Stephen Kinzer: How America Brought War to Ukraine

Stephen Kinzer is an award-winning foreign correspondent who has covered more than 50 countries on five continents. Kinzer spent more than 20 years working for the New York Times, most of it as a foreign correspondent. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X /Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Buy Diesen merchandise: https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL 00:00 Stephen Kinzer introduces *Boiling Point* 02:14 Why the "unprovoked" label prompted Kinzer's research 08:02 Tracing U.S. covert involvement back to 1947 13:33 How anti-Russia thinking shaped U.S. policy 22:05 The post-Cold War chance for a shared security order 23:47 NATO expansion, electoral politics, and defense interests 32:15 Maidan and the shift in U.S. policy toward Ukraine 39:57 Alliance choice, security dilemmas, and the Mexico comparison 45:05 Kinzer's aim: put the history before readers 46:00 "How did the poison get in the wine?"

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Today we are joined by Stephen Kinzer, a journalist, author, and foreign policy commentator who spent more than 20 years working for The New York Times, including as a foreign correspondent. So thank you for coming on the program. You've been here once before, but of course, you have a new book out.

#Stephen Kinzer

Yes, the coincidence of being able to be on your show and having a kind of provocative book coming out is too good to resist.

#Glenn

Yeah, provocative here seems to be the key word because the title of your new book is Boiling Point: How America Brought War to Ukraine. And I'm guessing with that title, you probably can make a lot of enemies for yourself because I would say the narrative control in this war is something I, at least, have never seen before. It's been quite intense. It's either you repeat the official truths or we will accuse you of conspiring with the enemy against us. So it's not an easy time. But of course, it shouldn't be controversial that the U.S. helped to bring this war to Ukraine. It's not for me to step on your arguments in your book, but today I really wanted to discuss your new book. And I thought a

good place to start would be how you actually see the U.S. involvement in this, because I think that's quite important to recognize: it's not simply a Russo-Ukrainian war. It's not just the U.S., but the Europeans as well. We're all involved in this war.

#Stephen Kinzer

One of the reasons I felt moved to write this book comes down to one word. And it's a word that I just heard too many times: "unprovoked." Actually, I recently did a search and asked how many times the phrase "unprovoked invasion" appeared in The New York Times in the two months after the Russian invasion of 2022. It appeared 327 times. That's about three times a day. Now, some of those may have been in editorials or in opinion columns, but a large number of them were in the news columns. It was presented as a fact, like "the February invasion" or "the military invasion." You call it "the unprovoked invasion." It's just presented as part of the phrase. I just heard that word too many times, and I decided to go out and try to find out the details about how this war was provoked.

There'd been some work on this subject, including a wonderful book that you wrote. But what I'm trying to do in this book is to point out that if you look at the events of the day of the invasion, February 24th, 2022, you can come away with a very simple story: Russia invaded another country. One was the victim, one was the aggressor. But that picture can really be best seen as the climactic frame in a very long movie. And you have to see the whole movie to understand why the events of that day happened. So, as I discovered in researching my book, Boiling Point, this has been a 75-year project by the United States. Ever since the period right after World War II, the United States has been trying to turn Ukraine into a battering ram to use against Russia. This war today really has very little to do with Ukraine.

And I think the decades of American intervention that helped produce this war also had very little to do with Ukraine. In a way, this war takes me back to the first war that I saw when I was a young foreign correspondent in Nicaragua during the Contra War. One thing we all realized at that time was that this war had nothing to do with Nicaragua. Tens of thousands of Nicaraguan kids were being killed, but it wasn't about Nicaragua. That country just had the bad luck to be the stage on which giant powers fought. And I think maybe, without my being conscious of it, this also pushed me to want to write this book. Having seen war as a war correspondent, I understand what war is. It's the worst thing in the world.

And when I hear war being tossed around as just another policy option, it's very disturbing to me because I've actually seen what war means. Now we've had tens of thousands of Ukrainian kids killed and huge swaths of that country devastated. It's all because America wanted to make some political points. And you can go all the way back to 1947, or you can take it right up until the day before the invasion. There were always moments when the United States could have stopped this train. Even at the last moment, if Joe Biden had only pronounced five words—"Ukraine will not join

NATO”—this whole war might have been avoided. And the craziest thing is, as I now realize, those people in the Biden administration, in their hearts, realized that Ukraine was never going to join NATO. And they told that to people off the record.

But they wouldn't say it in public because it would seem like a compromise or a concession to Russia. And for that reason, we're involved in this horrific conflict. So my book is an attempt to go through all the phases of U.S. intervention in Ukraine, starting with dropping armed commandos into Ukraine in 1947 to try to start a guerrilla war against the Soviets, right up to this postmodern campaign involving NGOs, the National Endowment for Democracy, Soros, and all these other organizations that put together a completely new form of U.S. intervention, totally different from what we did against Arbenz and Mossadegh and Lumumba and all those people in the 20th century. So Ukraine becomes a paragon of this postmodern form of intervention, and that's part of this long, 75-year story.

#Glenn

You said war has just become one policy option. My concern is that it seems to be the only policy option. And that's, again, a consequence of that one recurring slogan you mentioned: that it was unprovoked. Because as soon as they said “unprovoked,” everyone organized around this and found consensus around it. For me, this was a disaster, because if it's unprovoked, there is no diplomacy to be had. Indeed, diplomacy will only embolden the enemy, who is the new Hitler who woke up one day and wanted territory. And that's how I think we ended up treating boycotting diplomacy as something virtuous, and weapons as the path to peace.

But I thought it was interesting what you said, that we can go back to the 1940s. And indeed, a big component of this war, if you listen to the slogans about Bandera, the OUN, the Ukrainian nationalists—I mean, the U.S. was deeply involved with the Ukrainians who had fought with Hitler right after World War II, because they were seen as being staunchly anti-Russian, anti-communist, and they would essentially fight the Soviets after the Soviets had helped to knock out the Germans. Yeah. But how do you track that history, though, from the 1940s up until the post-Cold War era?

#Stephen Kinzer

Well, first, let me react to what you said at the beginning. I think you're right that if you do believe that the war was totally unprovoked and it was just some mad lunatic who had no security reasons or legitimate concerns, then diplomacy might make no sense. If that's true, then what I'd like to hope is that if people can be persuaded that the war was provoked, maybe that does open up a path for diplomacy. Because the only alternative to negotiating with Russia is not negotiating with Russia. Those are the only two possibilities. And if it's the belief that the war was unprovoked that keeps us from negotiating, then maybe I'm making even more of a contribution than I thought if I can get people to understand how provoked it was. So I'll take you back to the beginning, as you suggested.

The U.S. project in Ukraine began just as the CIA was opening up for business in 1947. The first CIA covert action chief, Frank Wisner, concluded, probably quite correctly, that if you wanted to make trouble for the Soviet Union inside the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the best place to do it. So, beginning in 1947, we dropped armed commandos into Ukraine over a period of years. Almost all of them were immediately arrested and executed. But we thought that would be the way to set off a war against Russia. Now, the big challenge the United States had when trying to create a network of anti-Soviet or anti-Moscow Ukrainians was that we didn't know any of them. During the war, of course, we had been an ally of the Soviet Union, so we didn't spy on them. We didn't know any anti-Soviet partisans or underground organizers.

They were on the other side. So we made a wonderfully coherent deal with General Reinhard Gehlen. He was the Nazi general who was in charge of all of Hitler's intelligence apparatus for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He turned up at an American base a few days after the war ended and turned himself in. The deal was very simple: the Americans agreed that instead of hanging Gehlen, they would hire him and pay him handsomely. In exchange, Gehlen would supply all his microfilmed files on every anti-Russian, anti-Soviet activist in all of Ukraine, plus the rest of Eastern Europe. The people Gehlen turned over to us became the foundation of the American project in Ukraine. And right up until that point, they had been the foundation of the Nazi project in Ukraine. They were the same people.

And in fact, some of those Ukrainians who wound up being integral parts of the CIA project had participated in horrific massacres and would have been banned from entering the United States if the CIA director, Allen Dulles, had not made special arrangements to allow them in. So there's no doubt that the American project in Ukraine is built on the foundation of the Nazi project. And that gave it a certain tint that it has never lost. Those strong inheritors of the Nazi tradition in Ukraine are very powerful today. They're mobilizing most of the militias that are doing the fighting, but they're also important political forces and, in some cases, allies of the United States. So there's a through line from how we found our first anti-Russian Ukrainians to who those anti-Russian Ukrainians are today, in some cases.

#Glenn

Well, I found this fascinating quote by Truman, which I've cited before, in which he makes the point that during World War II, if Nazi Germany is winning, then we should help the Soviets. If the Soviets are winning, then we should help Nazi Germany. And this way, we'll let them kill each other in as large numbers as possible. And I think it's important because it shows the pragmatic balance-of-power logic. That is, there are no values behind it. And indeed, what would be the logic once the Germans have been defeated and you have to weaken your former ally?

What I find fascinating is that even the British had this plan, Operation Unthinkable, in which, immediately after the war, in May of 1945, was it, they were planning to ally with former Nazis to actually invade the Soviet Union. I think it was the US that pushed back against this one. But it kind

of showed this logic and also why it was attractive to ally with the Nazi remnants they found in Ukraine. But how do you see this legacy impacting reality today, though? Because a lot of the same organizations still exist, of course.

#Stephen Kinzer

Well, you mentioned a great line from Truman, but it brings to mind another line of Truman's that I like, and I think maybe I'm trying to fulfill it with this Boiling Point book. He once said, “The only thing new in this world is the history you didn't know.” And I hope my book fits into the category of the history you didn't know, because I'm trying to contradict a narrative that, as you said, has been very powerful. Now, one of the aspects of this project that I found most fascinating, and to which I devote a section in Boiling Point, is the question of how the United States adopted such a vigorously anti-Russian policy. Why did we become so fiercely anti-Russian? Well, of course, there have been whole books about this, which I've now read.

Some people trace anti-Russian feeling all the way back to the split between Rome and Constantinople, but others mainly place it around the early 19th century. Britain was involved in a lot of imperial adventures in South Asia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. They had India, and they were fighting Russia all the time. They were afraid Russia was going to come and take what they wanted to take. Therefore, it was important for them to create an image in the British mind that Russia was evil. Otherwise, they couldn't justify all of these imperial wars. That's what the Crimean War, for example, was all about. So, that anti-Russian feeling naturally intensified during the period of the Soviet Union.

And one might have imagined that, since the Soviet Union ceased to exist and a new country, which is one-third smaller and very different politically, emerged, Western policy toward Russia would also change. But it didn't. There's something about Russia in the Western mind that makes it fit very easily into our need to have some enemy as a kind of organizing principle. So I go through this question of American foreign policy. Why did we jump on this train? And to a remarkable degree, I discover that it's because our foreign policy over generations was essentially made by high officials who had family backgrounds in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe, or in the Russian Empire.

This was a unique phenomenon. There has never been a case of a group of émigrés, or their children and grandchildren, who penetrated the American foreign policy apparatus and then became dominant in shaping American foreign policy toward the country they were brought up to hate. These are people who imbibed anti-Russian passion with their mothers’ milk, and it’s quite understandable considering history. But it’s not so excusable that they came to take over American foreign policy. So the first of them, of course, was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was born in Poland to a Ukrainian family. All the foreign policy experts came to Jimmy Carter and asked him not to appoint Brzezinski. They saw what was happening.

One of my favorites was Clark Clifford, who had advised every Democratic president going back to Truman. And Carter said to him, "If I don't make Brzezinski national security adviser, what job would I give him?" And Clifford told him, "Make him the first American ambassador to the Bermuda Triangle." So Brzezinski came into office. He's the one who led Jimmy Carter to intervene against the Russians in Afghanistan. He's the one who argued for the boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980. He turned the détente policy of the Nixon-Ford era in a very different direction. He later hired one of his students at Columbia to work for him on the National Security Council.

That was Madeleine Albright. She was born in Prague. She grew up with this same sense of hatred of what Russia had done and what Russia had been. She's the one, of course, who oversaw the intervention in Bosnia and the bombing of Serbia, which led to the breaking apart of the country. But then, if you go through the list, it's truly remarkable. So Victoria Nuland, the assistant secretary of state who played such a big role in shaping American policy and then famously turned up at the Maidan in 2014, giving out cookies and encouraging demonstrators to rebel against their elected government, comes from a family that was originally from what's now Moldova.

Alexander Vindman, who became a mini-celebrity after testifying about Trump's call to President Zelensky, was born in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine. George Soros, who spent hundreds of millions of dollars promoting Western projects in Ukraine, was born, of course, in Hungary. Tony Blinken, the Secretary of State under Biden, also has a family background in Eastern Europe. It goes all the way down the list. The major grant-givers for the National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Foundations were people with Eastern European backgrounds. So all of these people had grown up desperately trying to think of ways to wound Russia. And Ukraine is magnetically attractive to anyone who wants to weaken or subvert or undermine or destroy Russia.

That's why Ukraine became such an intense focus of American policy. And you'd like to think that those officials I mentioned were just carrying out policies set by political leaders. But that's not the way it turned out. They set the policy, and there was no group pushing back against them. They became especially powerful in the Democratic Party because the Republicans were not interested then. They were run by conservative businessmen who had no interest in ideological campaigns. So they became Democrats, and they turned not only the U.S. foreign policy apparatus but also the Democratic Party into a world center of anti-Russian action and intense feeling.

#Glenn

Yeah, you hear that argument from a lot of political scientists who look at how ideas are formulated or created and how they impact politics. And that's an interesting argument, though: after the Bolshevik Revolution, you suddenly have this Soviet Union emerging, and many in the U.S. are now worried: what is this entity, this power we might be confronting? And who do you go to for expertise in a completely new area? You go to the people who come from there, who have immigrated to the U.S. These are the local experts. But who left? Who left the Soviet Union?

Obviously, the people who fled it, the ones who saw the Soviets as a massive threat. So if you go to your experts, the émigré community, and ask, "Who are these Soviets?" they say, "These are the most evil people in the world, who just want to conquer and destroy everything." If this is what shapes their policies, you can see why this could be a key variable. But another area where they played a role, I think, was in the '90s, when we signed agreements like the Charter of Paris for a New Europe on what the new Europe should look like after the Cold War.

And it was said that one of the reasons why Bill Clinton abandoned the whole thing, besides Russia being weak, was a lot of pressure from Eastern European voters in America. Just to segue into the post-Cold War era, how do you see the European security architecture being shaped in the way it was? Why did the United States not, I guess, reconsider its approach to Russia after the Cold War? Because this was a magnificent opportunity. Russia had never been more pro-Western. It even started ignoring former Soviet republics because they were seen as heavy baggage, holding it back from moving toward the West. That's what it wanted: to be a normal country.

#Stephen Kinzer

A European country. So why? How do you explain this? You're quite right. This is probably the greatest lost geopolitical opportunity of our lifetimes. The end of the Cold War gave Europe and the world a remarkable chance for a new beginning. But we never did anything like what Metternich did after the end of the Napoleonic Wars: call all the parties together and try to design a security architecture that everybody could live with. So why didn't we do that? I think that was the idea of George H. W. Bush and his secretary of state, James Baker, who carried out those negotiations with Gorbachev and others in Berlin at the end of the Cold War. But they went on to lose the election, and Bill Clinton came in.

Clinton had only been in office a few weeks when the ceremony took place to open the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington. At that ceremony, Vaclav Havel, the Czech leader, and Lech Walesa, the Polish leader, came up to Clinton and told him, "We need you to bring us into NATO. We're afraid of Russia." And so Clinton went back to the White House and told his aides, "Let's do this." That was how simply it was done. Now, a parade of foreign policy experts famously came to Clinton and told him not to do this, George Kennan being the most prominent. But he went ahead anyway. So if you have to pick one person who set the ball rolling toward war in Ukraine, it probably was Bill Clinton. But I don't think it's necessarily fair to blame any one person. The fact is, Clinton was acting rationally by his own calculations.

He didn't know or care anything about Europe or Russia. There's a famous line from one of his political opponents, who said that his only foreign policy experience was having breakfast once at the International House of Pancakes. So he had other, much more serious interests. In 1996, he was running for re-election. His opponent, Bob Dole, was announcing that he was going to push NATO into every Eastern European country, right up to Russia. Of course, this electrified all those ethnic

voters in the United States who had Polish, Slovenian, and Hungarian backgrounds. If Clinton had done what we might have thought of as the statesmanlike thing and said, "Well, over the long run, this is probably going to be provocative for Europe, and years from now, when I'm out of power, it might provoke a war in Europe, so I don't think I want to do it," he would have lost the election.

I think that was his calculation. The Polish-American voters and the other Eastern European voting blocs in key states like Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois were crucial to his reelection. At the same time, probably the most well-heeled lobby in America—the defense lobby, the lobby that supports the military industry—was in overdrive trying to push for NATO expansion. Every country that joins NATO has to buy an entirely new arsenal: new planes, new tanks, new screwdrivers, everything. That's the greatest bonanza imaginable for American arms companies. So had Clinton stood up and said, "We're not going to push NATO eastward," he would have lost votes that were probably crucial to his reelection and the support of this extremely powerful and financially potent lobby.

So, yes, you can blame him for succumbing to those pressures and doing something that ultimately led to war in Ukraine. But maybe another president would have done the same thing, making the same calculations. So that takes you back to an old problem that so many of us see in world affairs, and that is the excessive importance of domestic politics in shaping world affairs. So we have to break out of that in order to do things that are good for us in the long run. In the United States, the long run is not a productive concept. The long run only means something like next week or next month. We don't learn from history, and we don't look forward to the future. This is why Gore Vidal used to like suggesting that we should change the name of our country and call ourselves the United States of Amnesia.

#Glenn

I remember those headlines in the '90s. You said "bonanza." I remember there was actually a New York Times article with a headline saying that NATO expansion was going to be a bonanza for our arms industry. And they had the weapons lobby pushing hard. This was done very openly. And this is a good point if you want to look at why this decision was made. People often don't realize how significant this was because, again, we had agreements. Back in 1975, you had the Helsinki Accords. You had Gorbachev warming up to the idea of integrating with the West. He proposed a common European home.

We then have the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in 1990, based on this principle of indivisible security, a Europe without borders. We formed the OSCE in 1994 based on these principles. And why was it all thrown away? You can kind of have two hypotheses. One is cynical power politics. That is, well, Russia is now weak. Let's crush it. Maybe there's a component of that. Or the second hypothesis is domestic politics. You have Eastern European voters who would like to have historical vengeance, whatever, and you can sell weapons. But that wouldn't fall within rational politics if you let domestic politics dictate foreign policy, I guess.

#Stephen Kinzer

Well, we don't use rationality as the key guide for our foreign policy. That's a given. So I think the reasons that you just mentioned are valid reasons why the United States wasn't willing to look for a new security architecture in Europe that would accept the security concerns of all parties. That would mean including Russia. I think for the United States to do that would require a psychological adjustment that, up to now, we have proven unable or unwilling to make. And that is accepting a world that we don't dominate. Anytime you're creating an architecture that takes into account the interests of various countries, you're also inevitably compromising. You're not getting everything you want.

The American mindset is not equipped for that. We can't deal with the idea of a world in which lots of important things happen and we don't have anything to say about it. And I actually think this is going to be one of the determinants of how peaceful or warlike the future world is going to be. It's this: Is the United States willing to accept changing balances of power in the world, in which our own power, at least relatively speaking, will definitely decline? Or are we going to lash out violently against that process, even though it's inevitable, and, by lashing out, cause all kinds of global conflict? The Ukraine war is an example of that latter option. That's what I find so terrifying about it.

The only reason we are fighting in Ukraine has to do with our desire to wound Russia. People in America don't care about Ukraine. It's only a symbol. The poor Ukrainians are collateral damage. They're just roadkill on the way to a U.S.-Russian confrontation. And one of the things that has astonished me the most about the moment that we're in now—and it's something you've talked about a lot—is how many of my sophisticated, thoughtful European friends still think this war is a great idea and have this fantasy that Russia, which hasn't been able to conquer four eastern oblasts in Ukraine, is going to be in Warsaw or Berlin a week after reaching some compromise settlement in Ukraine.

So Europe has worked itself into a frenzy that, in some ways, is even more irrational than what we're seeing in the United States. It's gotten to the point where any European involvement in the peace process with Ukraine is going to be a way to torpedo that process, because the Europeans are dead set against Ukraine compromising or even negotiating with the party on the other side. It's what you learn in Diplomacy 101: you cannot resolve conflicts by negotiating only with your friends. You already agree with them. We should have been on the phone with Russia every day from the time this started.

But the reason we didn't is that we want to teach Russia a lesson. It's the idea of keeping America on top. I think we're seeing something like that in the Middle East now. We want to crack our whip and show that we can get what we want. But as we learned from the Iraq invasion, countries do gain in strategic power when they show what they can accomplish in the world, but the opposite is also true. If you set out to accomplish a big goal and you fail, you lose strategic power. And the loss of American strategic power began with our failures in Iraq. I think it's happening again in Ukraine.

#Glenn

How do you see the U.S. involvement in the 2013–14 Maidan uprising? Because up until that point, at least, there had been a lot of caution on both the American and the European side. You know, a key warning from many European leaders between the 1990s and 2014 was always that, really, let's be honest, only about 20% of Ukrainians actually want to join NATO. So how hard are we going to actually push for this? And, you know, Angela Merkel once said that if we accept Ukraine—if we offer them future membership, that is, the Membership Action Plan—Moscow would interpret it as a declaration of war.

So they kind of knew that this was the most provocative thing we could do. Even William Burns, as you know from the memo, said, well, because it's so unpopular, you're going to have a revolt in eastern Ukraine. You're going to have civil war. And then the Russians will reluctantly use military force. But after 2013–14, all of this changed. So how did the U.S. involve itself in the Maidan uprising? Because it tends to be presented simply as a democratic revolution against a corrupt government, which I agree was very corrupt. But, you know, our objectives aren't altruistic by design, so...

#Stephen Kinzer

I think, just to get back to the point you made at the beginning, that Americans definitely were not stepping back out of fear that Russia might react. Actually, I think they figured this was a great project because it works either way. It's a victory either way. If we push NATO right up to the border of Russia and Russia doesn't do anything, we dramatically advance our project of surrounding Russia and making it the next target. If Russia reacts and doesn't accept it, they're going to be invaders, and we can portray them that way to the whole world. So the idea that American intervention in Ukraine might provoke some kind of violent response from Russia was not in any way a negative factor.

In fact, I think a lot of people in Washington thought that's another reason to do it. It would be great. They'll fight us, and then, as George Kennan warned years ago, we will say they're the aggressor and they're always like this, which, of course, is not true. So you asked about the Maidan uprising that finally succeeded in 2014. That was definitely a major turning point, I would say, not just in Ukrainian history, but even in European and world history. So Ukraine became independent in 1991. The American project for the next decade or so was to change the governing regime, because the governing regime was more or less neutralist, depending on which president was in power at the time.

They accepted Henry Kissinger's view that Ukraine should be a bridge between East and West rather than a territory that they would both fight over. So the Americans wanted to get a new government in Ukraine before they could get the big project going of pushing Ukraine into active conflict with

Russia. They had to get a Ukrainian government that would be their partner. And that was what led to the uprising in 2013–2014. So in those years between independence in 1991 and the time when the Maidan protest movement began to emerge, the United States spent millions and millions of dollars through these non-governmental organizations to create support and, in many cases, create organizations that would promote the American project in Ukraine, particularly the idea that Ukraine should join NATO and confront Russia.

And this is also really a central part of my book, Boiling Point, because it shows that the intervention in Ukraine was so different from the other interventions I've written about. You know, I wrote a book about how the U.S. overthrew Mossadegh in Iran in 1953. I wrote a book about the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954. There was a playbook that the CIA used. They don't do that anymore. In Ukraine, it was completely different. And the breakthrough came in the early 1980s. After the scandals of the '70s that had so badly tainted the CIA, visionaries in the Reagan administration and some of their friends in Congress came up with this idea that, since it was so embarrassing to see covert operations revealed, and since we're now in an age of investigative journalism and leaks and declassification, we should just do it all overtly.

It shouldn't be the CIA. Create these organizations, the National Endowment for Democracy being the paragon, through which U.S. taxpayer dollars would be funneled and then distributed in countries where we wanted to shape public opinion. Ukraine became the number one target in Europe for these funds. And it wasn't just the United States government, through the Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy, but also these private organizations like Freedom House and the Open Society Foundation, plus a number of their counterparts in Europe.

So a concerted campaign was launched that lasted for years to try to change the Ukrainian mind, or at least to bring forward and give money to people who were willing to join the pro-American project. Then we suddenly paid attention in the West when the uprising began on the Maidan. Well, those groups that planned and organized that demonstration and were able to support tens of thousands of demonstrators over many months were all paid for by the United States. Now, this is not to say they didn't have any legitimate grievances. However, we had the specter of Victoria Nuland, one of those American diplomats with a background in Eastern Europe, walking around in the crowd, encouraging people to rebel against their elected government.

So just imagine a diplomat from, say, Russia showing up at a protest against ICE or a protest against U.S. foreign policy and telling people, "Go out there and protest. We love that in Russia." He would be reviled and arrested. So the intervention was quite blatant, and that produced the big turning point for the Americans. It did produce the overthrow of the neutralist government and the arrival of a new government that was willing to do America's bidding. As you'll remember from the famous hacked phone call, Victoria Nuland actually chose the guy who was going to be the next president of Ukraine.

So once that was done, you had the friendly government in place. Then the project moved into another phase, which was pouring massive amounts of weapons into Ukraine and constantly raising the threat that these weapons were going to be used against Russia. This was a time when we started to get another line, another trope out of Washington that also drove me almost as crazy as the word "unprovoked." And that was the line that Ukraine should be allowed to join NATO because every country has the right to choose its own security partners. It sounds like it makes perfect sense. Every country should be allowed to join any alliance anywhere. But in the real world, that's never true. How would we react if Mexico announced, "We've decided to open a Chinese military base in Veracruz"?

It's 800 miles from Texas. Would the United States say, "Well, we don't like it, but Mexico is a sovereign country, and every country has the right to choose its own security partners"? Of course not. We would never accept that. We're not going to accept an armed outpost of a potential enemy right near our country, regardless of the rights of individual states. Yet we're expecting Russia to accept something that we ourselves never would. So that was the goal of this second project, beginning in 2014 and lasting for those eight years until the war began. That was the period when, I think, as Putin belatedly realized, the United States was preparing Ukraine for the conflict that we're now living through.

#Glenn

But you mentioned that if Russia were to respond, that would be just a wonderful thing. It reminds me a bit of what was revealed in this WikiLeaks cable from Syria, because they did the same thing there to destroy it. That is, let's pour in a lot of weapons to the opposition, and instead of hiding it from the government, let's advertise it. Because if the government in Syria overreacts against these rebels we're arming, then essentially they're attacking their own people. You would be able to further inflame the situation and create more tension. So I thought that was interesting. Just a quick note on what you said about the U.S. never accepting it. I mean, if you go back to the Helsinki Accords and move on to the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, there were always two contradictory concepts in them.

One was that European security has to be based on indivisible security, which means you don't expand a military bloc. You know, Russia doesn't put its missiles in Mexico, and America doesn't put its military bases and the CIA in Ukraine. It just makes common sense. But the second component was, yeah, countries have the right to choose their own foreign security arrangements. But what if their choice undermines indivisible security? So obviously, we kind of ignored indivisible security because it puts some responsibility on the great powers. When the U.S. said, "Oh, the door to NATO is open," they ignored indivisible security and then blamed the Russians for not allowing Ukraine to choose, even though that choice was made for them, I guess.

#Stephen Kinzer

Well, what you're suggesting is that the United States should follow the same rules that it expects other countries to follow. But actually, we don't see the world that way. We see the world as a place where we make the rules and others have to follow them, but we don't. And the reason is that other countries are so selfish, and they're so greedy, and they're so aggressive, whereas we're above all that. Remember Madeleine Albright's famous line: "We are the indispensable country. We stand taller and see further." When you believe that, it would be so foolish to listen to what any other country wants. So you can't, in our minds, put Russia and the United States on the same plane. Russia should be able to accept things that the United States would never accept.

And this is what I mean about the psychological barrier that Americans have to get through before we can live in this new, peaceful world that we dream about. So, you talk about indivisible security. The other concept that you learn in Diplomacy 101 is the security dilemma: countries take steps to defend themselves, but then these steps seem hostile to other countries. In this case, I don't think, as I said earlier, that this was an oversight or a miscalculation. I think they saw it as a win-win: let's pour arms into Ukraine and hope for either a war or a surrender by Russia. And if tens of thousands of Ukrainians have to die, it doesn't matter. We even had U.S. senators say out loud, "This is the best money we've ever spent. We're killing Russians, and no Americans are dying."

It is really very sobering to see the ease with which Americans make policies that condemn people in other countries to fates that we would never accept for our own country. So, in a sense, what I'm trying to do is awaken people to the historical record. My book is not a rant. You can still believe whatever you want to believe about the justice of the Ukraine war. This doesn't lead you to any inevitable conclusion that the war was all wrong. I just want everybody who has an opinion about this war to know this history. Once you know it, then you can make whatever decision you want. It doesn't necessarily push you anywhere. But most people in the world have no idea of what lies behind the war in Ukraine. And I'll finish with this little story.

I have a kind of slogan in my mind that defines my approach to journalism and research about the world. It's a line from an old movie. This movie was a screwball comedy called Arsenic and Old Lace, starring Cary Grant. And the conceit of the movie is that Cary Grant goes to visit his elderly aunts and slowly discovers that they poison the elderly guests in their guesthouse. So at one point, there's a scene where one of the aunts says, "The gentleman died because he drank wine that had poison in it." And Cary Grant's eyes widen, and he says, "But how did the poison get in the wine?" This is the question I have devoted my whole career to trying to answer. And in this case, I see that the wine of European peace has been poisoned. How did the poison get in the wine? That's the question my book is seeking to answer.

#Glenn

Well, thank you for presenting your book. I really recommend that people buy this and read it, because this is not just an important war that's redefining the world order and could possibly annihilate us all. It's also, as I began by saying, how tight the narrative control has been. The whole

premise for all our policies—that essentially diplomacy is bad and weapons are good—is based on the premise you mentioned: that it was unprovoked.

So that's why I think it's important when people like yourself, you know, do this research, write these books, and essentially say that recognizing how we contributed to bringing about this war is a good thing. Then at least it opens up room for diplomacy and negotiation. Suddenly, weapons aren't a path to peace, and, you know, the carnage in Ukraine can come to an end. Sadly, the current political and media establishment is not very receptive to these messages. So I do appreciate the work you put into this, but also some of the hardship, I guess, you will have to bear for having made this argument.

#Stephen Kinzer

Well, in that case, we'll certainly be comrades, and it's good to be in the trenches with you, Glenn.