Larry Johnson: NATO Attacks Russia in the Baltic Sea

Larry Johnson is a former CIA intelligence analyst who also worked at the U.S. State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. Johnson discusses the attack on a Russian cargo ship in the Baltic Sea, and the air alarms going off in Kaliningrad. Read Larry Johnson's Sonar21: https://sonar21.com/ 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 Escalating Tensions in the Baltic Sea 02:45 NATO's Role and Russia's Response 05:52 The Shift in European Attitudes Towards Russia 09:11 Cultural Influences on Perceptions of Russia 11:44 The Consequences of Military Escalation 15:06 The Irrelevance of Europe in Global Politics 25:49 Reassessing Global Power Dynamics 32:44 The Role of Europe in a Changing World 39: 19 The Impact of Economic Interests on Politics 41:03 Military Strategies and the Ukraine Conflict 47: 54 Final Thoughts and Recommendations

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Today is Saturday, November 21st, 2026. And we are joined by Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst who also worked at the Office of Counterterrorism at the U.S. State Department. And I can add that he's an excellent writer, so make sure to check out his writing on Sonar 21. I've left a link in the description. Good to see you again, Larry.

#Larry Johnson

Professor, always good to be with you, brother. Likewise.

#Glenn

As we speak, there are some very disturbing developments taking place today. That is, again, on Saturday, we see a Russian cargo ship has been attacked by two drones in the Baltic Sea, in the Gulf of Finland. And again, it's assumed that this is a Russian drone, but anyone looking at the map knows there's... You mean a Ukrainian drone? What did I say?

#Larry Johnson

Russian drone.

#Glenn

Sorry, a Ukrainian drone. It's assumed it's a Ukrainian drone. But again, my point is, look at the geography here. There's no way this did not originate from a NATO country unless you assume it flew all the way through Russia, then through St. Petersburg and into the Baltic Sea. And if that's not enough, as we speak, we see air raid alarms going off in Kaliningrad—again, the enclave of Russia stuck between NATO countries—as expectations of drone attacks increase. They seem to be coming from Lithuania. I mean, it hasn't all been confirmed yet, but they've shut down the airports in Kaliningrad. And this is quite dramatic. I mean, as we speak, Russia could be under attack by NATO. And there's no way Russia could avoid responding with full force if this is the case. So this is quite troubling.

#Larry Johnson

Well, and then you add to that the Kerch Bridge attack, which took place with the assistance of NATO. That was not just a one-off by Ukraine. I apologize for using obscure cultural references, but the Baltic states can't get away with pretending that they're Sergeant Schultz from Hogan's Heroes. Now, Hogan's Heroes was a comedy show in the 1960s that featured U.S. prisoners of war being held by Nazis. You figure, how's that a comedy premise? But Sergeant Schultz was this big, rotund guy—the actor was German—and his famous saying was, "I know nothing. I see nothing. I hear nothing." And here are the Baltic states trying to pretend, "Boy, we don't know how this drone got there."

"Boy, that's a mystery to us." Excuse me. It's just not going to hold. And, yeah, I think Russia is not panicked. These attacks by the West, by NATO, in conjunction with Ukraine, are a sign of panic. Excuse me. Got some pollen going on here today. And so, out of that panic, they're acting in a very desperate manner. It's sort of like a drunken sailor in a wild bar fight, just throwing punches, not even sure who they're punching, not even sure that the punches have any effect. But the retaliation will be effective and will be quite targeted. So, yeah, these guys are playing with fire.

#Glenn

It seems as if NATO, with this, has decided that they will go with the war option. And again, as you and I have discussed before with other guests, this would always be the most dangerous time of the war. That is, after Ukraine has been completely exhausted and it begins to fall apart on the front lines and beyond. And we kind of see this happening now. And that's when, essentially, NATO would have to decide whether to go for the diplomatic option or join in the war directly. And as we've seen over the past few weeks, the war rhetoric has really escalated. And as you said, these massive attacks against the Crimean Bridge have been ongoing. Again, there's no way at all that this was

done without NATO—that NATO is not behind it. And we saw the Russians retaliate, you know, striking close to the Dutch embassy in Kiev. And I was just wondering, what could we expect from this in terms of retaliation from Russia now?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, you know, in one of our previous conversations, I remarked upon what I observed from the European delegations when I was at the UN Security Council, testifying in support of Ambassador Rodion Miroshnik about the situation in Oleski, in Kherson. The hostility, the rage, almost the irrational anger on the part of the Latvians, the Danes, the Greeks, and the French—I mean, I was sort of stunned by it. The Brits were relatively restrained that day. I would have expected a real diatribe from them. So Russia's listening. They're paying attention to who's saying what, how they're saying it. And, you know, this literally could lead to Russia beginning to carry out drone and missile strikes in the Baltic territories, in Finland, against sites that are launching drones or are involved in any way with handling or facilitating drone operations. So, yeah, this is headed towards getting out of hand, that's for sure.

#Glenn

Yeah, we see the rhetoric that has been building up. Today, the same day as NATO attacks Russia, we see Ursula von der Leyen of the European Union blaming Russia for an assassination attempt in Denmark. She has provided no evidence. And again, this is possible, but we also have to remember that this is the same von der Leyen who earlier accused Russia of jamming the GPS signal to her plane, preventing it from landing in Bulgaria, until Politico and other newspapers got hold of the flight data and showed that it was a complete fraud. There hadn't been any delays or anything.

There hadn't been any jamming. She made it up. And again, they reported on it when it happened, but they don't report on it after it's been debunked. So we should really get some evidence. Again, it could be true, but it is a bit suspicious that these allegations of assassination attempts within Denmark come on the same day as these strikes on the Russian cargo ship in the Baltic Sea, which, again, has to be NATO. And if there are now any attacks on Kaliningrad, again, I'm not sure what other conclusion to draw. I mean, what would be the counterargument here? I don't understand how this could be interpreted in any other way.

#Larry Johnson

Well, again, the Europeans have adopted the attitude that Russia is this authoritarian threat, this monster intent upon taking over and capturing all of Europe. And therefore, they feel obligated to fight Russia. I mean, that's the decision they've taken. They've shown no indication yet whatsoever of trying to talk to Russia or trying to find a diplomatic solution. Their idea of diplomacy is that Russia has to prostrate itself before the Europeans, surrender totally, grovel and beg for forgiveness, and pay reparations. And Russia's having none of it.

You know, we saw that last week, or more than a week ago now, when Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff were at the Kremlin. And basically, they were pushing for, "Oh, we've got to get the Europeans involved." Putin said, basically, "No, no, no. Europeans are demonstrating no interest whatsoever in coming to the peace table and offering any kind of reasonable settlement. So, no, we're not going to deal with them. And if they put any personnel in Ukraine, we'll kill them." So, you know, right now the door is shut for the Europeans with respect to Russia.

#Glenn

Yeah, so Kaja Kallas, the EU foreign policy chief, made a comment today—well, maybe it was yesterday—that, you know, peace doesn't mean the end of human suffering and freedom. So, you know, she's indicating that peace would not be enough. Essentially, yeah, you have to slay the evil Russian dragon first. Well, she didn't make the Russian dragon comment, but that's kind of the insinuation here. It's very radical stuff coming from the Europeans here. Let's not put ourselves in their category.

#Larry Johnson

Before you go on here, maybe you can answer this. So people who are your age—you're in your mid-40s or, you know, you're in the 40s range—everybody your age and younger has zero memory of when the United States and the West were locked in this struggle with the Soviet Union. And the actions of the Soviet Union back then—you could actually point to some concrete things that were very objectionable and seen as very draconian. And so there was sort of a natural reason in the West to oppose the Soviets. And yet, during that entire period, I never experienced the visceral hatred of Russia that I am seeing right now coming out of people of your generation. Why is that? I mean, can you explain what it is that Russia has done that has been so inflammatory, particularly to people in Europe?

#Glenn

No. Again, I was born in 1979, so I was 10 years old when the Cold War ended in 1989. I have no great memory of that time, but obviously I've read the history. I've followed the documents from that time. And, you know, you would refer to Soviet leaders with a certain respect. You wouldn't call them dictators and thugs, or look them in the eye and say, "KGB." I mean, they didn't use to talk this way. We had diplomats who believed in diplomacy as well, not diplomats who warned against it. And it is something very different we're seeing now. I don't know where this is coming from.

And it is a very strange hatred. I mean, there was more reason during the Cold War to be angry with the Russians, but we were restrained. I think it's the opposite now. I mean, during the Cold War, when there was a real threat, at least in terms of Soviet capabilities, there was restraint. We tried to understand. After the Cold War, when that threat receded, we began to escalate. We expanded the

military bloc. We started to develop missile defense. We started to talk in the most aggressive way about the Russians. So this is a contradiction, and it's hard to make sense of.

#Larry Johnson

You know, and again, this is just a hypothesis off the top of my head. I wonder how much of this is a consequence of Hollywood and its propaganda. When the movie Red Dawn came out, that was still during the Cold War. I think that was Patrick Swayze, and they were fighting the Soviet and Cuban invaders of the United States. But from the 1990s on, when Russians were portrayed, they were generally portrayed as criminals—ruthless, vicious criminals—or, you know, just wantonly killing Afghans. Even though that had taken place in the '80s, it was portrayed in the '90s.

I just wonder—and it's something I'm going to look into—if the themes in films played a role in shaping Western perceptions of the new Russia as this corrupt criminal enterprise and therefore poisoned an entire generation. Because my son, he's two years younger than you. And, you know, in talking to him and then hearing you, you guys have grown up in a whole different environment than what I grew up in.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think it's also perhaps about the distribution of power. During the Cold War, there was a balance of power. So when both sides are balanced, you understand that the only way you can have peace is if you understand your opponents. That's necessary to find compromises, make mutual concessions, and figure out how to harmonize interests when possible. When it's not possible, at least come up with ways to manage competition. I think in the hegemonic era, this all went away. We stopped trying to understand them because we didn't have to harmonize our interests with them. Security then relied on dominance.

So, you know, as William Perry, Bill Clinton's defense secretary, said, when everyone was for expanding NATO and he warned, "We're going to make enemies out of the Russians," the feedback he got was, "Who cares? They're weak now." So, you know, if your security is about dominance, you don't really care. And I think this is kind of what has really festered in the West. I mean, I always make the point that during the Cold War, we were able to make compromises for mutual benefit and for peace. These days, all our enemies, you know, from Milosevic all the way to Putin now, and all the Arab states in between, they're all the new Hitlers.

Every adversary has to be defeated because if you make concessions, you accept a status quo where there's a balance. You have to defeat the opponent. That's how you restore your dominant position. That's how you have peace. So there is an immediate hatred, and it's not just against the Russians. It's all adversaries. They're not understood. They're dehumanized. That's the first impulse. I think there's something more, maybe structural, or maybe it's just us uncultured, dumbed-down Hollywood people who have taken over a little bit, or ideology, perhaps. I mean, whenever these

people confront Russia, the only thing they explain is, "But we are good. We have values, democracy."

“They're evil. They're imperialists. They want to restore the Soviet Union.” Yes, what I wanted to ask, though, is that we also see other things now. We see that Estonia has announced the closure of all its land borders with Russia, something you would expect ahead of a war. But we also see Russian missiles and drones reportedly—and I have to emphasize “reportedly”—entering Polish airspace. It seems that it happened. It's not clear yet if it was deliberate, but, you know, this news at least seems more reliable than the statements of von der Leyen, which I would be very cautious about believing before I see some evidence. But what sense do you make of this? Is this accidental, do you think? Or are the Russians sending a signal in terms of retaliation?

#Larry Johnson

Well, actually, I think there's another possible explanation: that this was generated by Ukraine and /or Poland. You know, we've seen this in the past, where there was an immediate accusation that Russia had penetrated Polish territory, and it turned out it was a Ukrainian drone or it was from Ukraine. But that said, to the extent that Poland continues to facilitate any attacks on Russian territory, they're making themselves a target. And the Russian leadership has been quite clear about that. And, you know, this goes back to something our mutual friend Sergei Karaganov has spoken about: with the passage of time, the Europeans have lost their fear of Russia using a nuclear weapon.

You know, this is one thing I was indirectly referencing with respect to the Cold War period that I experienced. In the back of everyone's mind was always the idea that Russia's got nukes, and they could use them. And so the last thing you want to do is put them in a situation where they're going to feel so threatened that they might use them. You know, when you look back on it, it's pretty remarkable that there were Russian pilots—or Soviet pilots—in North Vietnamese combat aircraft, shooting at and killing American pilots. Yet during that time, and up to the end of the war in Vietnam, the United States still talked to the Soviets. We didn't take that as a casus belli and say, “Oh, we're cutting off contact with you.”

“We're not going to talk to you anymore.” In fact, they engaged in serious negotiations, which produced the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties, SALT I and SALT II, ultimately the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Agreement in the 1980s, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. So my point is, during this entire time of conflict and tension with Russia, we still maintained this healthy respect. You know, Russia's got nukes, and you can't disrespect them. Whereas now, you've got so many in Europe who just say, “Oh, Russia's never going to use those. We don't have to worry about that.” And in taking that attitude, they are actually increasing the likelihood of their use. That's the ultimate irony.

#Glenn

We saw, was it two or three days ago, Poland accused Russia of planning a false flag attack within Poland and intending to blame it on the Ukrainians, hoping that this would divide the Polish and Ukrainian communities. Again, this is why it's a bit concerning. It's too much at once. It's possible, but it's a bit strange that this happens now as well. And again, I'm not sure what to believe anymore. But nonetheless, this happened, what, two or three days before the attack on a Russian cargo ship in the Baltic Sea, and now this possible attack on Kaliningrad.

Again, this is also kind of wild. This indicates that there's a deliberate response from the Poles. Either Russia actually did this and this is retaliation by the Poles, or this was just made up by the Poles to justify, essentially, an attack on Kaliningrad. Because it looks like this is always what NATO does. It takes these little steps. So first a cargo ship, then set off some alarms in Kaliningrad, and then go for a larger, all-out attack later on. You read the news as well. How do you make sense of this, though—the alleged Russian false flag?

#Larry Johnson

Listen, I think it is, I'll call it, a natural consequence of the decisive turn in the war against Ukraine. Ukraine is now losing, and even some of the strongest supporters of Ukraine in the West are finally starting to acknowledge that their situation is becoming desperate. Particularly the situation in Kiev, with the destruction of the bridges, the destruction of the electrical grids, water not running—no water, no power. They're going to have to abandon the city. And so when you start abandoning the city, that is tangible evidence that Ukraine is losing. And so, out of that desperation, they're striking back like this. And again, it's counterintuitive, because if they launch these attacks on a Russian ship or on Kaliningrad, Russia's not going to take it lying down at all. Russian patience is exhausted, from what I've seen. And they are hitting back harder and harder each time. And at some point, Ukraine will break. They cannot continue to absorb this kind of punishment without cracking.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, that's what I thought as well. I mean, the Ukrainians have been very resilient. I thought that they would have folded earlier, but again, they have thrown a lot of men into this, and NATO has thrown away a lot of weapons and money—more than I had expected. But also, of course, they have proven to be very resilient and prepared to fight on. But nonetheless, with what's happening now, this intensification—I mean, the laws of physics still apply. There's no way this downward spiral can be stopped now that it's started. But as you said, it seems to be entering the endgame of the war, which means either escalating or making concessions. And it seems that NATO has now gone with escalation. Do you think the meeting between Trump, Putin, and Xi in China could have set off some of this panic, you know, in addition to, of course, the setbacks for NATO on the battlefield?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, as far as just telling Europe, "You're no longer relevant. You know, you're not even worth consulting." And step back and just let's look at it objectively. What is it that Europe produces or provides, from an economic resource standpoint, that either the United States or Russia or China needs? And the answer is nothing. Nothing at all. How important is Europe in the realm of developing artificial intelligence, modern technology, modern industrial processes, robots? Are they important in any of that? And the answer is no. A hundred and ten years ago, Europe was the center of science. That's where all the major developments in physics and chemistry were coming out of. That's no longer the case.

The industrial power present in Europe on the eve of World War I was such that nobody in the world could touch them. The United States was starting to enter into that, but really had not achieved even what Europe was achieving. Now Europe is shedding industries, particularly Germany. So here you have, if you will, the entire European continent turning out to be totally irrelevant. They're no longer a part of the international economic talks. What role do they play other than creating a nuisance on the side? And, you know, maybe one of the statements that was issued out of that joint meeting, the trilateral meeting in Shenzhen, was that we need to take a new look at the United Nations.

Well, what they're talking about is the UN Security Council. Does it really make any sense any longer to have the United Kingdom and France as superpowers on the UN Security Council with the power to veto, when the fact of the matter is they're largely irrelevant? There are other countries that are bigger and more important economically, such as India and Brazil, which perhaps deserve a seat at the table in lieu of them. So, yeah, this very well could, in part, be Europe trying to say, "We're still relevant. See, we're still important." Europe is now like Fredo from The Godfather. You know, the third son who kept saying, "I'm smart." Well, he's not that smart, but he thinks he is.

#Glenn

Overall, though, what was your takeaway from that meeting, the trilateral meeting between, again, the three great powers? I know Trump wanted to present it as another Yalta. I don't buy into that. I don't think it was that important. I mean, I'm happy to see the great powers sit down and try to figure out new rules of the game for this new power constellation. But I know some people want to read into it what they want to see. For example, I saw the very Russophobic former American ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, tweet a picture of Putin sitting at a table all by himself: "Ha ha, he's humiliated." That was AI, though. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So again, it's kind of wild. In his defense, he probably didn't know it was AI, but it shows kind of how excited he got. But what was your takeaway here?

#Larry Johnson

Well, yeah, I despise McFaul, but to his credit, he did finally recognize it was an AI fake, and he took it down from his X account. I wrote about it last night at sonar21.com. I encourage people to take a

look at it. I called it "A Photo for One and Talk for the Other." You know, this was master manipulation by Xi Jinping, where he provided Trump with all the photo ops you could want. Man, he got greeted at the airport in person by Xi Jinping, and they played the American national anthem. They had the YMCA song at the banquet for Trump. And, you know, from a photo-op standpoint, there were a lot of people in the West who said, "Oh, man, Xi is dissing Putin and showing that he's great buddies with Trump."

But then, when you go back and say, "Okay, what did Xi Jinping say when he actually met with each man in a bilateral setting and was recorded?" the very first words out of his mouth with Vladimir Putin were, "Mr. President, my dear friend." And he repeatedly referred to both Putin and Russia as friends and allies of China in the warmest of terms. He didn't say a damn thing like that to Trump. Not one word about "great friend," etc. On issues, he spoke in depth about political, economic, and military cooperation with Russia. With respect to Trump, he was basically warning him: you know, you need to stop with these tariffs, and you need to not meddle in Taiwan. So there were no warm expressions like, "Oh, the United States and China are the greatest of friends."

Xi went out of his way to point out that he had met with Putin 50 times. And again, Trump kept calling Xi, "Oh, my dear friend, my great friend, we're the best of friends." Xi never reciprocated, just remained pretty stoic. So the biggest accomplishment out of the APEC summit, from my perspective, was that it rehabilitated Putin. That's what Xi was doing, because Putin was front and center in all of the pictures. Some tried to say, "Oh, in the one picture where Trump was immediately to Xi's right, immediately to Xi's left was Xi's wife, and then next to Xi's wife was Putin." But I jokingly said, "Xi made the right call. I wouldn't trust Donald Trump standing next to my wife. Are you kidding? You know, I've got to keep him in check."

"I'm going to keep him here on the side where I can keep an eyeball on him." Now, the reality, though, was that later, when it was just the leaders, Putin was standing to Xi's right. And the official statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with respect to Russia were all laudatory. With respect to the United States, they were all, I'd call it, cautionary. So this was reestablishing the fact that Vladimir Putin is one of the three great powers in the world today. And Canada was in the back row. Albanese of Australia, he was in the back row. It was sort of putting everybody in their place: the important ones were standing here, front and center—Russia, China, the United States. And of that triumvirate, the ones that have the closest relationship are Russia and China.

#Glenn

What I found interesting is Sikorski of Poland. Well, he was making the point that this is not a good thing. It's not good optics. It's the three great powers, isn't it? The US, Russia, and China. It should be the US, the EU, and China. So replace Russia with the EU. But again, they can't even send anyone to represent them. They can't even take a diplomatic position. You know, the EU is in a mess now, and it's not even able to behave as one actor. The more it attempts to behave like one actor, the more it has to restrain the nation-states from acting in their own interests, which just causes

further havoc. So, yeah, it seems like desperate or wishful thinking. That is, you know, let's all pretend we're a great power, and then we will be. You know, this is the constructivist thinking often found in Brussels.

#Larry Johnson

Well, yeah, you know, when I say what I say about Europe no longer being relevant, I'm not trying to be insulting to my European friends. You know, I've spent many enjoyable days—usually working—in Germany, in France, in the UK, and in Italy, and a little bit in the Netherlands and Switzerland. So I'm not anti-European, but it's just an objective fact. Step back and ask yourselves, what is it that we as Europeans bring to the table that the U.S. needs, Russia needs, or China needs? And the answer is nothing. That period in which Europe was an essential player because of its military power, its economic reach, its control of natural resources in other countries, and its colonial empires—that's all gone. That is now history.

And the crucial role that Europe once played in the exploration of the world, the opening of the world, the colonization of the world—that's gone. And that ain't coming back. So at this point, you know, we like to talk about Europe as a monolith, but as you know so well yourself, there are still significant cultural differences between Germans, French, Brits, Dutch, Swiss, Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, etc. In fact, the common history they have is that they spent most of the last three centuries fighting each other, as opposed to having a unified worldview. And now, at this point, Europe's trying to galvanize itself to come together in opposition to Russia at the very time that it no longer makes economic sense.

I mean, the German public is starting to wake up. They are shedding industry at a horrific rate. You know, Volkswagen shutting down, BASF pulling out of the country, Bayer reducing its chemical operations and moving overseas. Same with BMW and Mercedes. I mean, it is bad news in Germany right now. There's not some bright future with a dynamic industrial sector. It's just the opposite. It's going in reverse. And the one country where it's actually moving forward, particularly on the industrial front, is Russia. And Russia's got this cheap oil and gas that it was happy to sell to Europe. But the United States couldn't stand that because, by God, we wanted the Europeans dependent on us. And so we put a hit out on the Nord Stream pipeline, got that destroyed, and now you've got most of Europe dependent upon buying much more expensive LNG out of the United States.

#Glenn

I agree, but I often make the same point, because if you criticize Europe, it's assumed to be anti-European. But I'm a big fan of the concept of a geoeconomic Europe. That is, a Europe that finds more unity on economic matters. You can have collective bargaining power to improve the symmetry with the large powers. You can also work together to pursue technological sovereignty. That is, collectively develop something like a European Google or Amazon—something for technological sovereignty. But then you also have to diversify your partnerships.

Don't only link yourself to the US, but also to the Russians and the Chinese. But what I don't like about Europe is the centralization of power in this ideological, unelected bureaucracy. We redivide the continent and make an enemy of Russia. And if you make a comment that this will destroy us, well, that's anti-European because you don't criticize the project. So essentially, if you're pro-European, you have to just put on the blindfold and run towards the cliff. It's very strange because this whole idea of a geopolitical Europe united against Russia destroys the possibility of a geoeconomic Europe.

I mean, we don't need to have a redivided, militarized Europe. You know, I don't even think Europe can have a future without the largest European state, which is Russia. I mean, they're the energy hub. They actually have technological sovereignty. They have the geography. We should have them on our side of the ledger. Otherwise, Europe would be a poor vassal, excessively dependent on the US. But yeah, I can't for the life of me understand why no one is changing course in Europe, though. But I guess it will come when there's some regime change around the continent.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, I mean, it really is. Well, you can argue that one of the influences is the realm of international finance. And we can take Friedrich Merz of Germany as a case in point. He is a former BlackRock executive. BlackRock is heavily invested in Ukraine, and BlackRock stands to lose substantial amounts of capital if the Russians prevail, which they are going to. And yet they are in this desperation mode to try to salvage that. And so what's happening is that Merz is sacrificing the German public, the German national interest, for this financial interest of a foreign economic entity. And that's what's absolutely so crazy about this. It just makes no sense. It is so self-destructive.

#Glenn

Now, when I see the German foreign minister say, you know, energy prices will come down and things will go back to normal once Russia's been defeated in this war, I feel like we've watched this movie more than once, and it's not going to go down well for the Germans on this one. But again, how do you explain the desperation in Europe now? I mean, if you look towards the battlefield, what actually are we watching? Because there's been so much over the past two or three days now, especially after the Ukraine-NATO attack on the Crimean Bridge. What is it that you see happening now in terms of what Russia aims to achieve, and also the extent to which it is able to achieve it?

#Larry Johnson

Well, I'm not sure the actual information is getting through to the Europeans. Now, the channels I'm monitoring show that Russia is actually making dramatic advances. Ukraine's land defenses are weakening, its losses in the Black Sea are increasing, and there's growing destruction from missiles and drones in the major cities. There's not one bright area that the Ukrainians can point to that is

working out militarily for them. And now, as we're on the threshold of winter, the temperatures have dropped. We've already had snow in Russia, and Kiev is going to be unlivable as a city. And the destruction of the bridges is accelerating that process. So why the Europeans don't see that and comprehend it, I don't know.

#Glenn

How severe is the impact on the bridges at the moment? Because the bridges across the Dnieper River are very difficult to bring down completely, but they can be made unusable, at least for military purposes—that is, to get heavy machinery across, even trucks—if you punch enough holes in them. How serious is the damage, to the extent that you have any overview of this?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, no, the damage is serious. It is now starting to disrupt the logistics flow. I had a conversation about four months ago with a retired general, Evgeny Buzhinsky—a great man. We're cohorts; he's a couple of years older than me. But I asked him at the time, "Look, I'm not trying to play armchair strategist here, but why hasn't Russia taken out these bridges over the Dnieper?" And his first answer, you know, sort of tongue in cheek, was, "I've been asking myself that same question." But then he went on to elaborate.

He said he thinks the reason was that, at the time, Russia did not want to take down the bridges, which would have left the bulk of the Ukrainian army on the western shore. They wanted those bridges open so the Ukrainian army could come across, so that Russia basically could destroy the army as part of their effort to demilitarize Ukraine. But it looks like now the general staff of the Russian army have recognized, "We're at that stage. We're taking the bridges down because taking the bridges down at this stage is going to logistically starve the forces that are east of the Dnieper River and will accelerate their defeat."

#Glenn

Well, I'm always worried when I hear all these rumors or unsubstantiated claims of Russian efforts to carry out a false flag in Poland. Because we also see some reports now in the U.S. that the Iranians are planning to use a dirty bomb on U.S. territory, which seems completely out of keeping with how the Iranians operate. But the fact that they're making up this story is a source of concern—not only if it's true. Most likely, this is not true, but that's something you would say if you're building up to a strike on Iran. And it seems like the Americans now have lined up most of the capabilities they require.

But just as a last question, if the NATO-Russia proxy war now goes into a more direct phase, how do you see this playing out? Because I always assumed that Kaliningrad could be where the war could start, because it's quite vulnerable, and NATO's been talking very openly about how they can isolate

it. The American general there—I forgot his name—said, you know, "We could take Kaliningrad quickly. There's nothing the Russians can do." He never asked what the Russians would do the day after one million of their citizens were under occupation by NATO. But how do you see this conflict possibly playing out? Yeah, I think it was the former EUCOM commander, Donahue, I believe, who made that threat.

#Larry Johnson

I believe there's probably a 60% to 70% chance that within the next two to three months, Russia will be hitting targets inside either the Baltic states or Poland with missiles, most likely an Oreshnik missile. They'll be hitting factories and military sites that have been used to launch drones against Russia. And that'll be the first marker laid down, saying, "Okay, you've now crossed the line." And then that will set off the process of NATO trying to invoke Article 5. And I think that's the point at which we're going to see NATO fall apart, because there will not be this unity of, "Oh, my God, we've all got to fight Russia now." You're going to have enough countries saying, "Wait a second, this is crazy." So I think this will be another moment that will further fragment the NATO coalition—not unite them, but fragment them.

#Glenn

Well, whether this escalates or we're able to calm this down, I think the dynamics within the Russian political system are definitely going to shift over this. I mean, you know, whatever happened or did not happen in Kaliningrad, the fact that they hit a Russian cargo ship in the Baltic Sea—I mean, it's going to be very hard for Putin now to explain to his political class that it's good to avoid retaliation, that it's not worth the risk. I think there's going to be a lot of pressure now to get a lot tougher with the Europeans. Correct. Correct. Anyways, Larry, any final thoughts before we finish up?

#Larry Johnson

Let me just steer people. I did an interview earlier this week with Stephen Kinzer. Kinzer has written a book recently called Boiling Point, and he lays out how this effort to use Ukraine as a military weapon against Russia goes back to the end of World War II. And it's an excellent, excellent book. We have a great discussion about it on Countercurrents. I advise people to go check it out. I actually interviewed him myself about this book.

#Glenn

For a long time, he was a New York Times journalist. He's written some excellent books over the decades now. Of course, this was his latest one. Great work. Make sure to check out the talk between Larry and Stephen Kinzer. Maybe even read the book. Thank you, Larry, for coming on, and thanks to everyone for listening in.

#Larry Johnson

Hey, thanks, my friend. It's always a pleasure.