

US Military Bases Make Countries LESS Safe

| Dr. Arta Moeini

Dr. Arta Moeini, Managing Director of U.S. Operations and Research Director at the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, discusses radical realism, regional power, and the limits of global hegemony. The conversation covers China, Iran, neutrality, middle powers, Ukraine, Israel, U.S. strategy, Europe's dependence on America, and why a post-unipolar world may be shaped more by regions, cultures, and civilizations than by one global system. Links: Institute for Peace and Diplomacy: <https://peacediplomacy.org> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction to Arta Moeini and IPD 00:01:35 Radical realism and world politics 00:03:59 Why radical realism differs from neorealism 00:08:34 China, culture, and global hegemony 00:14:52 Power beyond tanks and GDP 00:18:10 Middle powers and multinodality 00:22:34 Neutrality at the edge of empires 00:30:34 U.S. regional disruptors and alliances 00:36:24 Elite networks and bad state choices 00:40:06 Europe, NATO, and American influence 00:45:41 The coming post-unipolar world

#Pascal

Welcome to the show.

#Arta Moeini

Hello. Good to be back, this time in person with drinks in our hands.

#Pascal

This time in person, so cheers to that. Arta, you are working at the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, a North American think tank. Can you tell us just very briefly what it's about and what you do there?

#Arta Moeini

So the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy is a realist think tank based in Washington and Toronto. We are a North American outlet trying to see the world through the perspective of the continent and through the perspective of, you know, North America. And that focuses on the regions and mostly on what the role of regions and geography is in world politics. We are also focused on sort of challenging the interventionism of U.S. foreign policy, the role of ideology in U.S. foreign policy. So

we're very focused on U.S. grand strategy and U.S. politics and what sort of keeps America involved in various parts of the world. And then we are also trying to change the conversation about what the international system is like, how it works, and, you know, connect various issues on that note. So we are an academic institute, a research institute that does policy work—that's how we put it. And our approach, as I mentioned, is very realist-focused. So, yeah.

#Pascal

So tell me, on a grand scale, how do you think international relations works?

#Arta Moeini

Because we all try to understand why world politics is the way it is and how states function.

#Pascal

What is your approach to making sense out of the chaos we are seeing?

#Arta Moeini

So I think a lot of the problem that we have had is just path dependency. People have been learning the world a certain way. They've worked a certain job. They're part of a certain network. And they do the same thing over and over again, even if it doesn't work. And so I think instead of focusing on sort of the ideological reasons of why, you know, we have to know this ideology behind a lot of the action that has driven U.S. foreign policy and driven, you know, our actions towards the world, I think instead we've got to focus on what has always been there—the role of actual, sort of concrete things: geography, culture, history. International relations as a discipline was created in the 20th century, effectively. So it has a lot of baggage from the 20th century and the biases of the 20th century—positivism, utilitarianism later.

I mean, there's a lot of that. And I think more than that, we've got to think about just the fundamentals. There is a world of multiple systems, multiple countries, multiple states, but also multiple civilizations that anchor the world. These are tied to geographies and cultures. They have always interacted. Sometimes they have fought great wars. Sometimes they've made great peace. The question is, how do they interact and how can they share this world? How can they have a modus vivendi? And a lot of our theories today, I think, fail to understand those rudimentary elements of how these multiple networks of systems and countries and nations and peoples interact, and instead create or project, rather, our version of things onto the world.

#Pascal

You call yourself a radical realist, right? Yeah. How is radical realism different from, let's say, the Mearsheimerian type of offensive realism?

#Arta Moeini

Well, so first of all, radical realism—our focus on the word “radical”—that comes from the Latin root meaning roots, the root causes. So, realism that looks at the root causes of things and the way that things function is at the rudimentary, elementary level, which is, uh, we have to go back to what's important, which is the regions, the peoples, the cultures, and how they interact. You can't do realism based on a vacuum or in a vacuum, where it's just some metrics and there are only a couple of players engaging in a vacuum. And then we call it the great power competition, and we just say, okay, well, now this is how the international system is devised.

That approach has an inherent globalism, an inherent universalism that actually sort of pretends that because the world is anarchic and the situation is anarchic, all countries need to maximize power. And therefore, that means they have to control the entire world or at least prevent other countries from being powerful even in their own regions, right? Yeah. So from my perspective—and I respect the work of John Mearsheimer a lot—it has a lot of explanatory power if you focus and zoom in on specific regions. But I think it loses its power if you look at it at a global level. Because I do not believe—and this is the provocative statement here—that there is a global system. There is not a global system. We don't live in a global system.

We don't even live in the world. We live in places in the world and mostly are not as connected to one another as we think. So we live in various continents, various locations, and inhabit various civilizations and cultural forms that inform our worldview. So our perception of reality is altered depending on where we are and how we see our first principles and have that worldview, what kind of norms and values we have. Those things matter. And in time, because we're different people, we also develop different types of strategic culture, right? And the problem with new realism as such—this is not just about offensive realism—but I think realism as such is highly, especially new realism, is highly utilitarian and looks at just the material conditions.

How many tanks do you have? What's your GDP look like? Those are the measures of power. And then, if you are powerful enough, if you're deemed powerful enough within the confines of the theory, then you're bound to go to war because you can't share this world, because you're always insecure. Or bound to do security competition. Security competition, exactly. And the security competition, to be fair, is supposed to prevent war from happening in a way because it becomes deterrence on both sides. But the fundamental principle is that the world is something to be conquered by one or the other. It's very Hobbesian in the sense that it's just... there is no ultimate hegemon.

There is no ultimate authority. We are in an anarchic situation. And the result of that anarchic situation is kind of a chaos. And so, all men for themselves kind of world. And I think that view is fundamentally mistaken for a few reasons. One is that it doesn't allow you to understand that China, for example, one of the major security competitors of our century today, is not going to act anywhere remotely like what America did in the 20th century. China is a fundamentally different country with a fundamentally different strategic culture and a fundamentally different orientation about the world. It does not want to be a global hegemon. It doesn't see itself as a global hegemon.

#Pascal

Hard power realists, or offensive realists, would argue, of course, like, no, no, no, that's just what they pretend because they're too weak. But once they're strong enough, they'll do exactly the same. That's going to be the clip.

#Arta Moeini

Exactly. And history shows us that China had the opportunity to go around the world and be the first colonial empire, the maritime colonial empire. What did it do? It burned all its ships down because it wanted to stay. Because the Chinese culture in this case—I'm not an expert on Chinese culture, I'm talking more at the level of cultures as such—but the Chinese culture in this case understood something that I think only now maybe some conservatives in America and Europe are understanding, which is when you become a global empire, you inevitably interact with others and you dilute yourself, and you have to mix and match and do all sorts of things. So you basically end up becoming multicultural.

The Chinese didn't want to become, in that sense, a multicultural society. They thought that they were better than everyone in that sense. And so why would you go and lose the core of who you are? It was an identity question. So I think the fundamental orientation of a maritime power like America, but also of the likes of Great Britain, is very different from landlocked powers, as we know through the differences between the Eurasian power, heartland power, and maritime powers. But also, culturally, the civilizational forms, the kinds of philosophies that you've had, make a very big difference as to how you conceive of the world. So that's just one thing. That's just one small reason why I don't think it's at all likely that China is going to follow the path of America.

But more so than that, the other reason is that if you see the world in those utilitarian terms, you are pretending again that you have the ability. Or if you have the ability, you are always going to try to dominate the globe. Whereas I think that's what gives you security. In fact, doing so, first of all, makes you highly insecure because you're going to hollow out your core. You're going to do all sorts of stupid things and make all sorts of stupid decisions. And you're going to go fight stupid wars. And

you're going to have a weak core at home. And once you're weak at home, it's harder for you to actually even maintain your status as a regional power, let alone a globally projecting power. But also, it's hard for me to see how divorced we are from history.

Because if we see how regions actually work, we have all this information about empires and how they have worked in the past. Balancing, which is this important theory of realism, as you know, is something that happens naturally, right? It's not even irrational, of course. It happens naturally because old empires, which map onto old civilizations, balance each other out because the realm of the civilizational realm stops. And then you have various civilizations that are sharing these spaces, and they come into contact. And you have, for example, the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire always in lockstep, in a way balancing each other.

So as long as you have both of them at a relative degree of strength, the system is stable. That's just the political side. The geographic side. We just saw in the Iran war how difficult it is to go and topple the Iranian government. Why? They did prepare for this conflict for 47 years, but ultimately they leveraged their geography — the coasts and the mountains. Iran is a fortress. But that's not because of the Islamic Republic. That's why Iran is a civilizational state over thousands of years, because it has been able to, whichever empire, whatever kind of ethnic makeup or ideology or philosophy or religion has held that land, in a certain way.

And other countries have had a lot of trouble conquering it or breaking it apart. And so it goes with other empires that have had continuity, endurance, and staying power. So geography, and then culture, and the people who live there — they have a culture, a language, a way of being. These elements are important in international politics or in any sort of politics, in the way that these cultures are going to interact with one another. So my point is that there is anarchy, but there is not chaos. That is the mistake of the new realist schools. But I consider myself a proud realist.

And balancing anarchy, security competition within regions — all of those things are real. Our mistake is the globalization, or the globalizing, of the historical pattern that realism gives us, which is in regions and contained, and is based on spheres of interest. And so, moving from those spheres of interest into a global circumstance, we have a very, I think, problematic situation in which we think that unless we are conquering others and are the first country, the global hegemon, we are not safe and secure. Actually, most states are safe and secure so long as they do have the basics, which is a protective geography, a defensive geography, a structural resilience that comes from their societal resilience, and anchored on an actual cultural form.

#Pascal

Right, right. So in a sense, you're also a realist who doesn't agree to reduce everything to just power, right? Power and chaos. I mean, there are these other factors that do matter. So culture matters, and the depth of the experiences that the community might have had matters. Maybe you've got the Iran example. I mean, it's quite fascinating that Iran was able to basically create its

defense in a distributed way — 31 military districts that are able to independently decide what they're going to shoot at and whatnot in order to do mosaic defense. I mean, that's just something that I haven't seen any other state try to do. But Iran seems to have made it work because of the understanding that this will not lead to negative feedback, right? I mean, there are also dangers involved with this kind of strategy, but for Iran's strategic culture, this is something that was possible. So, in a sense, some realists might say that, oh, but that means you're taking into consideration all of these other soft factors, right?

#Arta Moeini

But you wouldn't say that this is... No, I also don't think that this is. I think the soft power, hard power dichotomy also is mistaken. I use the German framing. I do emphasize power. But power, **Macht** in German, has a very different connotation than force and coercion — **Kraft**, right? So the focus of most utilitarian thinking is on the physical force. But power is if I can get you to do something without lifting a finger. And so that is not a soft power. That's just power. You know, so I think the reason that civilizational realms and civilizational states are so important is that over bounded territory — bounded territory — they have power. They have power through history.

They have power through human and people-to-people interaction that makes the people around that realm see the world a certain way. And that gives a lot of advantages. And they also know the terrain and the geography and the way to defend their homes. So those things all matter. And then most recently, we have had new advances in technology that allow for these types of states to, in a way, find a way to defend their territories much more efficiently, with less cost. So it has equalized war and democratized war. Perhaps not for all small states, but for these types of states that have the advantages of the geography and the people and the resilience.

#Pascal

Yeah, asymmetric warfare just became more asymmetric. Exactly.

#Arta Moeini

It became more asymmetric, but it became a way to balance the playing field for the middle powers. And by middle powers, we mean powers that are not just great powers in the sense that they can project power anywhere in the world in bouts, but actually they can consistently project power in their own neighborhood. That's what a definition of middle power is to me. So Iran is a middle power, and even Russia to me is a middle power. So that's why we have all these discussions about multipolarity. If you do a narrow understanding of multipolarity, we live in a bipolar system, which a lot of Cold Warriors or boomer types love, right?

Because it allows them to have this duality of us versus them once more. However, my point is that the new post-unipolar era that we're heading into is going to be fundamentally different in terms of

its organization, its conception, than what came before it. So it's not just that the players are changing. The Soviet Union is now gone. Russia is not a great power. Maybe it's the middle powers, but China is a great power because China can project. It's not that. It's that we are back to something that's far more historical and far more normal, which is the differences between great powers and middle powers.

There is a difference, but not that much. It means that the great powers can't do much to middle powers. Middle powers are more important than ever before. And so these regional powers are, to me, at the regional level, more important than great powers. Even though if we step back and think about the global, yes, China and America are going to be important in setting other frameworks like technological frameworks and other things. But it doesn't mean that they can come in and topple middle powers and everything in regions. They are going to be much less important in faraway regions.

#Pascal

So in a sense, what used to be easier to do, like power projection through just aircraft carriers and whatnot — the Navy just sent it over there, and then once the coast was basically threatened, the other one would fold. I mean, how the United States opened Japan back in 1858, or how it, deep into the early 2000s, was ready to use its Navy to project real hard power right to the coast and then right into the Torres Strait — that's kind of going away right now, isn't it? So the immediate periphery of these middle powers is now much more up to the middle powers than what it used to be. Is that the new multipolarity that we're needing to work with? So not everybody on an equal plane, but the plane is still unequal, the abilities are still unequal, but the ones closer at home have increased. Yes.

#Arta Moeini

But I think, therefore, I use the term multi-nodality rather than multi-polarity. Jess Freeman also likes multi-nodal much more. Yes. Why nodal and not polar? Because of the baggage that we have with the polarity situation. Because polarity is deeply tied to neorealism. Right. And I think this, you know, more holistic understanding of realism that is, you know, some might say, oh, is this neoclassical realism? No, it's not, because it's not only focused on the domestic factors. It's focused on the whole — it wants to change the very foundations of what is the actor in the international system, in the global system, which is not a system anymore.

It's actually multiple systems. So multi-nodality allows you to actually move from the one system to the multiple systems. It's not the world that we're talking about anymore. It's multi-worlds. Each world unto itself — the Chinese world, the American world, the Persian world, the Turkic world. These are different worlds. And to the extent that America or China can lock their regions down,

they are great powers. But Russia, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia — these are other middle powers that are going to be very important and have a lot of efficacy in their own historical realms. We are back into realm politics. Yeah.

#Pascal

So... you know, other strategic cultures — the Indians, Kautilya — they had more of a mandala theory of international relations and, you know, outward projections in circles. So are we moving toward something more like that? And then what does this do to these overlapping spaces? I mean, one interesting, fascinating thing right now is what's happened to the Gulf states. Yeah. And obviously they don't like it, but they're now this kind of periphery. There's always a periphery, right? Yeah. To me, for neutrality studies, the most straightforward thing that I would predict is that at the end of this process, these places will be de facto or de jure neutral, neutralized, because that's what they have to be in order to maintain what they are within the position they have, without being absorbed by one or the other, which at the moment just looks impossible to do. The forces cancel each other out. But it's also not possible anymore to just be part of the US extended empire and then survive through that. How do you see it?

#Arta Moeini

I very much agree with you. Look, first of all, the reason that our institute also has a very strong position on neutrality being a very important part of the conversation — I think this is how we started talking in the first place. Neutrality happens at the margins of empires and great spatial spheres of empires and civilizations. Obviously, we can't expect China, America, Iran, or Turkey to be neutral. But we do expect the countries on the borders of them to become neutral. And this has been something that is historically very... We were just talking before the show about Switzerland, about Belgium, about Austria in the conference that we were just at. Why were these countries, in different times in history, neutral, right? And something that we need to add is that neutrality is such a bad word in Atlanticist circles.

#Pascal

Yeah, they hate it.

#Arta Moeini

They hate it. They hate neutrality because neutrality is capitulation, neutrality is appeasement, neutrality is evil. But neutrality is how these smaller states can protect themselves from the excesses of, or flying too close to the sun, alternatively, of the bigger states. And what I said, again, going back to the fact that this is a realist framework — it's not an egalitarian framework, right? So it's not

a liberal institutionalist framework where we think, oh, all states are equal. No, they're not. And no amount of multilateral institutions or UN treaties can make them equal. States are fundamentally unequal, and therefore neutrality is a very important survival strategy for these places.

Now, the states that actually historically have had a great track record in being neutral are the organic nation-states of history — states like Georgia, the country we're recording from, Oman. These are kingdoms. These are not made-up countries; they're not artificial countries like the UAE, which was made after World War II, right? These are not. They have an experience, they have a strategic culture made on neutrality. I hope the listeners understand what I'm trying to say — that there are organic states and artificial states, and they make a difference. The organic states — so there is a thing called nation-states that are organically created, and almost all these nation-states... You mean rooted in geography? Are rooted in geography, of being in the middle.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Arta Moeini

Being in specific areas that have been at the crossroads or the fault line. If you play it right, you can be a neutral kingdom. Korea is another example close to where you are. Between two bigger, more powerful states — China mostly — for the most part, Korea was under the suzerainty of China, but also Japan later on, as Japan rose from a more isolated nation-state to trying to project more power. So Korea is a very... And you see, these places have their own customs and traditions. They're not a civilization, though. They are interesting. They're genuinely national. Hungary, another one.

Why is Hungary... Why did Hungary insist so much on neutrality between the European side of its heritage and the more Eastern European or Russian side of the equation? Because Hungary has an experience of really being in the middle, of playing with both sides, of being both German and Russian without being either, being completely unique. So my point is, this is not about Orban. This was never about Orban. This was about the strategic culture of Hungary. And the Hungarians, whichever Hungarians discover that and protect that, are going to be remembered as patriots. And whoever gives it up, to one side or another, is going to give up the entire country.

#Pascal

So you're condemned to play with both, right? It's in the nature of what you're trying to defend then.

#Arta Moeini

You're defending the sui generis existence that somehow you managed to squeeze into the borderlands of empires. Now, the alternative is to be a Ukraine. And a Ukraine, a Taiwan, and Israel

even — these are states that have been, that use and have been used in a sort of dialectic with the great powers to unbalance and destroy the harmony of regional structures for the benefit of the external great power. And they think that this is the best way for them to protect themselves. And yet they will, if they insist on this, they will disappear. And you're seeing what's happening with Ukraine, right? Millions dead, millions have left, the East has disappeared, and Zelensky is responsible for it.

#Pascal

And we all know, and it was absolutely crystal clear since the 1990s, when Ukraine came out of the Soviet Union, that the only way for Ukraine to be prosperous is to be neutral, which is why they had it in the Constitution ever since 1995. It was clear to the people. It was clear also to a lot of realists, and so on and so on, who said, no, this needs to be neutral, right? It needs to be neither this one nor that one, but it needs to be a bridge that can interact with both. And we almost had it. We almost had it. In 2014, it was undone. It was chased away. Yanukovich was a neutralist. No, he was a neutralist. And we almost had it again in 2022, right after the whole chaos that unfolded. The Istanbul conversation — I mean, they were circling around each other — that would have solved the situation. And then that solution was destroyed by the people who thought, like, no, we've got to fight it out.

#Arta Moeini

Yeah, this is what I was— you started talking about my role. As the managing director at the Institute of Peace and Diplomacy and being a research director, what I do is effectively try to figure out what are these tropes, these ideological tropes that have blinded us in America to do these kinds of— frankly, foolish, stupid policies. And very inhumane. Well, again, I'm a realist, so that's not the main focus. Okay, fine. Stupid in the sense of... stupid in the sense of... it's against the American national interest. Again, a lot of people can say a lot of things about Israel. I'm not interested. The most important element here is that the U.S.-Israeli relationship is against the American interest, period. That's it. The rest of it doesn't come into the realist conversation.

#Pascal

Brian Verrett would disagree with you and would say, like, no, I mean, it's the United States that uses Israel in order to do hegemonic policy in West Asia and actually keep grabbing forward, forward, forward. It doesn't matter how many people die because it's not Americans who are dying. It's the others who are doing the dying. At worst, it's going to be Israelis who are doing the dying. But it's still strategically beneficial to weaken everybody else on every single front in order to break the system.

#Arta Moeini

So I agree with the general framework. America has since then... I mean, this is a paper that I'm working on right now. It's about this... Since the 1970s, since the fall of Nixon, if you can call it that, American strategy changed. And Brzezinski is partly responsible for that. It really started with the Carter administration. By the way, they were the original neoconservatives. And then it sort of went towards the Reagan administration. The strategy was kind of using these smaller states as regional cudgels, regional balancers, if you want to call it the word balancer, but they can't balance. It's basically just regional disruptors. We throw them in these regions, and we will just disrupt and destabilize all these regions.

And if they're destabilized, then we can actually, in a way, ensure that we're always on top. Because if all the regions around the world are destabilized—and this, by the way, goes to John's theory—that offensive realism says that it's in your interest for no other region other than your own region to have a regional hegemon. This is why I think it's a fundamentally mistaken theory. Because if you carry it to its logical conclusion—now, maybe if John was sitting here, he would say, no, I don't think America should interfere in these places—but effectively, somebody at some point decided, on very similar grounds, taking the point from offensive realism perhaps, that yes, John is right. That shouldn't happen.

So what's the best way for us to do this? It's to throw these grenades into these regions. And the grenades are—they became deeply embedded in the U.S. security structure, in the U.S. establishment. So the issue with Israel is that that relationship got reversed at some point. But Ukraine is a perfect example of a more nascent relationship in which the state of Ukraine is used to obviously bloody Russia and destabilize that entire region. Taiwan could be another one. So there are two questions. One is, is it foolish for America to do this? I say yes. I think it's against our interest. We spend billions of dollars on these kinds of projects. It doesn't serve the American people. It doesn't matter to Americans what happens in far corners of Eastern Europe, period.

Taiwan doesn't matter to America. That's one thing. But then there is number two, which is these are the smaller states that don't really—they can't really defend themselves ultimately. They need American support and American largesse, so it becomes this very unhealthy relationship in which they need America to be more involved in their wars. And this is the second avenue in which it's bad for America because you can very easily find yourself in a global war as Americans. So that's against what Brian was saying. And so that's one side of the equation, the American side.

So I think we should avoid these kinds of states like the plague. Now, if you talk about Japan... Is it beneficial for America to have an alliance with Japan? It's a very different story. Japan is a middle power. Japan is a state that can sustain itself and be resilient, independent of what we do to Japan. So we just strengthen their hand with our technology or supportive logistics. That's a very different story. We will never have to fight an actual war on Japan's behalf in the way that we will have to at some point, or we already have, for Israel and Ukraine. So that's one thing. All that was on the great power side.

On the recipient side, on the smaller side, on the small state side, if I'm Israeli, I would not do this, right? If I'm Ukrainian, I would not do this. If I'm from any small state, UAE, it's in your direct interest to be neutral. And yet, because ultimately, once the war happens, you are the one fighting it, and you are the one paying the cost for it. You are the one that's going to be destroyed. Your entire statehood can go away. You can become an unsustainable state. You can lose your viability. You can become a failed state. All these things are possible. It's possible in Ukraine.

#Pascal

Yeah, but that's why... That's why it... Whenever realists are forced to say, like, it makes no sense, it's the moment when you must admit that there are things happening that are not explainable by, like, what's good for the... what's the national good, right? So people make decisions based upon something different, based upon elite networks or based upon allegiance to something else, based upon, you know, where the money is coming from and that you know you always have a place to escape to. So, in a sense, can this kind of reduction to what is good for the nation-state and the assumption that this is how the decisions are being taken kind of be upheld? Like, looking at that, it's just clearly Ukraine... It's a copy case. The trading state is not taking or receiving what makes most sense for the national good of Ukraine from within the framework that we are applying to understanding the conflict.

#Arta Moeini

Yeah, it's not, but there are two or three reasons for it. One is that we have interfered in these countries. Like you mentioned, Yanukovych. I mean, Maidan was a coup. This has been admitted by multiple sources, right? The playbook is very similar. They tried the same thing in Iran just a few months ago. And again, this is irrespective of whether or not there are many millions of Ukrainians that perhaps wanted to be on the side of Europe. There are many Iranians today that want to be on the side of America. That's irrespective of the fact that America is interfering in it, right? A coup is a bad thing to do if you're interfering. So I think doing that thing... I think you're taking away the agency of what would have happened anyway.

And it will always backfire, is my point. So it's one thing to say that the Ukrainians or the Iranians are just misguided and want to be siding with the West. Like, for example, in the Persian Gulf, these smaller Gulf states, they made the decision that it's beneficial for them to court America. We didn't install these people, even though maybe we did at some point, if you want to go decades back. But these people were there, and they decided this. So let's just say that this was an authentic decision. It was a wrong decision. It's a wrong decision because in outside regions, outside the West, outside America specifically, there's a misjudgment around the level of American power and commitments — what America can do for you.

So they banked on it, they gambled on it, and it backfired. And therefore today, the state of Qatar, the state of Saudi Arabia are moving away from that arrangement. And the UAE or Kuwait might be

stubborn, but they will find out soon enough the way that Ukraine and other countries have been finding out as well. Having U.S. military presence in your countries is a liability. It's not a security force. And this is not in the Middle East. This is everywhere. You are opening yourself up. But the mere fact of having U.S. troops in your region, in your country, is antagonizing the actual great neighbor that you have to your north or east or south or wherever. So you're creating the conditions for antagonism that will come back to haunt you.

#Pascal

And the whole thinking that these military bases will protect you as a middle or small power only works if you actually know that, oh no, these things are very good, right? They could shoot down anything that comes in. And what we are learning now is, like, when they can, they can—they really just work to antagonize your bigger neighbor, and they just point the bullseye on you. And I wonder how long it will take for that to sink in in Japan and in other parts of the world. But I think it will sink in eventually. I'm not very sure about Europe because it's so enmeshed that it's kind of different.

#Arta Moeini

Europe is a different story. Europe is a story that has to do also with something, some other factor, which is the sociological factor. The Europeans, they see themselves as part of this courtship network. Yeah, the bigger court of the American empire, right? So the Europeans come to America, they study, they come back. So they think that they are the international world. Yeah, they kind of are standing for the American empire. Yeah, which is why it's so conflicting for them to talk about strategic autonomy, and then it goes nowhere. Because if you listen to the speeches of many European leaders, they sometimes say "us" when they talk about America.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Arta Moeini

And it's a Freudian slip. It's not us. Europe and America are two fundamentally different entities. I would argue that they are two different realms. They have different strategic priorities. They have different strategic cultures. Even within Europe, you have different ones. I mean, France and Germany or France and Poland are fundamentally different.

#Pascal

Yeah, but this is what many, many decades of this kind of narrative construct create, right? When you think that in NATO, oh yeah, every country is equal. In NATO, exactly. Yeah, sure. No, NATO, and we know that since the beginning, always had several goals. I mean, as Eastman Hastings said,

NATO is there to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down, right? And all of these things were important actions. And we're seeing how that one is now changing.

#Arta Moeini

Except that it's mostly the Germans keeping themselves down, so they don't need to do much.

#Pascal

Yeah, they're changing that now, but not necessarily for the better, and it will cause counter-reactions within all of the other states. Somebody was pointing out to me, I just guessed a bit, that now we have the situation in which the UK did a separate defense agreement with the Poles. Purely symbolic, but symbolic it is. Against who do we do a defense agreement between the UK and Poland? Obviously, there's only one giant elephant in the room that could potentially be meant by that. And this kind of logic is now going to restart again. I mean, you have a lot of...

#Arta Moeini

German politicians like Baerbock or von der Leyen, they have no understanding of what Germany is from my perspective. They are so enmeshed in Americanism. This is a shame because if you were genuinely understanding what your own strategic interests are, you would act very differently.

#Pascal

But even there, the problem was, who is "you"? We know that at the beginning of the Cold War, there was an offer in 1952 for a unified Germany under a neutrality framework. It was on the table. Adenauer said no. And he said no because a unified Germany would have probably meant his power gone, right? So for him, the most rational decision to make was to convince the Americans to say, sure, no, hell no to this kind of arrangement. Would it have been good for the German nation? It would have been good for Adenauer, yeah.

#Arta Moeini

And so there is definitely the elites. They do have politics, and it makes a difference. But I think ultimately the elites do come from the people. I do think that there are these networks of relationships between people, a certain group of elites that act as transnational. And they want to go to the same parties. They want to write in the same magazines. It's a prestige mechanism, is what I'm trying to say. And so it's not a conspiracy. It's not that they're sitting there to do something. It's more deeply human. You want to be... you kind of align yourself and conform to the norms that are part of your herd. And they are a specific kind of animal. Epistemic communities. Yeah. That then naturally go forward. Very good phrasing. Exactly. They're epistemic communities.

And no matter where they come from, once you get indoctrinated into that community, you advance in a sort of groupthink. Yeah. And so the problem is these groupthinkings are fundamentally ideological. And they are mythical even. They have their roots in the post-war era. They have an internalized understanding of American exceptionalism that doesn't exist in reality. So it's all of these kinds of... Or they believe in this another false creation, an invention, which is the Judeo-Christian Western civilization. It doesn't exist. There's no such thing as a Judeo-Christian civilization. Completely made-up term. Made-up term to justify, again, our strategic relationship with Israel. There's so much, again, there's so much jargon and so much BS that passes in serious conversation these days.

#Pascal

And that's the job we have, to deconstruct this kind of bias. And that's why I'm glad that we have conferences and whatnot to work on that together, and that we can also do it via our different links. So, Arta, anything you want to add to this conversation?

#Arta Moeini

I would just say, you know, I think the world is at one of its most important inflection points. Everything that we talked about—the old order is disappearing. It's falling in front of our eyes. It started, the first sort of exponent of this was Ukraine. But the Iran war, I think, is a culmination. By the time this is done, you will see a different world actually come out of it, the contours of which are not necessarily clear right now.

But it's going to be a post-unipolar, and I would say a post-global, world in which globalization, neoliberalism, all those material conditions are much more regionalized. And the world itself, strategically and geopolitically, is far more regionalized, and cultures and civilizations will be the most important analytic units, replacing the nation-state as the most important moving forward—not in the next one, two, or five years, but in the course of this shift that will happen in a new order. And so the game will change, and we need to find ways, a new understanding of diplomacy and coexistence, in a world that's defined by global cultural pluralism and genuine diversity of peoples and nations.

#Pascal

Let's continue the search for that future kind of diplomacy. Artem Moen, thank you so much for your time today.

#Arta Moeini

Thank you.

#Pascal

Cheers.