Baiting Russia AGAIN & CIA Deceptions Exposed | George Beebe

George Beebe, director of grand strategy at the Quincy Institute and former CIA Russia analyst, explains how intelligence should inform policy, why covert action can distort analysis, and how partisan bias has grown inside U.S. institutions. He also talks about Russia, Ukraine, the risk of escalation, and why a more neutral, multipolar world may need new rules. Links: Quincy Institute: https://quincyinst.org George Beebe Twitter/X: https://x.com/GeorgeBeebe13 Neutrality Studies substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Merch: https://neutralitystudies.com/shop Donation: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Timestamps: 00:00:00 Intelligence and the CIA’s role 00:06:42 Foreign intel, oversight, and Curveball 00:17:59 CIA after 9/11 and policy bias 00:24:26 DNI, transparency, and partisanship 00:31:59 RussiaGate and intel reform 00:35:56 Russia, Ukraine, and escalation risks 00:41:58 Why neutrality is hard in Ukraine 00:44:59 A multipolar world and new realism

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, I've got with me George Beebe, the Director of Grand Strategy at the Quincy Institute and a former Director of the CIA's Russia Analysis, as well as Director of the CIA's Open Source Center and former Staff Advisor on Russia Matters for Vice President Cheney. George, welcome. Thank you very much. George, we met actually recently at a conference, and you were speaking there as well. And with your background, especially working for the Open Source desk at the CIA within the kind of intelligence arm, not the operations arm of the CIA, I kind of wanted to know a little bit how you assess the role of the intelligence services today in the U.S. and within its foreign policy. How important do you think the role of the CIA is in what U.S. foreign policy is?

#George Beebe

Well, I can talk a little bit about what I think it should be and also talk about what I think it is. In general, I think intelligence is extremely important for American foreign policy. We need to understand the world. We need to understand the dynamics that are at work today in the international system. We need to understand the capabilities and intentions of other actors. That includes allies and partners, as well as adversaries and enemies. The better informed we are, the better we understand those developments and dynamics, the more effectively American policymakers can adopt policies that protect American security and advance American prosperity. And that's not an easy thing to do. Understanding what's going on in the world is a huge challenge because you have to get out of the American mindset.

You have to see the world through other eyes, foreign eyes. These are the perspectives that other countries have—how they perceive the United States, how they perceive developments in the world. You have to do that in such a way that doesn't justify them, that doesn't say, oh, here's how they see things and they're right. It has to be an understanding that allows you to anticipate what they might do, how they might react to what the United States is doing. You need to account for misperceptions and misunderstandings, which frequently play an enormous role in international crises and conflicts. But that kind of understanding not only helps U.S. policymakers prepare to defend against threats, but it also enables and empowers American diplomats so that they can be most effective in dealing with their counterparts abroad.

Now, that's sort of the ideal, what you would hope for from intelligence. But there are other aspects of intelligence that are also part of what an intelligence organization does. When the United States created the Central Intelligence Agency, this was in 1947, in the National Security Act of 1947. And this was a reaction to what happened in World War II, particularly Pearl Harbor. That surprise attack was something that had a lasting effect on the American psyche and on the American body politic. And one of the things that legislators wanted to ensure was that we wouldn't be taken by surprise like that again. So they wanted a central intelligence organization that had access to all different types of information and could be a central point where all this was assembled and analyzed.

And the hope was that this would minimize the likelihood of future surprises. But what else happened at that time? We were entering into a Cold War with the Soviet Union. And there was another aspect of World War II that had an impact on how the CIA was designed and organized, and that was the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, a part of the U.S. military during World War II that engaged in secret paramilitary operations, the covert activities. And the CIA ended up becoming an organization that embraced both that operational paramilitary capability and the analytic capability. And those two things existed in a sort of uneasy tension, and always have ever since that time.

Because if you're an arm of American policy, if you're out there doing things in the world—not just gathering and analyzing information, but attempting to neutralize bad guys overseas, undertaking covert operations that sometimes might involve overthrowing other organizations or sabotaging different infrastructure elements abroad—it compromises your ability as an organization to see things through the eyes of the other side, to be as analytically objective as you can be, free from concerns about policy. And the tension, in a nutshell, is if you're out there trying to make a policy succeed, you have a vested interest in how your intelligence analysis describes the prospects for that operation and the success of that operation. So that is a tension that has ebbed and flowed over the years within the U.S. intelligence community.

#Pascal

So in a sense, if you're playing in the regime change business, then obviously it will impact the way that you do the regime analysis business.

#George Beebe

Exactly right. And I'll give you a very recent example of this. The Israelis and the Israeli intelligence service came to the White House, and this was all described in the New York Times account of why President Trump ultimately decided to launch this conflict against Iran that we're now trying to wrap up. But they essentially said, hey, look, here's what we can do. Here's the intelligence that we have about Iran. And here's what we propose to do to eliminate the Iranian nuclear weapons capability, to neutralize or eliminate its missile capability, to overthrow this regime, essentially, and inspire some sort of popular uprising in Iran. And they were quite optimistic.

That intelligence analysis was very much skewed to influence President Trump to think, oh, yeah, we've got a great opportunity. This can work. Now, in retrospect, that intelligence analysis was badly distorted. It badly overestimated the likelihood that these attacks would produce some sort of popular uprising that would overthrow the theocracy in Iran. And it illustrates to me the tension between policy advocacy and the Israelis, and Benjamin Netanyahu, while they were in the White House, were absolutely advocating a policy. And they were using intelligence effectively for the purposes of that advocacy, which almost inevitably compromises the objectivity of the judgments that you produce.

#Pascal

So this leads me to the question, you know, how deep is the intermingling and interaction between different intelligence services, foreign intelligence services, especially MI6 and Mossad? Because the problem we have is that these entities are... basically, you cannot audit them. The CIA can actually refuse to answer questions from your lawmakers, from Congress. They are on record saying, like, I cannot answer this because of national security. So you cannot actually look. They're like a black box within the black box of governments. And how much do you know about how they interact with other intelligence services? Because my assumption would be that they have shared interests, maybe for different reasons, but they do have shared interests. Do they cooperate among each other in order to get a political outcome that they want to see?

#George Beebe

Well, I'll say a couple of things in response. One is the CIA can't actually refuse to answer questions from Congress. They can refuse in certain settings if there is an open public hearing and are asked about information which is classified. Then, of course, they will have to say, I'll have to answer that in a closed hearing. Now, there are also certain programs, certain bits of intelligence that are so highly classified that they're only shared with specific named individuals in Congress.

And so there are provisions for that kind of sharing when something is so sensitive that you can't share it with the entire roster of Congress and their staffs. You have to do so under carefully

controlled conditions with a few specially named congressional leaders. But there is not an instance that I'm aware of where the CIA can simply say, sorry, we're not going to answer that question at all. That would be a big problem. And there you've got the question more broadly of how does a democratic government actually maintain democratic control over secret intelligence organizations? And that's a very important question.

#Pascal

But you would say it's still, it's not perfect, but it's given. I mean, the assumption that the CIA runs in the background and runs amok is overblown. It's still under democratic control.

#George Beebe

That's right. Now, one can question the degree to which this sharing is effective, how much candor and openness and transparency there is between the intelligence community and the people in Congress that they're supposed to be reporting to. That's a different question. But to say that there's no oversight and they can simply block congressional investigation and questioning, I think, is an exaggeration. Now, the question about sharing with other intelligence services, that is a part of intelligence work. The CIA can't be everywhere at all times and gather information everywhere at all times. It needs help. And so oftentimes you're going to lean on partners that have better collection capabilities than you do in certain areas. Now, part of this is an important and inevitable advantage that being local can bring in intelligence matters.

Geography matters, and culture matters, and linguistic capabilities matter, and all of that. So ideally, what you want to do in intelligence sharing is to use partners when they have advantages, but you have to do so with your eyes open, recognizing that some of them have agendas, that they're trying to influence the United States government too. So it's something that needs to be done. It needs to be done carefully. And usually, the way this works is there's a quid pro quo, meaning if a foreign intelligence organization is partnering with the CIA and they want to provide information, or we want information from them, they're going to want information from us. So there's a two-way sharing that goes on. But that is something that has to be done carefully, with your eyes open, recognizing how susceptible you can be to the influence of these foreign organizations.

And I'll cite another example, a very well-known example of what is called intelligence liaison, sharing of information gathered by a foreign intelligence organization that ended up not being handled with due skepticism and caution. And that was the case of the so-called Iraqi defector Curveball in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq under George W. Bush. This was an Iraqi national who was being handled at the time by the German intelligence service. And he provided information that, in retrospect, was clearly fabricated. But neither the German organization nor the U.S. government adequately dealt with that. And we ended up using that to justify the claims that there were active WMD programs in Iraq that had to be addressed through, the Bush administration argued anyway, through invasion.

#Pascal

Although in that moment, there was also a very clear political motivation to find anything you could in order to justify a policy that you wanted to do. So it was not... I mean, the whole thing of, oh, an intelligence failure, the intelligence failed, it's kind of a very, very weak defense for doing a policy that people wanted to do for completely different reasons than what they did.

#George Beebe

I think the thing to keep in mind there was... And I was, for part of this period, working in the CIA, and for part of it, I was in the White House on Vice President Cheney's staff as his advisor on Russia. So I wasn't dealing directly with Iraq and Middle Eastern issues, but I saw a good amount of the intelligence that was being produced at the time. I did not get the impression that the White House knew all along that this was fabricated, false information and was cynically using it to advance a political agenda. This was more a case of confirmation bias. You tend to see what you believe, rather than the other way around.

So there was a belief already in the White House that the Iraqis couldn't be trusted. We had gone through this during the first Gulf War when we discovered that the Iraqis had made a lot more progress on their nuclear program than the intelligence community had assessed at the time. So there was a belief among policymakers that, ooh, you know, we need to be biased in favor of assuming the worst, believing that there's stuff going on that we might not be aware of through intelligence channels. So that predisposition to believe this was going on made the assessment of this kind of information much less skeptical than it probably should have been in retrospect.

#Pascal

Yeah, so you had, on the one hand, confirmation bias. On the other hand, you had people who were trying to find what then would give them reason. And we remember also some of these nonsensical political claims, like Donald Rumsfeld saying, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." And really, like, you know, just deep nonsensical stuff that basically is there to serve a political end. But they're the politicians. I mean, the politicians do what politicians do. That's fine. The question is, does the intelligence then push in a certain direction, or is intelligence, as you said, in the optimal world, supposed to be very neutral, right? It should just be there and serve the purpose of informing the politicians. But the danger is, of course, that if there are within the intelligence political aims, it will start influencing the politics. That's right. How far down that rabbit hole are we, in your assessment?

#George Beebe

Well, you know, I mentioned earlier that the CIA, from its very inception, had both an analytic mission, in which the effort was to be as objective and neutral and free of policy bias as you can be, and an operational element, which by its very nature has a policy goal behind it. And that tension has never been overcome. And I think it's actually gotten worse. Now, why do I say that? 9/11 happened, and the attacks on September 11, 2001, changed the CIA quite significantly. It undertook a massive hiring campaign, so it grew enormously in size. And the mission to find terrorists—to identify plots before they were able to come to fruition, and to go abroad and take the fight to these terrorist organizations so that they couldn't take the fight to the U.S. homeland—was intelligence mission number one.

But that, by its nature, is both an analytic function and an operational function. Yeah. And the paramilitary parts of the CIA grew quite substantially. We hired a whole bunch of people whose mission was to find bad guys and neutralize them, either by capturing them or killing them. And when you devote such an enormous part of the organization, in terms of money, hiring, and mission, to that objective, you change the organization's balance. You inevitably become a part of the policymaking equation because you are responsible for carrying out operations that are meant to have policy impacts. So it's very hard, in that kind of a situation, to be free of policy views. And that almost inevitably makes that effort to balance objectivity and operational impact unsuccessful.

#Pascal

What about ideology? I mean, do people in the CIA, the way you put it, believe that, you know, there are just bad guys who do bad things because they're bad people? You know, kind of the stereotypical—Shakespeare has this beautiful character of Iago in Othello, and Iago gets up in the morning and says, I want to do evil. Is that the mindset? Because the other thing that an intelligence agency could do is to say, like, why are there people who want to do bad things to us? And there's this famous interview with Osama bin Laden, you know, where he's asked, why do you do that? And Osama bin Laden actually explains the logical chain that leads him to do what he does. I mean, that would be the other way of approaching it. But so, is there this—let's call it an American ideology of we the good guys versus the bad guys, and we go and kill them, and if we kill them all, then the problem is gone? Is that strong in the CIA?

#George Beebe

Well, I think that in any kind of a large organization, you're going to have a diversity of views and a diversity of people and perspectives. So I think it would be wrong to say this is the way the CIA thinks about that issue. You're going to find people that have a very sophisticated understanding of how other people in the world think, how other political cultures operate, how other governments work, and are able to put themselves in the shoes of other people effectively and understand their perceptions and the operating environments in which they're making decisions. You're also going to have people that have fairly simplistic views. And they all live in the same organization and have to

work together and get along. And that shouldn't be surprising. So there are elements of very black-and-white views, and there are also a lot of people that have much more complex understandings of things.

#Pascal

Yeah, but exactly, like an intelligence service that deals with such very, very important information, right? And like national security, like deeply national security-related information, and you need clearance and whatnot. Isn't the tendency strong in such an organization to create kind of a framework? And if the person doesn't fit into the framework, then they need to leave, right? They cannot be part of the organization, right? So an ideological bias of the organization to foster a certain type of thinking, or is the CIA kind of— is it diverse enough to deal with itself?

#George Beebe

Well, it is diverse. And there are different organizational cultures within the agency. And that's inevitable and probably a good thing. You need a different kind of mindset to be a leader, what we call a case officer, someone who spends most of his career overseas, whose job it is to persuade foreign nationals to give the U.S. government information that we want but the host government doesn't want us to have. So you have to have a certain personality type to do that effectively. And oftentimes it's a different skill set.

It's a different set of strengths than you need to be a special operations person who's out there doing paramilitary kinds of things. That's a different mindset too. And then, you know, your analyst has probably more in common with your average university professor than he does with, you know, a paramilitary operations person. And the organization needs all of those things. And the U.S. government needs all of those things, you know, in order to be effective. You've got to be able to do different things with people that have different strengths.

#Pascal

And the interesting thing about the U.S. is, of course, that the CIA is only one out of, I think, 17 intelligence organizations, right? And at the very top of that structure sits the Director of National Intelligence, which until, like, a few days ago was Tulsi Gabbard. She, on her way out, really slammed the door with revelations on these bio labs all over the world. What did you make of that? And what is the role of the CIA within the 17 organizations? I mean, I suppose the CIA is the biggest of the 17, right?

#George Beebe

Well, I don't actually know the answer to that, and I think it's probably classified. So even if I did know the answer, I probably wouldn't be able to say so publicly. But the CIA is a large organization.

Its role has changed since 2004. As I mentioned earlier, the impact of 9/11 on the CIA itself was quite significant, but it also resulted in a reorganization of the intelligence community as a whole, and it changed the CIA's role. It used to be that the director of the CIA was actually called the Director of Central Intelligence, and he had dual responsibilities for running the CIA itself as an organization, but also overseeing the coordination of the rest of the intelligence community. And the Intelligence Reorganization Act of 2004 said, we're not going to have the CIA work that way anymore.

#Pascal

Wow.

#George Beebe

The Director of Central Intelligence would become the Director of the CIA only. And there would be this new Office of the Director of National Intelligence, with the Director of National Intelligence at its head, that would have that integrative responsibility for overseeing all of these different intelligence organizations and ensuring that they're working together harmoniously and sharing information that wasn’t happening. Part of the reason for this was that information that led to the 9 /11 attacks was not shared as well as it should have been between the FBI and the CIA. So lawmakers decided to try to fix that problem by creating the DNI. And a lot of the responsibilities that were in the CIA previously got moved out.

#Pascal

Now, how successful has that been?

#George Beebe

I think not very successful, quite honestly. I think what we ended up doing was simply creating another layer of bureaucratic organization that brought with it a fair amount of bureaucratic bloat and not a whole lot of real authority over the intelligence community, and very mixed success in promoting the kinds of sharing that that reorganization was meant to facilitate. So I think we're in a situation right now where the Office of the DNI needs some fairly significant revamping and reorganization and reform. And I think part of what Tulsi was doing was trying to hasten that. But that's going to be an effort that will take a long time and has to be done by several different administrations.

#Pascal

One of the things that, you know, Tulsi Gabbard, but also, you know, parts of the Trump administration, what they've been working partially towards is a little bit more possibility for auditing

or transparency. So, I mean, her basically unveiling the biolabs that were going on, which is something that she and others in the administration were really bothered by, because I think she's actually scared of the potential destruction that pathogens can create that you work with. Obviously, she didn't try to crack down internally. She tried to expose that and create public awareness of it. Do you think that that is something that the United States must do more of—the ability for whistleblowers also to expose certain things? Again, this double-edged sword: national security on the one hand, but horrible overreach potentially on the other. How would you square that circle?

#George Beebe

Well, I think when I first joined the CIA and throughout the vast bulk of my career there, the question of whether someone was a Democrat or a Republican, a liberal or a conservative, never arose. I had no idea what the political leanings of my colleagues were. It never came up, and it certainly didn't affect our analytic judgments on things. So, you know, I think we're in a situation right now where that has changed. I think the intelligence community has been infected with political partisanship. And it's not surprising that it has been for two reasons. One is, partisanship in the country as a whole has grown much, much more acute. We're living in the United States right now in a very divided, very partisan, very acrimonious political environment. Almost everything gets infected with politics.

Your family Thanksgiving dinners get infected with this, so it would be surprising indeed if that didn't bleed over into the politics of the intelligence community of the United States as well. And that's also true in academia in the United States. I think if you look at studies of political leanings in colleges and universities and their faculties in the country, it has been skewed, I think, quite severely toward the left. The number of professors that identify as conservatives or Republicans in U.S. universities has plummeted. It's a different situation, I think. Universities leaned left when I was in school years ago, but now it's very rare indeed to find professors who openly acknowledge being conservative or Republican. And that, of course, has an impact on the CIA because it does a lot of recruiting from these universities.

That's the population it draws upon in its hiring. So that's part of the issue here, too. I think there were clearly abuses that took place in the so-called Russiagate episode. There were things that were done that shouldn't have been done. And those had enormous consequences for American foreign policy, for our relationship with Russia. I think they played a significant role there in contributing to problems in U.S.-Russian relations that, in turn, are now quite, quite dangerous. We're in this war in Ukraine that could easily escalate into direct conflict between the United States and Russia. And Russiagate, I think, was a factor—not the only one—but certainly a factor that contributed to the situation we're in right now.

And I think what Tulsi has done is say, hey, look, let's publish some of what happened there with the goal to make sure we don't get into that kind of situation again. Now, the difficulty in doing this is how you expose this matters a lot, because it can be perceived as an act of partisanship in and of

itself. So how do you reform and insulate the intelligence community from what I would call partisan malfeasance without exacerbating that partisanship or undermining the argument that her office is being politically neutral in all of this? And that's not an easy question to answer. I can't give you a pat formula on all of this.

But one of the things I would say is we need some understandings within our government about the rules, the dos and don'ts. What are we gonna do? What principles will govern things? And the more explicit those are, the more you've got methodologies, the more you've got agreed approaches, the freer you will be from the influence of partisanship. So, you know, my instinct on this is to say we've got ourselves a problem, it needs to be addressed, and the way to do it, I think, is through articulating very clear methods and rules and procedures that will apply uniformly, and in so doing, minimize the likelihood that these sorts of things will be driven by partisan objectives.

#Pascal

Yeah, again, the optimal dream, then, of course, is having a neutral organization that's just there for the purpose of serving the state, right? That's what it should be. And the question of whether it is, is a huge one. But let's put that maybe a little bit aside. And for the final 10, 15 minutes, concentrate on another one of your specialties, which is, of course, Russia, having been on the Russia desk and so on. How do you evaluate the role of the United States at the moment in this entire, what to me looks like, an escalation that's going on with the drones launched from Ukraine or not, but definitely produced also partially outside of Ukraine in European countries, now being launched deep into Russia?

And we've seen things that were unthinkable under the Cold War scenario — you know, Operation Spiderweb attacking part of the nuclear triad of Russia, the Zaporizhzhia power plant constantly being under attack. Today, again, Russia Today published an article about a second worker at the Zaporizhzhia power plant who’s been assassinated off duty. And, you know, these kinds of pinprick escalations — last week, a large monument in Sevastopol being blown up, zero military value, a lot of cultural value to the Russians. What's your assessment of this situation?

#George Beebe

Well, I think it's an extremely dangerous situation. And it's dangerous because it can lead to an escalation that could become very difficult to control and ultimately result in direct warfare between the United States and Russia, which would, you know...

#Pascal

Devastating.

#George Beebe

Yeah, it could go nuclear, and it would be absolutely devastating. So this is not something that we should take lightly. Now, on the Russia side, the problem is that President Putin, I think, wants an end to this war. It's very clear that the Russians are, for largely geopolitical reasons, wanting a compromise that will allow them to argue that they've achieved the objectives of the special military operation. But in reality, they're going to have to compromise on some things that really matter to the Ukrainian side of this and to their Western partners.

The biggest one is to say we're not going to get in the way of Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Now, that was an issue that back in 2014, after the Maidan revolution, the Russians absolutely opposed. And the Maidan had its origins in the EU accession agreement that the Russians felt would force Ukraine into the Western camp and cut off Ukrainian ties to Russia. So this was an issue that the Russians cared very deeply about. And today, I think they are saying they're not going to stand in the way, which is, I think, a huge concession.

#Pascal

On the other hand, though, I believe I remember that it was NATO membership that was the core of the objection. That EU membership was actually something that for the longest time Russia said, as long as the EU remains an economic community, then they have little problem with that. And actually, as you correctly point out, I mean, Vladimir Putin recently again said that he's not against Ukraine joining the EU. The red line, the absolute red line over which they're going to war at the moment is NATO.

#George Beebe

That's right. But there are two aspects to this. Back in 2014, Russia assumed that EU membership was the precursor to NATO membership, so they were worried about the slippery slope. But the other part of this was... Foreign Minister Lavrov just published on the foreign ministry website an article that he had tried to publish in Politico Europe, which was ultimately rejected by the editors there. But in that, he does go over this history of the EU accession to the association agreement in 2014, and the provision within it that Ukraine would have to end any possibility of involvement in the Russian free trade zone. Yes, and it was that choice that Brussels forced upon Ukraine. You know, you can either have an association agreement with the EU, or you can be part of the Eurasian economic zone, but not both. Right.

#Pascal

Which is actually something that the Russians didn't do. They said, like, you can be part of our economic zone, and we don't care what you do with the Europeans.

#George Beebe

Russians said, you can have both. Brussels said, no, you can't. And that became a very big source of friction in 2014. And since that time, Russia's position has evolved. They have understood that EU membership does not necessarily lead to NATO membership. And they have said, if you close the door on NATO being in Ukraine, or Ukraine being in NATO, then we can live with EU membership eventually. To me, that is a compromise. It's a fairly significant geopolitical compromise. It enables a scenario like the Austrian State Treaty, where you have a country that is militarily neutral but is a member of the EU and has deep links to European trade and economic practices, etc., etc.

#Pascal

It took me a while, it took me quite a while to understand why it is that this military neutrality of Ukraine not only didn’t become a thing, but why it went into reverse gear. Because the Ukrainians had an article in their constitution before 2014 that said they would strive for neutrality. That was then replaced by the current version, which is they will strive for NATO membership. We know that in April 2022, the linchpin of the Istanbul Accords was basically the neutrality of Ukraine. That was the main thing, and that was sabotaged by Western powers. We even have now a lot of people on record, including Victoria Nuland, who in an interview once said that kind of agreement would have neutered Ukraine and it wouldn't have been a good thing. Why is it that from these quarters, the neoconservative quarters of the West, a neutral Ukraine, a bridge between the two worlds, is so impossible? And why is it that these people have so much sway over U.S. politics?

#George Beebe

Well, I think the simple answer to that is that with the end of the Cold War, America decided that its foreign policy ought to be about turning that Western bloc, that NATO organization that came out of the Cold War, into a model for the entire global order—but without Russia, without Russia in it. Well, we were actually happy to have Russia in it as a subordinate, not a full member. Join NATO? That would change what NATO is. But you're welcome to be a part of the Western community as some sort of junior subordinate. You can have a seat in the NATO-Russia Council. And what that will allow us to do is explain to you, after NATO takes decisions, “Here’s the decision that we’ve taken. Now, you can’t change that decision, right, but you can at least sit there in the room and hear about this decision that we took.” Now, the Russians looked at this and said, wait a minute, that didn’t seem like a very attractive model for us.

#Pascal

Yeah, and the West now seems surprised that that doesn't look like an attractive model because, funnily enough, I mean, within NATO, the Germans and the others have kind of accepted that that's the model. When they're informed by the decision-makers in the United States what's going to happen, they have a very hard time actually saying no to that.

#George Beebe

Yeah, no, that's right, which is a whole separate conversation in and of itself. That mindset that we should be in a unipolar world, and the community that the United States helped to form and lead during the Cold War, which then covered a significant part of the world, but not all of it. We led the free world, but then there were vast portions of the world that weren't included in that. We then came into the unipolar era with the demise of the Soviet Union and said, let's take that free world and expand its borders to include everyone. And if you tell the Russians, no, Ukraine can be neutral...

It can be neither ours nor yours. It can be neutral, somewhere in the middle. You have essentially said our ambition, our vision for what the world ought to look like, isn't viable. We're abandoning it. We're coming up with something else. And we weren't willing to do that. And today we're in a different reality. We've got China. We've got, you know, rising middle powers. The world isn't unipolar anymore. And the question is, how multipolar is it going to be? That's a different world. And I think from that flow different imperatives for U.S. foreign policy.

#Pascal

This kind of attitude of "neutral ain't good enough" is probably not going to work anymore in this multipolar world, which would make me believe that there must be a change in attitude also within these policy circles in the United States. But I don't see them yet. Or do you see them forming that more kind of realist attitude toward "we must find some sort of compromise also on our side"?

#George Beebe

Right. Well, I think you're seeing the beginnings of that recognition in the United States. It is not a majority position, but it is no longer a marginal position. I think there is a growing minority that is arguing increasingly effectively that the world has changed and we're going to have to take a different approach to the world. We can't pretend we're the unipolar power anymore. Right. So we're going to have to have a more realist approach to the world, drawing upon balance-of-power principles and diplomacy to supplement deterrence and coercion, and to work in partnership with coercive elements of policy.

And recognize that we can't afford to unite our enemies, unite our adversaries, and encourage them to work against the United States, which, in fact, we have done. I think a lot of the approach that we adopted during the unipolar period incentivized counterbalancing and hedging and the formation of partnerships against the United States to counterbalance our power and influence. And so we would have to take a different approach to be effective in the new environment.

#Pascal

So in a sense, at some point, maybe not too distant in the future, it should kind of sink in also in Washington that if you don't want others to counterbalance and hedge, basically gang up together,

you better foster kind of neutral places that don't do that while maintaining a balance. So you kind of underwrite my thesis that we're going to see more neutrality again, like pop up naturally from here.

#George Beebe

We should. I think it's in America's interest to allow that as a possibility as the global order evolves.

#Pascal

That's a very good point. It's actually a positive note, and I would love to end on that because most of my talks don't. They're like down in doom and gloom, so I'm happy we didn't go there. George, if people want to follow you and your work, I mean, I suppose they should go to the Quincy Institute, or where should they find you?

#George Beebe

Yes. The Quincy Institute homepage is at quincyinst.org. I have a Twitter handle, I think it's GBB13, something like that. So those that want to follow me there are welcome.

#Pascal

I'll make sure to Google it and find the handle, and also put the homepage of the Quincy Institute in the description box below. Everybody, please follow George Beebe there. George, thank you so much for your time today.

#George Beebe

Thank you very much.