especially for the Europeans and Asians. We can maybe put Africa in that same category. But we've seen some reports of more U.S. troops heading to the region. I don't know—I haven't seen the exact numbers. But do you think this is—I mean, it seems unlikely

that Trump wants to have another go at this, because I'm not sure what he's going to do with the troops. As you said, boots on the ground never really made any sense at all. Or is it just pressure, hoping that the U.S. will have a little bit more leverage in the negotiations? Because, you know, this is just a two-week ceasefire that's supposed to produce an actual peace agreement.

That peace agreement is going to be very difficult for Trump to get at the moment. The ceasefire deal is a bit ambiguous—there doesn't seem to be a written document they can point to. It's easy for him to harmonize his claim of victory with the need to, I guess, capitulate. But in an actual peace agreement, it's going to be very hard to square that. I'm just wondering, how do you see the possible ways this war could actually end? Because, again, we have to move from a ceasefire to an actual peace agreement. Or do you think Trump's just going to try to extend the ceasefire indefinitely and, you know, just avoid putting anything on paper so he doesn't have to admit defeat, essentially? Yeah.

#John Mearsheimer

Glenn, he has to admit defeat. He admitted defeat Monday night. Again, we're on the precipice—we've got to shut this one down. He has no choice here. You talk about sending ground forces to the region, a ground force option—that's really going to work well, right? That's going to get a quick agreement? Are you kidding? That's just going to make a bad situation worse. There's no ground force option here. There's no naval option. There's no air option. I guess, you know, he could use nuclear weapons and destroy Iran forever. I guess we could do that—we have that capability. Is he going to do that? No, he's not going to do that. So he's got to shut this one down. And he's between a rock and a hard place because the Israelis won't cooperate with him.

The Israelis won't even allow him to get a ceasefire. The Strait of Hormuz is still effectively closed. The only ships that get through are the ones the Iranians let through. So he can declare victory and talk about how we've gotten everything we wanted, that our goals have been achieved, and so forth. But nobody's going to believe that. We lost. The Israelis lost it. The problem is there are just so many alternative media outlets where all this is made clear—your show being one of them—that they can't put lipstick on a pig and get away with it. Pete Hegseth can say we won. Donald Trump can say we won. But who believes that?

Hardly anybody. You see this in the Israeli case—you know, they'll be talking about all the wonderful things they've done because the government has a vested interest in saying that. But all sorts of people are going to point out that this is a ludicrous argument. They didn't win. They lost. Uh, so what I would say to President Trump—and I don't think he needs me to tell him this, because I'm sure his advisors are telling him the same thing—is that this has to be shut down immediately. I'm sure that's exactly what Vance is telling him. I'd bet a lot of money on that—that this has to be shut down. And they're sending Vance to head this team of negotiators because they know Vance.

#John Mearsheimer

Uh, you know, you don't want to depend on Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. I mean, these are basically Israeli assets—not to mention the fact that they're incompetent. They have a demonstrated record of incompetence now. So you want someone like Vance in charge, and hopefully he can shut this down. Uh, but it'll be tough. You know, Glenn, just to go back to the Ukraine war and think about all the endless conversations we've had about ending the war in Ukraine—President Trump was determined to end that war even before he came into office. And if he didn't settle it before he came in, he was going to settle it after he came into office.

He's been a colossal failure. He and his lieutenants have bumbled around and really, uh, made a hash of the negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. It's the gang that can't shoot straight, right? Well, here we are now, trying to shut down another war, and it's the Trump administration again. And the question you have to ask yourself is, can they do it? If the cast of characters involved is just President Trump, Steve Witkoff, and Jared Kushner, I'd say we're in deep trouble. But Vance is our great hope here. He's the new boy in town when it comes to negotiating with an adversary, and we're all just hoping he can pull it off.

I'm sure the Chinese and the Russians, not to mention the Indians, the South Koreans, the Japanese, the Indonesians—people all over Africa, people all over the world—are pulling for Vance to work out a ceasefire and then sit down and negotiate some sort of settlement so we can get the Strait opened, get the fertilizer flowing—we have to get that fertilizer flowing—and get the oil and gas moving as well. We're not going to immediately go back to the status quo ante in terms of how much those goods come out of the Gulf, but it'll be a good start. We have to do this immediately, and I believe President Trump understands that. It's just hard to miss what's going on here. I'm sure countries all around the world are calling the White House every day, saying this is a colossal disaster—something has to be done.

And again, I think the Chinese and the Russians fully understand this. These are the responsible stakeholders in the system—the Chinese and the Russians, not the United States. But I think at a certain point, even the United States, even the Trump administration, gets the message. This is my reading of the situation. And again, Glenn, I would say just go back and look at the two Truth Social posts he wrote on Monday—what he said in the morning about annihilating Iranian culture, and then look at what he said in the evening. He did a 180-degree turn and said, “We accept Iran's ten-point plan as a basis for negotiations.” This is truly remarkable, and it reflects the desperation. And by the way, if he doesn't understand—if I'm wrong, if he and his lieutenants don't understand—just give them another week or two. They'll understand what's going on here in terms of the world economy.

#Glenn

I think we should all probably be happy that Vance will take over some negotiations. Something good could come from this. If he's successful—at least more successful than Witkoff and Kushner—then perhaps Trump will have the wisdom to also send him to Moscow. Because it seems, well,

Vance seems more genuine, not just in opposing the Iran war, but actually wanting to put an end to the Ukraine war as well. He doesn't seem to have any appetite left for throwing more lives and money into this, uh, big black hole. So, uh, again, something good could come from this, perhaps—but, uh, it is.

#John Mearsheimer

Can I make just one quick point on what you said? You do want to remember, though, that if Vance negotiates a settlement in which we lose—uh, and this is certainly true in the Gulf, and I believe it would be true in settling the Ukraine war—the right in the United States, the neoconservatives, who are a key element in the Republican Party, will blame him and go after him hammer and tongs. So you just want to understand that politically, for Vance, he's in a very dangerous situation. There's no question that for the good of the United States, for the good of the Trump presidency, and for the good of the world, we need him to behave in smart and brave ways to end this disaster.

We just need him to do that. But if he's successful—and let's hope he is—he'll pay a political price here in the United States. The question you have to ask yourself is whether that will affect how he approaches these negotiations. He's surely aware of the point I just made. I mean, he's a very smart man, whether you agree with his policy views or not. He's a smart man, and he's surely figured this out. But let's just hope that, you know, he puts the good of the country—and really the good of the world—it sounds funny saying that, but really we are talking about the good of the world here—above his own narrow political interests, and that he works hard to get a settlement and is successful.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's a great point. I actually didn't consider the domestic politics of the whole thing, but making that kind of humiliating peace—which has to be made—or maybe not humiliating, but, well, yeah, perhaps humiliating, is definitely going to come at a price.

#John Mearsheimer

No, it's going to be a humiliating peace. I hadn't thought of the language you used, but I think you're right. And as I said to you before, I don't think you can put lipstick on a pig in this case. It's just not going to work, because people like us are going to point out what's going on. Even places like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal will, in the end, have to fess up and say that this is a real defeat. And by the way, you'll see this in Israel as well. I mean, you know, we talk about Donald Trump making a catastrophic mistake—well, Bibi Netanyahu, whew, a huge mistake. And as I said before, you do not want to underestimate the trouble they're having in Lebanon. Right, they're not doing well. The Israelis are not doing well in Lebanon. So Israel is in terrible shape as a result of what's happened since February 28th.

#Glenn

Well, that's a good point, because I think the Israelis also bet everything on knocking out Iran here. I mean, that was supposed to be the head of the snake. And because they were already overstretched, they're not successful in Gaza, they're not successful in Lebanon, and now, of course, none of the objectives were achieved in the war against Iran. I saw today that the IDF told the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, that the new government in Iran was, quote, "more extreme." So again, this goes a little bit against what we're hearing from Washington—that this is a better government, easier to work with. But I think that never made any sense.

You can't, you know, you can't bomb a country to bits and then assume that relations will be better—especially if the country you bombed to bits comes out on top in the war. So, yeah. Yeah, I do wonder, though, how the Israelis are going to deal with this, because they can't really afford to back down either. Again, they bet everything on this. I mean, if what you're saying is correct—that the U. S. presence will be severely diminished in the Middle East—then Israel's position will be weakened. Iran, which was the main adversary and was supposed to be destroyed in this war, if not regime-changed and broken up, would at least be left chaotic like Syria.

Now it's going to come out on top. I mean, this is a horror show for the Israelis. It's hard to imagine that they'll accept this. I'm not sure what else they can do, short of launching a nuclear weapon at the Iranian capital. But how do you think the Israelis are going to deal with it? Will this fuel domestic divisions, maybe even a civil war? Or will they try to seek another victory on a different front? I don't know. How are they going to deal with this? Because it's just hard to see how they're going to recover.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah. Before I try to answer that question, let me just point out that this war has done significant damage to the U.S.–Israeli relationship. The United States is now in a catastrophic war, right? This will long be seen as the most foolish foreign policy decision the United States has ever made. You know, the Council on Foreign Relations did a big study a few months ago where they surveyed American diplomatic historians and asked them what the most foolish foreign policy decision any president in U.S. history had ever made was.

What was clearly ranked number one was George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. There's absolutely no question in my mind that the decision to attack Iran on February 28th will be seen as a much worse decision than the invasion of Iraq in 2003. There's no question that invading Iraq in 2003 led to major trouble—it was a catastrophic decision in its own right. No question about that. It did enormous damage in the region, to America's reputation, and so on. But in my opinion, it pales in comparison to the decision President Trump made on February 28th.

Now, in terms of U.S.–Israeli relations, it's becoming manifestly clear—because there's an abundance of evidence—that it was the Israelis who led President Trump into this war. A big New York Times story that recently came out describing the decision-making process made it clear that hardly anyone in the deep state, hardly any of Trump's close advisers, were enthusiastic about this enterprise. In fact, many of them were serious doubters, including the head of the CIA, the vice president, and so on. But President Trump did it because Prime Minister Netanyahu and David Barnea, the head of Mossad, convinced him that this would lead to a quick and decisive victory.

So it's widely recognized that it was the Israelis who led us into this disastrous war. That's point number one. And point number two, as we watch what's happening now, it's the Israelis who are preventing us from getting a ceasefire to end this disastrous war. This point is not lost on most Americans. U.S. views—the American public's views, the American elite's views—on Israel are undergoing a sea change. You can see it in the poll data. And in my opinion, this situation only gets worse with the passage of time, because once the shooting stops, the dust settles, and people begin to reflect on the causes of this disaster. And you want to remember one thing, Glenn.

I learned this during the Vietnam War. When a country loses a war, everybody goes back to the causes. They want to figure out, how did this ever happen? When you win, you don't care that much about the causes, right? You won and you celebrate the victory. When you lose—especially when it's a disastrous loss like this—people are going to want to know, how did this happen? How could a country like the United States do this? How could President Trump, who had been such a great politician and had been so careful in the use of military force, allow himself to fall off the cliff like this? What happened?

And what they'll discover very quickly—because again, the evidence is clear—is that it was the Israelis who led him by the nose into this disaster. And that is going to damage U.S.–Israeli relations. So you want to remember that, on top of all the things you and I have talked about up to now, U.S.–Israeli relations are going to be badly damaged as well. So your question is, where do we go from here? And in particular, where do the Israelis go from here? I think this is going to cause huge trouble inside Israel. I think it's going to lead to all sorts of domestic unrest.

There are going to be serious political fights between Netanyahu on one side and other political leaders on the other, over who's responsible for this and what price should be paid, and so forth. But I think, most importantly and most disturbingly, the Israelis will begin to think long and hard about using nuclear weapons against Iran. I think for most Americans—and this is certainly true for Europeans as well—we understand that Iran is not a serious threat to us. I mean, Iran is not a serious threat to the United States. They didn't attack us; we attacked them. How is Iran a serious threat to the United States?

You just can't make that argument. But that's not the way Israel thinks about Iran. Israel sees Iran as a mortal enemy. They think this is the second coming of the Third Reich. They've convinced

themselves that Iran is determined to get a nuclear weapon and to use that weapon to eliminate Israel from the face of the earth. They don't believe Iran can be deterred. And they now understand—the Israelis now understand—that they can't prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon by conventional means. This is what the war demonstrates. They can't do it even with us conventionally. The only way they can do it is with a nuclear weapon.

And given how ruthless the Israelis are, and how willing they are to engage in genocide and murderous behavior, I would not put it past them to use a nuclear weapon against Iran. So one could argue that, yes, Israel is in deep trouble, and that the Iranian threat is not less than ever—it's greater than ever. You can make that argument from their perspective. But the question you then have to ask yourself is, where does that lead? You're talking about a country that has no problem executing genocides and has convinced itself that it will face a genocidal state armed with nuclear weapons in Iran down the road. And that's—you can imagine them trying to use, or actually using, their nuclear arsenal against Iran.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it all seems that for Netanyahu, the effort to portray Iran as dead set on acquiring nuclear weapons—and also as profoundly irrational—was instrumental in turning Israel's problems into America's problems. Because that would be the only way one could conceive of Iran as a threat to the United States: if it acquired nuclear weapons, couldn't be deterred, and was devoted to using them offensively. But it's interesting that they seem to buy into their own rhetoric about Iran's irrationality and determination to get a nuclear weapon. It also seems this is going to be devastating for the Trump administration, I think, because Trump's whole appeal was based on something else.

He was looking at the U.S. relative decline—that is, its power in the world, its military, its economy, the position of people in society—and he essentially blamed this on weak and foolish leaders: the weakness of Obama, the weakness of Biden, and also the foolishness of engaging in all these wars. So the solution was essentially strength. You needed a strong man. That was Trump. He was strong. If he was just tough, decisive, and assertive, this was essentially the medicine that would make America great again. And his toughness would be matched with intelligence—you know, his intelligence, his high IQ, as he always said—because he wouldn't do these foolish forever wars. But now, you know, he went in, and the rhetoric was all about how no one else dared to do this.

Trump did it, but there's a reason why no one else did it. And now, of course, he's the war president, and he did something foolish. I mean, his whole persona—his whole image of making America great again—seems to have been damaged. Even he's lost his key supporters. You probably saw him scolding Tucker Carlson, Alex Jones, Candace Owens—all these people who had supported him when he was the peace president. So he already had a lot of problems before this war, and now all those problems are much, much worse. So how do you think this is going to—well, the international economy, of course, is a mess, the military defeat was an embarrassment—but what do you think this is going to do to the political situation within the United States?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think this is going to destroy the Trump presidency. I mean, he may remain in office until the end of his term, but he's damaged goods in a truly serious way. But you have to think about where we stand on the world stage today. Before this war started on February 28th, the Trump administration had already done enormous damage to America's position in the world, largely because the president—who is the ultimate unilateralist—was wrecking international institutions, paying no attention to the rules that underpin those institutions. He was disregarding and disrespecting international law, and he was treating allies with unmitigated contempt, especially the Europeans. He was even talking about invading Greenland.

He was even talking about making Canada the 51st state. And if you went to East Asia, the Japanese and the South Koreans—this is before February 28th—had real doubts about relying on the United States for security. And of course, during 2025, he had seriously damaged what had been good relations with India. U.S.–India relations went south that year. So the United States, before February 28th, was already in real trouble in terms of its foreign policy. And what's happened since February 28th has just damaged us further. If you look at U.S.–European relations, think about all the damage that was done over the Ukraine war, then all the damage that was done over Greenland, and now we have this situation where President Trump is effectively trying to blame the Europeans for the fact that we can't defeat Iran.

He's implying that if only the Europeans had sent their military forces—especially their navies—to the Middle East, we would have been able to break through the Strait of Hormuz and ended Iran's stranglehold on the world economy. But that didn't happen. We failed. But why did we fail? Not because of the United States, but because of the Europeans. So if you think about U.S.–European relations today, they're terrible. And what about other countries around the world—the Japanese, the South Koreans, the Indonesians, the Indians? I mean, the United States is a rogue elephant. Do you really want to get too close to the Trump administration?

No, you want to keep your distance. I think, in terms of our foreign policy, he's done even greater damage than he did before February 28th. And I don't see how he digs himself out of this hole. In fact, I think, if anything, his behavior will become more erratic with the passage of time. This is a man who thinks he's a genius. He thinks he has the Midas touch. He thinks anything he does works out well, and he always emerges victorious. He's simply not going to be able to make that argument in this case. This is not like all the previous cases he got away with. And he's therefore seriously damaged goods as president of the United States, even if he manages to shut this one down reasonably quickly.

And that remains to be seen, as we were talking about before. In terms of his standing here in the United States, there's no way he's not going to take a huge hit politically. You can already see him, as you pointed out, going after people like Candace Owens, Tucker Carlson, and Alex Jones. These

are all people who've been big supporters of his in the past, and now he's in a major-league war with them. This is not going to help his standing. Furthermore, if you look at what's happening inside the MAGA base, and with Christian evangelicals under the age of 50, I think he has truly profound political problems at home—and on the foreign policy front as well.

#Glenn

I was also expecting that after a disaster like this, instead of going through the process you described before—having some openness, asking where we went wrong, airing out the trouble, learning something from the mistakes—I would assume he'd seek to blame others. I guess the Europeans or NATO would be good fall guys. And he'd also try to divert attention, maybe go for a quick victory—seize Cuba or Greenland, something like that. Just shift focus as quickly as possible, because you don't want to sit around thinking about all the things, or having too many debates in the country about all the things, you did wrong.

This can't do anything good for him. So I guess erratic behavior moving forward is a pretty reasonable prediction. But if we take a step back to the bigger picture, what do you think the world will look like after this? Because you and I have talked before about the emergence of a multipolar world—where the international distribution of power shows that the concentration we had in the '90s is now dispersed. Now you have many centers of power, and it looks as if this will only intensify that development.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think the United States has obviously lost this war, and that will become increasingly clear to more and more people. That's for sure. I don't think it will diminish American power. I think American power is based on material capabilities, and losing this war won't affect how much power the United States has. To make this point, I like to refer to the Vietnam War. We lost the Vietnam War—it was a catastrophic, decisive defeat—but it didn't affect American power. We remained as powerful as ever. That said, this is not to deny for one second that losing a war in Iran will have a profound impact on our ability to project that power around the world and to influence other states in ways favorable to the United States.

So this really matters. Again, I just want to be clear: we will remain as powerful as ever. And we do live in a multipolar world. As you know, Glenn, my argument is that we've lived in a multipolar world since 2017. The other two great powers on the planet are China and Russia, and they're not going away. In fact, one could argue that they're better off as a result of this war vis-à-vis the United States. But it's not that China and Russia have become more powerful relative to the United States because of the war—I don't think that's what's happened. I think America's ability to project power and to influence other countries has been seriously damaged, and that works to China's advantage and to Russia's advantage.

In other words, just to take the Russian case, the Russian economy has benefited from the United States taking sanctions off Russia, particularly in terms of selling oil. Furthermore, the Russians have benefited from the fact that there are fewer weapons available for us to give the Ukrainians to fight against Russia, because we're using up weapons and munitions at such a rapid pace in Iran. So this all works to Russia's advantage. And in terms of China—right—what's happening in East Asia is that we're pulling forces out of East Asia. We're pivoting away from the region because we have to move forces that are physically located there to the Middle East.

This works to China's advantage. It doesn't change the balance of power, but it changes our ability to contain China in East Asia. It creates a situation where our allies in East Asia really don't trust us very much anymore. Not only are we pivoting away from East Asia, moving military forces out of the region, but also—can you trust American judgment? Do you think the United States is a responsible ally that will take care of you in a crunch? I think if you're a Japanese leader or a South Korean leader, the answer to that question is no. You can't depend on the United States the way you once thought you could, or the way you once could.

So again, you see the damage we've done to ourselves. And to go back to our discussion of the Gulf and where we might end up—we may lose those 13 bases, never return to them, and have much less ability to project power in the Gulf after February 28th than we had before. So you see, our power position around the world, in terms of our ability to project power and influence other countries, has been badly damaged. And as we've said on numerous occasions, we've done enormous damage to international institutions, international law, and our treatment of allies before February 28th. The United States is in so much trouble.

#Glenn

You know, I think what I'd say is it's a relative decline, as you have the rise of other powers. Because if Iran could have been knocked out, that would have weakened the Russians and the Chinese, and I guess strengthened the hand of the United States. But measuring the ability to project power in terms of the alliance system as well is probably a good approach, because, as you said, the Gulf states are in a very vulnerable position now. I know the rhetoric is a bit harsh toward the Iranians, but at some point, if the U.S. presence is expected to diminish, they're going to have to try to make some peace with their neighbors.

I would say eventually the Europeans will have to do the same. We can't fight against the Russians on our own. If the Americans reduce their presence, we're going to have to learn how to get along with the Russians. You could say this might be part of the calculations they're making in East Asia as well. As for NATO, this seems to be not a casualty, but one of the organizations that's been hit hard by the Iran war, simply because of the mutual accusations. How do you think NATO will be affected by the way this war ended?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think this is all disastrous for NATO—or, to put it in slightly different terms, for transatlantic relations. The main reason, I think, is that President Trump is going to need a scapegoat for this disaster. The Europeans will probably be the number one scapegoat, because he won't blame Benjamin Netanyahu, who's the person he should blame. And he can't really blame his advisers, because none of them were enthusiastic about this. Maybe Pete Hegseth was—maybe they'll get rid of Pete Hegseth. But I think what he's going to do is blame the Europeans, and he's going to make the argument that if the Europeans had anteed up, if they had come to our rescue, we would have won the war.

The reason we lost was because our allies failed us. And given that situation, what we should do is basically stop supporting them. Will he end the alliance—just put an end to it? I don't think so. He might, but I think he'll so seriously damage the alliance that, in the end, it'll be largely meaningless. The other thing is, Glenn, he has, what, two years and three months—uh, two years and nine months—left in his presidency, almost three years left. You know how much damage he's done in the first, let's say, fifteen months. Can you imagine how much damage he's going to do in the remaining two years and nine months? It's going to be enormous. Right.

And in the meantime, the Europeans have to come up with some sort of defensive strategy for dealing with the Russians. I mean, you and I think their assessment of the Russian threat is completely overblown. But the fact is, the European elites do believe there's a serious Russian threat there. Let's take that as a given. And they also recognize that they can't rely on the United States anymore. The transatlantic partnership no longer exists. Call this a partnership? It's no longer there. So the Europeans, over the next two years and nine months, have to figure out how to deal with this situation. And that's going to push them to put NATO in the background and not take NATO seriously.

So I find it hard to believe that NATO will be a meaningful alliance in January 2029, when President Trump steps down. Now, one could argue he may step down before then—he could be impeached, he could have medical problems, and J.D. Vance could become president. And who knows what Vance would do? I tend to believe that Vance would have a more positive attitude toward NATO than Trump would, but how much more positive is hard to say. We all remember his Valentine's Day speech in Munich in February 2025. I mean, Vance didn't look like he was friendly toward Europe then. And if he became president, maybe he wouldn't be once he was in the White House. Who knows for sure? But the future of NATO looks grim, to put it mildly.

#Glenn

Yeah. No, it seems to be heading toward an end. But by extension, what will all of this mean? The loss in the Iran war, all the weapons and money that were spent, and the further economic problems for the Europeans—what does that mean for the Ukraine war? Because I see Zelensky has been taking to Twitter, and now that the Iran war is over, he's encouraging everyone to shift focus

back to Ukraine. But it's hard to see any appetite from Trump to deepen involvement there. So, if you take into account all these different variables, what would you expect? How do you think the Ukraine war will be affected by the loss in the Iran war, and by the fragmentation we're now seeing in NATO?

#John Mearsheimer

I think, first of all, I wish Zelensky were right—that the Iran war was over and we could now focus on Ukraine. But I think we're going to be focused on Iran for the foreseeable future. I mean, this is a catastrophic situation. And with regard to Ukraine... let's assume I'm wrong and that two weeks from now the war is effectively over. I don't think that's going to happen, but let's assume it does. Okay, and let's assume we then focus on Ukraine. What does that mean? Are we going to give Ukraine a whole set of weapons that would allow it to prevail on the battlefield, or at least do well there? I think the answer is no. I don't think they're going to get those weapons.

We've run down the inventory to the point where the last thing we want to do is give precious weapons and military assets to the Ukrainians. It's just not going to happen. And with regard to the Russians—we need Russian oil in global markets. We just need it, right, to head off economic catastrophe. So the Russians are going to continue to do well economically, at least in the short term. I'm sure they're getting ready to launch a major set of offensives against the Ukrainians. And the Ukrainians, as you and I have talked about many times, are in desperate straits. We're not in any position to rescue them. This is a perfect situation for President Trump to say the Europeans are responsible.

As you know, he's been pushing in that direction for a long time. So let the Europeans deal with the Ukraine situation, because you have to understand that if people like you and I are right, Glenn, and it's only a matter of time before the Ukrainians collapse on the battlefield, the Russians push them out of Donbas, and the Russians conquer even more territory on the eastern front, President Trump is going to want to avoid being blamed for that. He's going to want to blame the Europeans for Ukraine's defeat. I'm sure, in his head, he's positioning himself to create a situation where, if the Ukrainians lose to the Russians and the Russians win a victory in that war, he can say it's the Europeans' fault. We were in the fight for a long time.

And as long as we were in the fight, the Ukrainians did quite well. But we couldn't go on forever because we had other responsibilities around the world. And by the way, in terms of those other responsibilities—in places like the Middle East—the Europeans wouldn't help us. So we were in a position where we had to turn the responsibility for dealing with Ukraine over to the Europeans, and they failed. They are responsible for this defeat. So what he'll do moving forward is blame the Europeans for what's happening in Ukraine, while at the same time not giving them the necessary weaponry to help the Ukrainians hold their own on the battlefield. And furthermore, he'll blame the Europeans for the defeat in Iran. I mean, this is the way President Trump operates. He's not someone who ever accepts responsibility.

#Glenn

So I think that's what the future looks like. I think in one tweet he managed to squeeze in both blaming the Europeans for Iran and also saying "bye-bye" to Greenland or something. So he seems to be, yeah, preparing both the blame game and a distraction, it seems. But no—well, you can see what's going to happen. I think in Ukraine it's a bit strange that the Europeans aren't preparing themselves—not sending more weapons, but preparing themselves in terms of, you know, picking up the phone. That would be a good first move before this whole thing begins to unravel. But I spoke recently with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, and he was making the point that he feels not just the United States, but Europe, is growing increasingly irrational.

And after that, I thought about asking you—do we have a good theory in international relations about rationality and declining hegemony, or collective hegemony like the United States and Europe? Because it seems that over the past few years we've been in at least relative decline. As problems build up in society, the assumption we had—that we built a society on ideological superiority—starts to falter. You'd expect society and our leaders to fully embrace reason, especially after military defeats like the one we suffered in Iran, or amid economic decline and social turmoil. I know that in political realism we assume the state is rational, but at least the neoclassical realists would challenge that assumption. So how would you assess, or how do you expect, the reason or rationality of states to function in the years to come?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, as you know, I wrote this book with Sebastian Rosato called **How States Think**, which deals directly with the question of rationality. In fact, the opening case we talk about is Putin's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. Our basic argument in the book is that states are rational if they pursue a policy based on a theory of international politics that makes good sense—that is, a plausible theory. If you don't have a plausible theory underpinning your policy, then you're acting irrationally. We also argue that the decision-making process matters as well: you have to have a process that allows all the key players in the room to voice their opinions in a rational, legal way.

And yeah, so that was our definition. I think if you look at various cases, like Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, that was clearly rational. He thought NATO expansion was a threat to Russia—an existential threat—and he launched a preventive war to make sure Ukraine did not become part of NATO. So that was, in our opinion, a rational decision. One could argue it was the wrong decision, or that it was illegal or immoral. But whether a decision is rational or not depends on whether you have an underlying theory—a plausible theory—that underpins the policy. Now, let's just talk a little bit about the Europeans.

I believe that the Europeans' behavior toward the United States, which is often labeled as irrational, is actually not irrational, because it has a simple theory underpinning it—a theory you could argue is

legitimate. What am I saying here? The Europeans have a deep-seated interest in keeping the United States actively involved in Europe. They want the American pacifier to remain in place. Another way to put it is that the Europeans want NATO to remain intact. Therefore, they'll do everything they can to accommodate the Americans so the Americans don't get angry at them and remain in Europe, because it's so important, from a strategic point of view, for the Europeans to have that American pacifier in place. Now, you could argue that that strategy is wrong.

You could have a different theory that says it would make much more sense for the Europeans to grow a backbone, understand that their close relationship with the United States is over, that they can't depend on the American pacifier anymore, and therefore they should act differently. A good realist like me would say that's how they should behave. But that's not to say the strategy they've employed is irrational, because there are different strategies based on different theories out there. The question is, do you have a plausible theory? And I think the Europeans' behavior toward the Americans is based on a plausible theory. I think it's the wrong theory, but there are lots of different theories, and those theories are all plausible.

I could go into this in greater detail—I won't now. But anyway, I think a lot of what the Europeans do is not irrational. I do think it's wrong, right? But just because something is wrong doesn't mean it's irrational. Let me give you one example of that: NATO expansion. NATO expansion was opposed by almost all realists, because all realists like me have a simple theory that says if you move NATO up to Russia's border, the Russians are going to react and you're going to have conflict—really serious trouble. Therefore, you don't want to expand NATO. And if you do expand NATO, it's going to lead to big trouble.

There was a whole set of liberal theories that underpinned our policy, not realist theories. The realist theories were rejected. The advice of realists like George Kennan and John Mearsheimer was ruled out of court. But the liberal theories said that what we want to do is move NATO eastward, and we want to create a zone of peace in Eastern Europe. That zone of peace would be based on a series of liberal theories. One is democratic peace theory—the idea that if we could spread democracy eastward into Eastern Europe, to include Russia at some point, we would create a giant zone of peace, because democracies don't fight other democracies.

They also relied on the theory of economic interdependence. The idea was that you would move the EU eastward and create a situation with a great deal of economic interaction in Eastern Europe, maybe eventually including the Russians in that. The end result, they believed, was that economic interdependence would produce peace and we would all live happily ever after. So there was a set of liberal theories—prominent, highly respected in academia—that underpinned the policy. If you read the commentary by Strobe Talbott and Madeleine Albright at the time of NATO expansion in the 1990s, their policy prescription for NATO expansion was based on these liberal theories.

I thought it was wrongheaded, but I didn't think it was irrational. That may sound funny to some viewers, but I think there's a difference between thinking a theory is wrong and thinking it's

irrational. A lot of what's done in international politics can be wrong, but not necessarily irrational. I could go on—there are plenty of examples of American behavior in particular, and even European behavior in recent times, that would fit under the rubric of irrational.

#Glenn

No, I think that's a good way of explaining it. And, no, I would agree. I don't think the European policy was irrational. As you said, it was a powerful theory. And, you know, you can link it a little bit to both political realism and liberalism—that is, the hegemonic peace. As long as the U.S. was all-powerful, the Europeans could benefit. For one thing, there would be no great power rivalry, as all power concentrated in the U.S. would essentially mitigate international anarchy. There would be only one center of power and no anarchy.

Second, because it was the United States, we assumed that liberal democracy and human rights would be elevated, so we would have this democratic peace as well. And you can also put a third leg on it, which would be that the U.S. would act as the pacifier in Europe, allowing Europe to function as it had, because we've never really stood together since after World War II, when the Americans came. So you can argue that, given that they could explain what they were doing, it was rational. And I think that's also why they were willing to make an enemy of Russia by expanding NATO—because this made sure that America's presence was cemented.

But my view is that it could have been a good strategy, but it became the only strategy, which meant there was no political imagination for anything else. So now, given the actual political realities—that is, the unipolar order—it's not just a policy, it's an actual distribution of power. It's gone. And we see that, for this reason, it's in America's interest to shift its policies, to focus less on Europe. Now it starts to feel irrational, because we're just returning to hope and expecting the U.S. to stay in Europe out of some alliance of democracies, even though it doesn't necessarily serve its interests. So it's very strange to see. Let me just ask, sir—yeah.

#John Mearsheimer

Can I just make two more points about this whole subject of irrationality? Because this is a very important subject. People watching this show will surely want to know whether it was rational for President Trump to attack Iran on February 28th. I believe it was irrational. And why do I think that? The basic theory that underpinned the decision to attack Iran on February 28th was that we could use air power alone to topple the regime and put in place one that would basically dance to America's tune—throw up its hands, surrender to us, and do what we wanted. But we know from the literature on international politics, which is well understood by many people in the policy world, that it's virtually impossible to create regime change with air power alone.

There is no theory of victory that can be considered rational if it's based on the idea that you can use air power alone to produce regime change. In fact, the literature says that's impossible. So what

President Trump did in deciding to go to war on February 28th was not only a foolish policy—it was irrational, because he had no plausible theory of victory. It's very important to understand that. Let me give you another case. The decision that the United States made before the war started in Ukraine—on February 24th, 2022—is really remarkable. In the run-up to the war, despite the fact that we, the West, and the United States in particular, thought the Russians were going to invade Ukraine, we did virtually nothing to stop it.

Then the war started, and negotiations began in Istanbul. Both sides were making very good progress, but the United States told the Ukrainians to walk away from the negotiations. Later, I think it was in November of that year, General Milley said that Ukraine had reached the high-water mark. You remember, the Ukrainian army had done quite well in two big offensives during 2022. General Milley, who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, said that Ukraine had reached the high-water mark and that they should cut a deal now. He was told to keep quiet and not raise the issue again. Now, the question you want to ask yourself is, why was that the case?

Why was the United States not attempting to prevent the war? And then why did it tell the Ukrainians to walk away and tell General Milley to keep his mouth closed? The answer is actually quite simple. We thought we could bring the Russians to their knees with economic sanctions. We had a theory of victory that was based, in part, on the Ukrainians holding the Russians off on the battlefield—number one. But number two, we believed we could use crushing sanctions to cripple the Russian economy and literally knock the Russians out of the ranks of the great powers. That was our theory of victory. I thought at the time that it was wrong. I thought it wouldn't work. But I think it was a plausible theory of victory. I think, at the time, most people I know thought it would work.

They thought we had so much economic leverage. They believed all that globalization of the 1990s and early 2000s had created a situation where the United States sat at the center of an economic web that allowed it to use coercive leverage over countries all around the planet—the way we've done with Iran, the way we've done with Venezuela, the way we tried to do with China. And that's what we thought would work with the Russians. I think it was a plausible theory of victory. I didn't think it would work—I had a different view, a different set of theories. But the point is, it wasn't irrational. It was wrong, but it wasn't irrational. But again, to go back to Trump invading Iran—that was irrational, because there was no plausible theory of victory there.

#Glenn

My view on the Ukraine war—initially, I thought it made a lot of sense. I mean, if you spend all those years investing all that money and training to build a massive Ukrainian army of hundreds of thousands of men, why would the US and NATO accept it going neutral when you could use that big army to fight and weaken Russia as a strategic rival? Again, I think it's, you know, brutal, and I wouldn't advise it, but it made sense—rationally. But my view is that after, as you mentioned, November 2022, when General Milley said, "Well, it doesn't get better than this—this is when we strike a deal," it feels like at that point we were already a bit swept away by our own propaganda—

that the Russians were inherently weak, that they could be defeated, that their economy was just a gas station masquerading as a country.

At this point, it looks like all the rhetoric we used to fuel the war—suddenly we began to believe it ourselves. And I started to wonder, how rational is this? Because if someone came along and said, “Well, actually, we have to assess what the Russians really have,” then immediately it was, “No, no, that’s pro-Russian.” So our ability to assess the information and make reasonable predictions—it seemed like that was all gone. You see that today as well. Everyone more or less understands that the war can’t be won, but they still want to fight it. For me now, there’s no reasonable strategy anymore, no reasonable theory of victory. It feels as if, yes, it began rational—brutal, but rational, using Ukrainians to fight their rival. But now I feel like we’ve drifted far away. Anyway, that’s just my view.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, just leaving aside the issue of rationality, where I think I’ve said enough, let me make another point. I think, Glenn, when countries get into major wars, it’s very difficult for them to get out. I’ve said over the years—and I think it’s because, for me, the Vietnam War was a formative experience—that it’s easy to get in, but incredibly difficult to get out. I like to say it’s like turning a giant supertanker around in the water; you don’t do it quickly. And I think Iran may actually be something of an exception because of our whole discussion about the economic consequences. You know, if you take what I was saying before—and I know you agree with me on this—the potential economic consequences here are catastrophic, right? The incentive structure may be such that we do shut this war down quite quickly, right?

And it would be, I think, quite unusual in that regard. I mean, think about the Afghanistan war—20 years. Vietnam—oh, that went on for, you know, year after year. It was very hard to get out of that war. And this is what happens when a great power like the United States, or major powers like the Europeans, get involved in a war. It’s just very difficult to walk away. It’s the whole sunk-cost argument. And I think that’s what has really paralyzed the Europeans and made it very difficult for them to get out. The other thing is—and you were talking about this in the context of Benjamin Netanyahu before—that after a while, you begin to believe your own arguments about Iran. You know, if you say Iran is the boogeyman for 40 years, at some point along the road, even if you didn’t believe it in the beginning, you certainly believe it after 40 years.

And I think, in terms of the Europeans, before the war in Ukraine started, I don’t think they thought the Russians were a great threat. You’ll remember, in 2008, at the famous Bucharest Summit—NATO’s Bucharest Summit in April 2008—the Europeans, in the person of Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, argued against bringing Ukraine into NATO. Merkel was adamantly opposed, as was Sarkozy. It’s not like the Europeans thought there was this great Russian threat out there that had to be deterred. In fact, they thought, like you and I, Glenn, that if you expanded NATO to bring Ukraine into it, Putin would interpret it as a declaration of war.

That's what Merkel said, right? That's why she was opposed. We agreed with her. But anyway, the United States foolishly pushed ahead, and we ended up in this disastrous war. I think what's happened over time is that the Europeans have convinced themselves that the Russians are the second coming of Nazi Germany—that Putin is Adolf Hitler, that the Russian army is the Wehrmacht. And, oh my God, if they don't do something, they'll have the Russian army on the beaches of Dunkirk. I mean, I find it all hard to believe. I know you do as well, but they really do believe that. It's very interesting when you think about how much European thinking about the Russian threat has changed over time.

And by the way, just to take it up another 10,000 feet—if you go back to NATO expansion and the decision to bring Ukraine in, in April 2008—it's very important to understand that we weren't interested in bringing Ukraine into NATO because we thought there was a Russian threat to Ukraine or to Eastern Europe. That's the realist view. The United States, which was driving the train on NATO expansion, wasn't operating according to realist theories; otherwise, they wouldn't have expanded NATO to include Ukraine. They were operating on liberal theories. And remember, Putin was at Bucharest—they invited him to Bucharest.

The Russians, the United States, and the Europeans actually had quite good relations at the time. We didn't see Ukraine as this great threat. Now Russia is seen as a really powerful threat—sorry, not Ukraine, Russia. It's really quite remarkable, the change that's taken place over time. But I bring all this up because it just shows how difficult it is now for the Europeans to change their view and put an end to this war, which, as you and I, Glenn, agree, would be in the interest of every European state.

#Glenn

Yeah. Now, this was the warning of Walter Lippmann—that when you go into war, you have all this incentive to build up your adversary as the embodiment of evil. And then, when it's time to make peace, you can't make peace anymore because you've convinced everyone that you're fighting evil. And that's essentially, yeah, I think, where we are today.

#John Mearsheimer

Anyway, any final thoughts before we wrap up? Just one last point. You want to remember that in the Iran war a few weeks ago, President Trump called for unconditional surrender, which is a powerful reinforcement of your point.

#Glenn

Yeah, he didn't get that. So no, it's very difficult to climb down after making such a statement. But I'm hoping that Trump's ability to shift focus and BS his way out of things could actually help deliver peace. But we'll see. Anyway, thank you so much for being so generous with your time.

#John Mearsheimer

My pleasure, Glenn. As always, I enjoyed our discussion immensely.