NATO's Biggest Strategic Failure YET | Cptn. Steven Jermy

Royal Navy Commodore Steve Jermy joins Pascal to discuss Europe’s strategic direction. Jermy argues that rising energy costs and economic pressure could reshape Western policy toward Ukraine and Iran. They examine escalation risks, military preparedness, public opinion, censorship, and the human consequences of war. Drawing on his service experience, Jermy makes the case for open debate and explains why he supports a petition to pause British military assistance to Ukraine pending discussion. Steve's Links: Substack: https://stevejermy.substack.com Petition article: https://stevejermy.substack.com/p/petition-pause-british-military-support UK Parliament petition: https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/781311 Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Support Neutrality Studies: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Neutrality Studies shop: https://neutralitystudies.com/shop Time Stamps 00:00 Steve Jermy in Tbilisi: what comes next? 03:01 Iran, Ukraine and Europe’s energy costs 09:29 Public opinion, security and the petition 19:01 Neutrality, prosperity and the price of war 27:46 Escalation and the politics of victimhood 36:57 Conscription, media narratives and dissent 49:49 Military experience and the human cost 56:40 Opening the debate and building a peace movement

#Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies. Today, we have another special episode because we are here live in Tbilisi, and I am with my friend and colleague, Steve Jermy, a former commodore in the Royal Navy.

#Steven Jermy

Steve, welcome. It's good to be here in Tbilisi. We've had such good fun. I think I've had my eyes opened on neutrality, for which I thank you. But also, it's nice to be back in Tbilisi with the Georgian people. They're a very special people.

#Pascal

It is, it is. And it was a very enjoyable conference, I would say, overall. It was a very good exchange. And now, since we are here, I thought we could talk a little bit about what you think the end of 2026 is going to bring us. I mean, we're at the beginning of November, heading toward the middle of November. We've had the midterm elections that have now kind of produced this blue wave in the United States. We have Israel. A lot of people were expecting that we would see an immediate resumption of the Iran war right after these two elections. Today is Saturday, and it hasn't happened yet.

Historically, Trump always starts these wars or this warfare on a Friday after markets close. So maybe this weekend is safe. Let's hope. Of course, by the time we upload this, it might already be a different reality. And at the same time, we have the Ukraine war, which is also not wrapped up yet. But it seems to everybody that the Russians are taking off the gloves and are looking for a military solution within less than the time it took them to get here, right? I mean, probably within a year or so. What are your expectations for the rest of 2026? And where's the next year going to take us?

#Steven Jermy

It's a really good question. I've been thinking a lot recently, Pascal, about what I call the strategic context. And if you think of the strategic context as I do, as a mariner, it's the chart on which you navigate. And for me, the strategic context is how we navigate into the future. It's got three key elements. There's a geopolitical element, which, in a way, is what we're talking about. There's a substrate, which is as fundamental, if not more so: the economic element. And then—I would say this, wouldn't I, as an energy person?—deep down at the foundations is the energetic element. That's how the energy system works. But I think at the moment, just looking at the top of those strata, which is interacting with economics as well, my sense is that we're in a period of risk. We're in a period of risk of escalation in both conflicts.

But I also think that if that escalation doesn't lead to the outbreak of major wars in one or other of those campaigns, then we may be closer to a solution for both—not for geopolitical reasons, but for economic reasons. Let's go to the first of them, which is the Iran war. A lot of people have been saying, as you've just described and as we've all been thinking in the independent media, "Well, it's about to happen. It's going to happen this week." I've been a little bit more cautious. Partly it's strategic intuition. Partly I didn't really see the warning signs and indicators. But also, I'm really struggling to think what the United States could achieve by further escalation. Having said that, I didn't think they could do it in the first place, and they did.

I wonder as well about the extent to which the midterms have changed this. I think it's generally accepted now, not least because the vice president has said clearly that Iran was the consequence of the midterm defeat. So I think the open question is what whim takes the president in one direction or the other. My guess is that it won't escalate, because I think the risk is that even if it were to be a performative three-day offensive, and then the United States retreats while claiming victory, the great danger there is a massive escalation by the Iranians. And I would imagine that the Pentagon in particular, but others in the American system as well, are warning against it, not only for grand strategic reasons, but also because of the political situation in the United States. You know, they've taken a massive hit in the GOP, in the Republican Party.

And if you want to make things worse, then probably the best way to do that would be to kick off another element of this war just at a time when your population had told you that this is the worst thing that you could have done. So I don't know. And as I say, last time I got this wrong. I think on

the Russia-Ukraine war, the logic is similar. I'm beginning to think there will be an economic answer to the campaign, if we don't tip into escalation through unwise action by the Europeans that causes the Russians to respond in kind.

And I think the reason I say that is that one of the consequences of the use of sanctions in the Russia-Ukraine war has been to increase energy prices for the West. The situation in the Strait of Hormuz has further increased energy prices for the West. And firing European weapons deep into Russia, against Russia's energy infrastructure, has also increased energy prices in the West. So, surprise, surprise, we have what a lot of people are calling a cost-of-living crisis in Europe, but it's not. It's actually a cost-of-energy crisis. And the primary symptom of the cost-of-energy crisis is the cost-of-living crisis.

So at the moment, when people say, "Well, we must keep investing in the war in Ukraine," my answer to that is, "So you're happy for your citizens to have their cost-of-living crisis intensified? Because that's a consequence of our policy." So I'm beginning to think that as we turn into the new year and it becomes clear that a recession is underway—using energy analysis, it already is underway—but as the economists recognize early next year that the economic crisis is starting to hit, probably a recession initially, then, time and again, we will find that people keep coming back to the issue of how we can spend $10 billion on Ukraine, in the United States or the United Kingdom, while we can't afford to do critical things at home.

#Pascal

Yeah, but this is the kind of discourse that we have because we think that countries should care about us, the citizens, first and foremost. But we have these European leaders on record saying, "I don't care if my population doesn't like it. This is the most important thing in the world: supporting Ukraine." And I mean, the German chancellor almost word for word said, "We will continue supporting Ukraine, whatever it takes, even if that means that I have to deprioritize my own population." Which is, from our perspective, a crazy thing to say. But from their perspective, what they mean is that if we don't stop Russia in its tracks, then tomorrow all of us are going to have to learn Russian, right?

I mean, that's the mentality under which they operate: there's no prosperity without security. Therefore, all the spending goes into what they define as security, even though it is lunacy. But the problem is that with these people, we don't even have common ground anymore on where to start the debate, right? Because they are so convinced that Russia is dead set on marching into Berlin, into Paris, and finally into Porto and whatnot. They really think in those terms. So to them, I suppose, pouring even more money into Ukraine is a way of keeping that phantom from ever manifesting itself. And if you doubt that, if you doubt the premise, then you are outing yourself as either an idiot or a Putin puppet, right? That's what they're doing.

And that's how they shut down the discourse. How do you think this is going down now among these European populations? Because one thing is the leadership. The other is, of course, the people who have to live with these economic impacts. The elites, of course, are the last ones to tighten their belts. They're the last ones to stop flying on their private jets to Davos and whatnot. But we will feel it on the ground. Hey, guys, autumn spirit is here, and we've launched our new merch. For instance, the monster from our Kyoto Symposium has arrived on T-shirts, tumblers, and magnets. The little fella is really cute. Check it out. Any purchase directly helps us keep the lights on. So thanks a lot, and see you soon.

#Steven Jermy

I think what's happening, strangely, or perhaps not strangely, is the same thing that happened during my time in Afghanistan. I was there in 2007, and what I've often said about the Afghanistan campaign is that, as well as there being no strategy, I noticed in 2007, just four years into the campaign, that the governments were dead set on it. It was the right thing to do. It was essential. The same sort of reasons: we had to be fearful of the Taliban.

#Pascal

They would come for us. They would kill us in London and in Bristol and whatnot, right? That's the idea.

#Steven Jermy

But what happened in Britain, and I think in the NATO countries, including the United States, was that the populations got there before the politicians. Mm-hmm. The populations understood before the politicians. I wouldn't say they understood it strategically or structurally, because they weren't offered the analysis, but they got it intuitively, and they didn't like seeing body bags coming back from these different places. I always say to people that the Afghan campaign was a 20-year campaign, and the British casualties killed in action were just over 450, and the American casualties were just over 2,000. And those became very significant political issues in both countries.

Same in Canada. And I also say to people that if we were in a war with Russia, we would be talking about tens of thousands of casualties, probably in the first month. So that's the way to start to think about it. But I'm beginning to think that, actually, the European populations are beginning to get this, and you can see it in the instability in Europe. So I think it would be time to turn around what you said, which we often hear: “No prosperity without security.” I would say, “No security without prosperity.” Because actually, if you've got internal conflicts in your country because of the internal consequences of economic failure, then that will become a more immediate threat to the internal security of a country.

We're thinking of France. We've seen it elsewhere. I think there have been riots elsewhere in Europe—Belgium, I think. Italy, I think. I've heard Professor David Betts talk about concerns about civil war in Europe, using the UK as a case study, but also suggesting that, if he had to guess, it would happen first in Ireland. Ireland? Yeah, I thought that was interesting. David Betts is well worth listening to. He has a very structured analysis of how he reaches his conclusions. But to be fair to him, he was quite cautious about that. He said, "If I had to guess, it would be Ireland." And I'll let people go to his podcast, which is well worth listening to.

But I think that, sooner or later, is going to start to turn politicians back to look at their bases. The Trump base has been destroyed by supporting a war. And I think the same is happening in Europe. And if you take the E3, in France, we have seen riots, and it's clear that, with the presidential elections coming up next year, the investment in Ukraine will become a political issue. It'll become a national political issue. It already is in Germany. Alice Weidel has a very different position from Merz—indeed, almost the opposite position. That leaves the UK, where there is, at the moment, unanimity, I would say, across the political parties.

But what's interesting is, you know, we've been running a petition. Yeah. Forgive me for taking the opportunity to pitch it. Please go ahead. The idea is to pause British support for Ukraine and have a national debate about it, amongst other things. I'm pleased to say that on Thursday, when we were about to go on stage, we passed the 10,000-signature mark. What that means is the British government must now respond in writing to us to explain its foreign policy position on Ukraine. And I would hope it will also give us an explanation of NATO's military strategy. And I think that will be fun to listen to because I haven't got a clue what the answer is on either. The foreign policy logic seems to be a Manichaean good versus evil.

The West is good. Russia and Putin are bad. Therefore, we must stand up, and our moral case is the answer. On the military strategy, it seems to be: double down with pinprick escalations and hope that the Russians don't respond in kind. And that is based on a guess. So 10,000 is a big thing. The British government will have to respond to us. And I think even having the response to actually pore over will be useful. I'll make sure I circulate it to everybody. If we can get to 100,000, then it will be debated in the House of Commons, which is Britain's main lawmaking chamber. And that will necessarily be a public debate, which the national press will have to cover. It's impossible that they won't. So what you'll then have is support for Ukraine becoming a political issue in those three E3 nations.

And I think the fact that even these discussions are going on in E3 nations—and if you think as well, we've just seen the leaders of Norway and Finland talking to Putin—I think what we're starting to see is a slow tectonic shift in the political situation in Europe. And I suspect that that shift will intensify as the financial pressures come on in the new year. So that's a long way to answer the question. And I hope I'm right, because the bad way to answer the question is that the Europeans will do something stupid, and the Russians will escalate, and we'll end up in a war. But my intuition and my strategic instinct tell me that it'll be economics that actually brings this matter to the fore,

and economics that actually finally forces our leaders into at least talking to the Russians and getting to some sort of negotiated solution.

#Pascal

Yeah, I would hope so too. Although, you know, it's still a long way to go. And also, even if we shift the public discourse, it's difficult to imagine at the moment that this tectonic shift would change it to the point where more than 50% would support that. And again, I bring up this Swiss referendum that we had, which was about neutrality, but the other side really successfully made it about: do you support sanctions on Russia, yes or no? And in Switzerland, we had 70% who said, yes, we support sanctions on Russia, and 30% who said no.

And that's my kind of gauge to say, like, yeah, that's more or less the European approach. Among the general public, 30% would be in favor of a rapprochement with Russia, and 70% are still like, "No, let's double down. We need to defeat the Russians, right? They cannot win." Even in my circle of friends, I have people who say, like, "Yeah, I don't know what to tell you, but the Russians can't win. They mustn't win," which, by implication, means they must lose, right? So we need to fight them. And that's still a very mainstream kind of opinion to have, I would say, all over the continent. It's very different in Asia. It's very different in South America and the Global South in general. But what you said earlier is also, I think, probably the most impactful issue. I mean, economics, right? And right now, yes, we're still putting security before prosperity. But how could we incentivize—or how could the general public demand—that the entire discourse be de-radicalized?

Because what we saw over the last few years is securitization on steroids, right? Everything is now being thought about as a security issue. So economics is also a security issue. Again, you cannot have prosperity because we need to have security first, right? So we need to sacrifice these kinds of social expenditures for security expenditures. And the hybrid warfare narrative is also all about how everything has to be perceived as a security issue. So we can no longer approach things like AI data breaches as just a policing issue. It's now a military issue, a national security issue, right? And everything is turning into a national security issue. The question to me is how to reverse that, how to change that. And again, reclaim a big part of what's going on in the social space, treating it not first and foremost as a security problem, but as a social issue.

#Steven Jermy

Yeah, yeah. Could I just ask one qualifying question? I'm just curious: in the Swiss debate, to what extent was the economic issue—guns versus butter—introduced into that debate? Or was it more of what I would call a linear debate, or a binary debate, between neutrality and security through confrontation?

#Pascal

It was a battle of narratives. Our side said, “No, this is about neutrality and how we define neutrality, and we need more of it.” And the other side said, “No, actually, that's not what it's about. It's about whether or not we should put sanctions on Russia. It's about whether or not we should be tough on Russia.” And I would say they managed to convince a lot of people with that. So it became more of an issue about Russia than it was about neutrality. Guns versus butter—interestingly, I think Switzerland is in that lucky position where it's just economically prosperous enough that it wasn't actually a big issue. And even today, Switzerland has this luxury. It has a buffer.

Its buffer is much bigger than those of other states. So we're not teetering on the brink of economic collapse as other places are. But, you know, there's this very unfair distribution in Europe. And I use the healthcare system to explain that. I mean, Switzerland doesn't train enough of its own doctors, but then it gets a lot of German doctors who come in. And then Germany has a shortage of doctors, so they get the Poles, and then the Poles get the Ukrainians, and the Ukrainians are effed and at war and die off, right? And that happens in a lot of sectors. So Switzerland is in the lucky position of being on top of this very unfair food chain. Yeah.

#Steven Jermy

I think there was a delicious irony there: to what extent is Switzerland's enviable position the consequence of neutrality? Yeah, if you see what I mean. I mean, there are significant expenditures in the UK and other places. But of course, war is expensive. It's expensive.

#Pascal

And it destroys a lot of things. Two hundred years without war gives you more time to make stuff.

#Steven Jermy

Yeah. I mean, I often say this, having worked both in the military and in the offshore energy sector. The investments that we make in the offshore energy sector, whether it's oil and gas or offshore wind, take a long time to make. And then the benefits, you know, happen over decades. But there's no such thing as military Keynesianism, as far as I can see. Essentially, you're creating apparatus whose purpose is destruction. And if you look at the sorts of destruction that happen when wars occur, it's not just the expenditures that go into the war. It's also the economic consequences after the wars.

And if you look, for example, at what was needed—the Marshall Plan in Europe after World War II—I mean, I look at Ukraine fearfully for Ukraine, because I have a strong sense that Ukraine may never be rebuilt. Where's the money going to come from? The Americans have been clear they won't invest. The Europeans can't afford to invest. I mean, Ukraine's very best opportunity for economic reconstruction would be to go to China and Russia. They're the two countries best placed to do it. But if they're left to expect support from the Europeans, I fear for them. So, again, I think this takes

me back to the issue that one of the great American strategists, Bernard Brodie, talked about. He talks about how, when you're thinking about or engaging in wars or these sorts of situations, one of the things to think about is the idea of a reasonable price.

I mean, I might want to do something in the war, but what price am I prepared to pay? And at the moment, the risk is that we will pay a significant price in Europe to invest in a war which, militarily, I am absolutely certain cannot be won. But the price will take two forms: there will be an economic price, but there will also be a price in blood. And if escalation into a European war occurs, then the cost to Europe will be significant. I mean, in the article I wrote some time ago on my Substack called "The Coming War with Russia," I explained that I did not expect the Russians to invade if there was a war. Let's imagine that Kaliningrad was invaded by a NATO force.

I said I expected the Russians to respond in kind to the forces that were invading and then to use their strategic advantage, which is their rocket forces, simply to attack and wear down the West's military infrastructure and energy infrastructure. And the consequences, at a time when the energy situation in Europe is precarious, would be profound. I talked about this leading to a dystopian future, and I believe that. It's a horrible thing to say. So the question is, how do you get this into the mindset of the population? I think we now come on to emotion. And as we were working our way through supporting the petition, one of the things that somebody in this little petition WhatsApp group said was, "We need to get this across to the mothers."

And it's the mothers who will be sending off sons and sending off husbands to war. And just look at some of the heartbreaking videos of Ukrainian mothers, wives, sisters and brothers when coffins are being laid into the ground for people who've been sent off, possibly press-ganged into going to war. So there's a price to pay in finance and economics and economic futures, but there's a price to pay in blood and emotion. And I think, as I look at the US-Iranian war, it's clear how much damage that has done to the GOP and to the Republicans. And if you think about the losses that the Americans have taken—a lot of aircraft, I think we're up to about 80 or something if you include drones—but at the moment, they're citing, I think, 23 service personnel killed.

#Pascal

And each of those service members is a big issue. And that's 23. Yeah.

#Steven Jermy

When people were coming back from Afghanistan, there were people lining up when the coffins came back. There's a place called Wootton Bassett, which had a sort of RAF airbase, a strategic airbase. And then the coffins would go off to wherever they were going. But if the coffins came back from a war with Russia and were going off to London, the motorway—the freeway between Wootton

Bassett and London—would be full, if we could even get them all back. It's just tens of thousands of people being killed. And for people who don't agree with this, I just say, look at the capabilities of the Russian hypersonic and ballistic missiles, against which we have no defense.

So are we prepared to pay with thousands killed in action? Tucker Carlson recently did an interview with a British politician called Jacob Rees-Mogg. And Rees-Mogg took the position that it was the duty of the British people to be prepared to fight and die for Britain's and Ukraine's security. I went through all the commentary afterwards—not with a fine-tooth comb, but a pretty fine-tooth comb. I couldn't find a single supporting comment. And I very often found comments from former British service personnel who said, "I wouldn't do this. I wouldn't do it myself, and I wouldn't send my children off." So I think, at the emotional level of the people, there is very little appetite—and they haven't been confronted properly with this yet—but very little appetite to fight and die for Ukraine. No appetite in the United States at all. Yeah.

#Pascal

It is absolutely true. The problem is that what we've seen with Ukraine is—and I think you and I were on the same page here—that while the special military operation is an invasion and is in breach of international law, it is also a highly provoked affair. But, you know, the provocation then led to this invasion, which then became the enabling factor for creating the narrative of an unprovoked attack: we need to support the victim of international aggression in whatever way we can, the greatest land war since the Second World War, and so on. But the victim narrative—in the West, it is very essential that we are able to create a victim. And then that victim has the right to use any kind of force, whatever it is.

The best example is, of course, the genocide in Gaza, right? The fact that to this day, in 2026, the powers that be in our states are able to say, “We need to support Israel because Israel was the victim on October 7th.” And hence, you know, poor little Israel must have the ability to defend itself, right? And then, in the name of defense, you go and slaughter people en masse to the point where Gaza is completely, utterly ruined. I mean, it's 100,000 people dead. Yeah. And still, the public narrative, at least the one being created, is that Israel is just defending itself. And the same is the case with Ukraine, right? Although there, the balance of forces is completely different, and it's the Russians inside Ukraine.

But the narrative that Ukraine, because it is a victim, needs to be defended—that's what enables this flow of weapons and so on, or at least that's the explanation to the general public. Yeah. And my very strong feeling is that what we've also seen is NATO salami-slicing its way into attacking Mother Russia. Let's not forget, at the beginning, it was the fight in the Donbass, and then came drones. But for the first two years, we only had Ukrainian drone attacks on places in the Donbass and Crimea, but not on pre-2022 Russian territory. And then came the Kursk incursion, and then came long-range drones, and then came the attacks deep inside Russia. So this is the salami-slicing into attacking ever more and more and more.

And the question is: how long will Russia ignore that, and when will Russia say, “Okay, you know what? NATO equipment, guided and operated by CIA people in all of these NATO territories, is attacking and blowing stuff up at home. We are now going to blow stuff up in their homes.” Yeah. Which the Europeans will then be able to use as the reason for saying, “Look, we told you they would attack us, right? We always told you they are evil, and they do that because they're imperialistic, so now we need to defend ourselves.” That would be the narrative created, but the Russians haven't gone for that yet. Don't you also see the danger that this is what they're trying to build up at the moment?

#Steven Jermy

So I have a sense that they are—and I'm talking about Europe here. I'm less clear about the Americans because there's no doubt that the CIA and some of the deep forces and the neoconservatives or the neoliberals are much more interested in the Russia-Ukraine war than they were in the Iranian war. I think that's a huge mistake. However, there is institutional momentum there, I think. And that's a big concern. It's a big concern. I think in Europe it's less conspiracy and more cock-up. Having worked at the various highest levels of British government, when people say it's a choice between conspiracy and cock-up, I'll generally say it'll probably be cock-up.

But let me give you an example of why. And I think one of the things that we will need to do in these sorts of situations—and this is why what we're all doing in the independent media, in our different ways, for what is a very worthy cause in my mind, is so important—is to help our populations deconstruct the narrative that's been presented to them. And I've often said that the West is being guided by a political narrative and that the Russians are being guided by a military strategy. The political narrative, whenever something changes, always adjusts a bit, so there's no sense of constancy in it. And that is one of the reasons why we're losing.

Now, if we had done the strategic analysis initially, we probably wouldn't have got into the war at all. One of the ways that I try to help people think about this is to use a medical metaphor. I wrote an article for the London Times back in the days of humanitarian intervention. And I said the very first principle, before you consider a humanitarian intervention, should be the medical principle: first, do no harm. The next metaphor is that the way the argument is being presented by the West—the Western governments and the Western media—is as if you were to go into your doctor's surgery and say, "I'm feeling ill, and this is what's wrong."

And the doctor looks at you and says, "I know exactly what is wrong with you. And so here is some medicine. Come back and talk to me in two days' time." Whereas a good doctor would surely say, "Tell me a bit about the history. Tell me a bit about the symptoms. When did this start?" And start to build up the diagnosis, because at the moment, there is no diagnosis whatsoever. So a diagnosis probably doesn't suit the West. But it's important for people to understand that the context in which we're operating is in large part a consequence of what's happened in the 20 years beforehand. I

mean, you and I know this very well. But I think when it's explained to people, initially, if the propaganda has worked, it takes them a bit of time.

But after you start to demonstrate to them the extraordinary contradictions in the narrative, one of the contradictions is that Russia's army is not very good. It's going very slowly. On the other hand, we need to be ready for war because, actually, they're about to invade us and take over the whole of Europe. Well, both of those things can't be true. The other one, which I often speak about as a former military guy, is that Russia's taking huge numbers of casualties and using massed forces to achieve very little. On the other hand, we know for sure that the Russian Federation is outproducing the whole of NATO in 155-millimeter shells to the tune of four to one.

And so when you do the math, you think, well, that means that each of the shells that Ukraine fires must be at least 10 times as effective as a Russian one. So I call them that: we must be providing them with logarithmic shells. The truth is completely the opposite. In war, and it's still the case in modern war, it's not drones that are the big killer; it's artillery. But drones allow you to do all these terrible individual things you see, like a drone chasing down a soldier. And it doesn't matter what nationality they are; it's really concerning when you see it. But actually, what drones also allow you to do is have visibility of the battlefield at range and make sure that your artillery is very accurate very quickly.

In the First World War, artillery was the big killer, by far the big killer, not the machine gun. It was artillery, and that is still the case. And so, at the moment, Russian artillery is much more effective. Their weapons are being turned around more quickly, and they've got much, much more ammunition. So at the moment, the Ukrainians are really struggling. And the figures that I hear from people like Stanislav and others—2.3 million Ukrainian deaths—feel right to me. I would expect, when history finally gets the final figures, that the total number of Ukrainians killed in action will be in the order of 1.5 to 2.5 million.

Now, if that's true, in a four-year war, that's nearly three times as many as Britain and the Commonwealth countries lost in the whole of the Second World War. About 850,000, I think, we lost. I mean, 2.3 million, 2.5 million—it's disastrous. So, again, I think you can start to deconstruct these things, and you can also deconstruct the view that Ukraine is good and Russia is bad. I mean, what about bussification? Yeah. What about press-ganging people? And it's heart-rending to see the videos. And yet, somehow, the Western press is willfully, willfully ignoring it.

#Pascal

And we just had this case last week, right, that was very big on social media, on X, of a Ukrainian ambulance worker, a lady, actually finding out that there were four people in severe distress somewhere in a cellar of a private house. Apparently, the Ukrainian military now uses private houses to make people willing to go to the front. I think that's what they're used for. I mean, to torture these people or otherwise put psychological pressure on them—people who either deserted or were

“bussified” and then need to be broken before they can be sent off. And apparently, there was at least one man who was in very dire straits. And she managed to rescue these people so that they could be released and taken into medical care.

And now she, along with one or two more of the people who helped do that, is in prison in Ukraine. And they're being brought before a judge for obstruction of the war effort and whatnot—basically treason charges, right? For exposing the inhumane treatment of these poor Ukrainian men. And that's the system that Europe supports, right? But again, our media, of course, doesn't cover that. And if they do, they frame it as, "Oh, the Russians allege that blah, blah, blah, blah happened," right? And it's part of Russian propaganda. And it's horrible because we on social media can clearly see this. You can see these people being taken out. You can see the bussification.

I mean, there are by now thousands of videos of men being stuffed into buses against their will. And then, obviously, they're not fit. I mean, these are obviously not soldiers. These are not people who have any kind of chance of surviving even just a couple of days on a battlefield, right? But they're being used as cannon fodder. The fact that, to this day, the mainstream media is still keeping this out makes it almost look like a conspiracy. Although, I must say, I still think we're well within the normal sociological developments of this kind of war mentality and what it does to societies. But it is quite striking that our media is, to this degree, complicit in camouflaging what is actually going on in Ukraine, isn't it?

#Steven Jermy

It is. I mean, take the case of these houses. I wouldn't call them safe houses because they are anything but safe houses. I mean, the immediate reaction, as you say, will be, "Well, this is just Kremlin propaganda." But it's obviously not, because the Ukrainian, Badenov, actually arrived at the house and agreed that this was wrong and that there would be an investigation into the 40 or so other houses. So this is going on, and it's undeniable if the Ukrainians themselves agree and are actually trying to do something about it—although, as you say, they're arresting the doctor who wanted to do something about it. So this cannot be Russian propaganda. Again, I suspect that over time we will start to see some changes.

And the reason that we'll see changes is that the truth is arriving, and the truth on the battlefield is arriving. The last of the fortress cities, I think, is just about taken. And we can see that Ukraine has no defense against Russia's air attacks. And all of the statistics and all of the mathematics show me that this is a lost war. And I think that you will slowly start to see some change. I know for sure that some people within the establishment, you know, within, for example, the British House of Lords, the sort of upper house in Britain, do follow our work. And I suspect there are others who are following our work. The difficulty they have, of course, is that if they speak up and say, "Perhaps these people are worth talking to," again, they get the same argument: "It must be Kremlin propaganda."

#Pascal

And I mean, unfortunately, this year we lost what I think was the greatest supporter of this kind of humanistic vision of international relations, Lord Sadowski. And, you know, there were very, very nasty comments by some of his colleagues, along the lines of, "Good riddance. Glad he's gone." Really horrible stuff. And Lord Sadowski was the greatest humanist I can think of. It was wonderful that Britain had him. But still, it's very, very poisonous. And the problem with these kinds of war situations is that you don't need 60% or 70% of people to support you. A very militant 20% to 30% is enough to keep carrying you forward. What do you think?

#Steven Jermy

I think, although what we're trying to do sounds quite difficult to achieve, the truth is that we've won the argument, judging by the way those people are operating. They're finding it very difficult to confront the argument. And so what they're doing is this classic ad hominem: they're playing the man, not the ball. They cannot deal with the arguments. And a scandalous and appalling example of that is the way our friend Glenn Diesen has been treated in Norway. I was just horrified. And I thought it was bad in other European states, including my own, in terms of free speech. But the way Glenn's being treated is a shameful thing.

It's a shameful thing. And the fact that he's had to decide that he must go off to Australia—I mean, you and I met Glenn personally. He's such a decent person, and he has been charged with being a Kremlinite. I think he should be charged with being a clear thinker. He's looking at the facts on the ground and trying to come up with an analysis. But because it doesn't fit the political narrative, he's being attacked. So I think this political narrative is starting to fall apart. It'll be slow, but then there will come a moment when people really do start to think. So we've got the 20%. Yeah. I think if we've got 20% to 30%, we're starting to actually open the debate. Hopefully there's a middle ground there. Yeah.

#Pascal

I hope so, too. The danger we are running is, of course, that through this work and through trying to expose what is actually happening, we're going to make the other side more militant. And we see that as well. Right now, we have Palestine Action on trial, and we have people on trial who just hold up placards saying, "I support Palestine Action," which, in any kind of free society, should be considered a matter of course—just your right to speak your mind, right? But we are not there anymore. And we've seen how the UK and also Europe are getting more and more draconian. And I probably don't need to point out that we have people like Jacques Baud, Nathalie Yamb, and Hüseyin Doğru inside the EU or the Schengen area under EU sanctions.

The sanctions themselves are now a way for the system to crack down—a system that's under attack by truth, under attack by, you know, being exposed. It's happening. But nevertheless, that

then increases the incentive on their side to create more draconian tools in order to stop what they see as malicious activities. And, you know, I do think a lot of these people actually believe their own rhetoric. I think Kaja Kallas probably believes that she is standing up for good and decency and values and so on. So anyone who's not with her must be evil. Therefore, we must create tools to fight evil abroad and at home, which is the most natural thing to happen, right? The enemy within. How high do you think the risk is that our societies will actually become more draconian before they get better?

#Steven Jermy

It's a very good question. I mean, it's a risk we all face. I mean, poor Ian Proud was detained when he was coming back from Valdai. So, indeed, was Richard Sakwa, who we both know. Again, they're really decent people. They're just calling it as they see it. I mean, I'm curious about whether I'll be detained when I come back. I don't think I will, but I don't know. We'll see. But I think the difference is that our cause is noble. Our cause is right. You know, we are trying to bring to a close a war which any historical analysis will show did not satisfy the criteria for unprovoked aggression. It was anything but.

I'm reading a book called Hubris by one of my professors at Cambridge. And the case is impossible to ignore. It's historically impossible to ignore. And so to say that it's unprovoked essentially is to say that history doesn't count. I think it's going to be a rocky few months. But again, I think that ultimately, as the events on the battlefield start to show that the war is lost, it will force the Europeans into a very difficult conversation. At the moment, the Europeans have just done something which I thought was incredibly stupid. And I sort of feel sorry, in a way, for Kaja Kallas because she's clearly hard of thinking.

I'm not saying that I'm glad they've done it, but what they've done is actually write to the Democrats and congratulate them on the midterms. I mean, if you wanted a way to make Donald Trump angrier, I find it difficult to think of one. So that is only going to make the existing schism between the White House and the European Union worse. I think that events on the battlefield will ultimately decide this. And I think as well that we, again, are starting to see in Ukraine the same issue that we're seeing in Europe, which is increasing population and increasing instability as a consequence. In Ukraine, it's a consequence of the war.

So there's a lack of people wanting the war to keep going. I think the vast majority in Ukraine—I would guess, and you may know the figure better than me, I think it's around about 60%—want peace under any conditions. Of course, this is what I find astonishing: despite the fact that most Ukrainian people want peace, the Europeans are going to support them in a way that does the opposite. I mean, you know, what's her name? Julia Mendel, who says that Ukraine is committing suicide. Yeah. Ukraine is committing suicide, and the Europeans are cheering them on. Our European establishment is cheering them on for their own reasons. They don't care about Ukraine. If they did, they would be looking at this strategically.

#Pascal

Yeah, but this is also a very classic thing that happens in conflict, in war: the people who are most directly impacted by it, the people who do the dying at the front and the people who are in the immediate vicinity and have shells destroy their houses and whatnot, those are the ones who are most in favor of peace by whatever means. And if it means surrender, it's surrender. Just stop the shooting because it is so utterly unbearable. Whereas the farther people are removed from the battlefield, the more ideological they get and the more they say, “No, no, no, we must fight on,” even though those are the very people who would never, ever go themselves.

They'll send their sons and daughters, right? And that's the exact discourse from the Europeans, saying, “We must fight.” You're not going to fight. And then you've got these people in their 60s and 70s saying, “We must fight.” It's like, you would never go. Yeah. And your children are sitting somewhere in the Commission or whatnot. And they will be the ones telling others to send others into battle. And you're so far removed. And this dynamic, unfortunately, I don't see breaking yet. Putting it more bluntly, there's still enough potential cannon fodder before the war gets closer to them, so that they get, you know, the sense of, “Oh, I might be personally threatened here.”

#Steven Jermy

I think the sons and daughters argument is a very, very important argument. And, you know, I've been through this. I've lost friends in the Falklands War. I'll tell you a story about the Afghan war. I'd just taken over in my first flag-rank job as a one-star. I took over command of the Fleet Air Arm, and I was rung up. It was in September—no, it would have been about July 2002. I was rung up by an admiral who said, “Steve, I want you to prepare these seven squadrons for warfighting operations in the Gulf in 2003.” And I said, “Okay.” Honestly, I'd been in the job for about two weeks. And I said, “Can I tell them?” He said, “No.” So, okay.

So I thought to myself, having gone off to the Falklands at extremely short notice—we sailed within four days of being told—I'm not going to let the Fleet Air Arm go to war without preparation. So I talked to a colleague in the Ministry of Defence, where I had been working. I said, “Do you think this is going to happen, Simon?” He said, “Yes, I think it is.” I said, “I do as well.” And we then had a quick look at the timelines, and we both predicted that March 2003 would be the most likely time. That was due to a number of factors: the time needed to get the forces mobilized, but also the weather and the heat. We knew that if we left it too long, the heat would have a massive impact on aircraft operations.

#Pascal

So that was for the Iraq War. And so we prepared everybody.

#Steven Jermy

Early on in the war, during the assault on the Al-Faw Peninsula, two of our aircraft crashed into each other, and all seven aircrew were killed. Just think: I went to six funerals in 11 days. I can tell you I would never want to do that again. And that's what we will be facing. We'll be facing thousands of funerals for, as you say, young men and women who really have had nothing to do with it. They will probably not be the sons and daughters of those who are advocating this and who have not thought through the personal consequences. I also think that there are many people in what I would call the middle ground of this who have not been properly exposed to the arguments.

But if they're told that we've got to go and fight and die for Ukraine, they won't do it. And I could imagine that there would be significant problems within the British and other European armed forces. We're seeing these in the American armed forces at the moment, where morale, by all reports—and I'm not at all surprised—is low. So I think that it's one thing to send people off to die for what is really an important cause. It's quite another thing to send them off to fight in a war which can't be won. And the problem is that we do have an establishment. It's not just the politicians. We have an establishment, including senior military officers, who, in most cases, I'm afraid to say, are not competent. A lot of people will be surprised by that.

Do you assume that because a military man or a security or intelligence professional is operating at the top level, they're competent? To which my answer is, well, let's just have a look at the track record of the West in this century. We've got Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and what appear to be two impending failures in Ukraine and Iran. And that, to me, is not a track record of an establishment that understands how to think and act strategically. So I think when you start to explain these things to people, you use simple examples. And a really good, simple example is one you remember I used yesterday. I said, how can anybody think that NATO could do this when it could not defeat the Taliban over a 20-year campaign, fighting against people who were essentially armed with AK-47s and IEDs?

How can we think that we can defeat what is the most battle-hardened army in the world, supported by industrial production that is outperforming the West and with complete energy independence? It's just beyond belief that anybody thinks that NATO could defeat Russia. We couldn't defeat Russia with the Americans on board. We certainly can't defeat it without the Americans on board. So this is the time to actually look at the arguments of power, whatever you think about the moral arguments. And I think the moral arguments are very balanced. It's certainly not the way it's being presented. Even if this were the strongest moral case, is it worth paying the price of the industrial devastation of Europe to support a war that can't be won?

#Pascal

Rational-thinking people will nod to the point where their necks will hurt. But unfortunately, it strikes me that our continent, Europe, with Britain included in it, of course, is caught in a very irrational

ideological moment. And the only hope I have is that we're not too far gone yet, that not every single drive for self-preservation has been overridden by this kind of ideological moment. And we have colleagues like Matthias Desmet who call it a mass formation and so on. You know, when you're willing to throw yourself like a lemming off the cliff, believing that, well, that's the direction you have to go. And we've, you know, seen that in other places. I mean, the Japanese were fighting a hopeless war, and it was hopeless from the beginning. The best-case scenario for them was to divide the Pacific. That was the best. Yes.

If that's the best case, you're just an idiot. But they were already driven so far, not necessarily by a mass formation, but by the way the system took them. In '41, they were at a place, you know, where all of the political dynamics were just pointing in that direction. Well, let's not go there. But, you know, path dependence exists. And I do hope that the path for Europe is not already so screwed up that we cannot stop it anymore. But maybe just in closing, Steve, what do you think? What is your best hope for what we can do with our limited means—not just you and I, but the people listening and the people agreeing that this is not the right thing to do or the right way to go? What can you recommend to people so they can do their little bit to try to keep us from going off the cliff?

#Steven Jermy

I think the best thing to do is to encourage people to listen to things like this. And what's interesting—I think we had the conversation yesterday—is that by far the biggest source of news and information for people in the world now is YouTube. I think I read that in the Financial Times about six months ago. And of course, we've got a real opportunity there. On mass formation, I thought your podcast with Matthias Desmet was fascinating. That was a fascinating comment. But I think that we have an opportunity here, and it was very interesting as well. So it's not only YouTube, but also social media and all of these things. Let me give you an example.

When we were doing the petition, it was going slowly initially, and we were doing okay. But then one of the team managed to put out a sort of link to, I think it was something like 57 different internal social media websites. And it was astonishing how it started to move and people started to get involved. It's now moving. We were about two or three weeks in, and then we went from 4,000 to 8,000, then 10,000 in two days. So this can work. And I think the fact is that when people are prepared to spread the word—and the word isn't that we're right and everybody else is wrong. The word is, let's have a discussion about this because it's so important for Europe. It's so important for Ukraine.

So at least let's have a national discussion. And when people hear us being shut down, what they're hearing is the establishment not being able to answer the charge. What they're hearing is the establishment losing. Sooner or later, the truth will come out, and our job is to accelerate that as much as we can. And again, this is why these sorts of things are so useful. I think the fact is that if we can start a sort of increasing tsunami, if you like, of waves running out across social media, with activities like yours, like Glenn's, and so many others who are actually just trying to call things as

they see them, then I think we have a chance. And I think, to go back to Matthias's thing, he said you need about 30% of the population to be of this sort of thinking. We can get to that sort of level, and I think, actually, we can be in a position to take the case to the 20% and see what we can do.

#Pascal

Yeah, and the other thing that he says is that even if you cannot break the general discourse, just by speaking against it, you're doing something to make the effects milder. Mass formation won't go overboard to the point where mothers will literally be calling for the executions of their sons, which is like the extreme level. But you can dampen it. So, ladies and gentlemen, talk to friends, talk to colleagues, write newsletters, do speak out, do start podcasts or just newsletters and, you know, mailing lists and so on, which are becoming very important for us to know who does what. And that will be part and parcel of it. And as long as YouTube is free and Substack is there and so on, we still have a chance.

#Steven Jermy

Yeah, and my one P.S., if I may, is: if you're one of those who signed the petition, thank you. And if you haven't signed it, have a look at it.

#Pascal

You need to be British, though.

#Steven Jermy

You need to be British. But also, if you're one of those who signed the petition, thank you. And don't hesitate to pass it on. The ripples can spread widely if we can do this. So thank you, and thanks for the opportunity.

#Pascal

So basically, the final conclusion is: like and subscribe to the petition or to the anti-war effort. And somewhere down the road, we're going to have a proper peace movement again. We will certainly have Steve Jeremy back here, probably next time online. Steve, thank you for your time today.

#Steven Jermy

Thanks very much. Thank you.