

# Russia's TRAP for Europe Is Working | Prof. Vladimir Brovkin

If you thought Russia's restraint is weakness... think again. There is strategy behind every move. Today, Dr. Vladimir Brovkin, Russian-born American historian and former Harvard associate professor, discusses Europe's weak public will for war with Russia, rising US-Russia risks, Putin's long game, Ukraine's drone attacks, Russia's military and industry, the likely endgame in Ukraine, and why Moscow is turning it's back to Europe. Links: History and Politics with Dr. Brovkin: <https://www.youtube.com/@vladimirbrovkin4052> [BOOK] From Vladimir Lenin to Vladimir Putin: Russia in Search of Its Identity: 1913–2023: <https://www.amazon.com/Vladimir-Lenin-Putin-Identity-1913-2023-ebook/dp/B0CKFNV3RT> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:01:19 Europe, Russia, and public opinion 00:07:15 Escalation and Putin's restraint 00:13:26 Why US-Russia ties are more dangerous 00:18:26 Russia's military power and time advantage 00:24:43 US politics, war hawks, and future risks 00:30:56 Drone attacks and Russia's response 00:40:37 Weapons costs and military industry 00:48:08 What a Russian victory may look like 00:54:54 Borders, Kaliningrad, and the Baltic question 00:58:18 Russia's turn toward Asia 01:01:09 Where to follow Dr. Brovkin

## #Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies, everybody. Today, for the first time, we have Dr. Vladimir Brovkin, a Russian-born American historian and former associate professor at Harvard University, and the author of several books, his latest one being \*Russia in Search of Its Identity: From Vladimir Lenin to Vladimir Putin\*. He's also the host of a very insightful YouTube channel called \*History and Politics with Dr. Brovkin\*. Vladimir, welcome.

## #Vladimir Brovkin

Thank you so much. Thank you, Pascal. Very, very happy to be on your channel, which is really about neutrality and really about not taking sides, but being objective and balanced. And I always follow you. Thank you.

## #Pascal

Well, thank you very much for that. I must say, though, you know, I repeat this quite often. I myself am not very neutral. I'm a neutralist. I try to show people why that might make sense in international relations. One of the examples is, of course, an example that you've studied quite a lot, which is Ukraine and the periphery of Russia. But I would like to hear your analysis today because

you're one of the voices who actually gives a very insightful analysis, being yourself from Russia but now living in the West. Where are we at in the West's relationship with Russia?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, it's a very difficult question because it's easy to say it's bad. Well, everybody knows it's bad, and it may get worse. However, why I'm reluctant to say it's bad is because the people of Europe don't have any hate toward Russia. And I live in Europe. I live in France. Yes, people do feel worried and upset about the current war, and many of them sympathize with the Ukrainians. Well, I do too. I mean, hey, I have nothing against Ukrainians. It's not a question of being for Ukrainians or not. Any war, any casualties are a matter of regret. But the people in Europe, they don't have a hatred toward Russia as some of the leaders of the European Union do.

And they do not have this kind of condescending, you know, "these Russians are subhuman" attitude. They don't. About that, let me just comment. I gave a lecture in Germany, and I studied in Germany, and I speak German, and I have German friends. So I know Germany quite well. I've been to every corner of Germany. And I don't think there is any hatred toward Russia among the Germans. I think what's happening in Germany, and the reason that there's so much support for Ukraine, and they support Mertz, I think there are two reasons for that. One is that in the 1980s, German society went through a kind of feeling of guilt.

And there were these Holocaust museums opening everywhere. And that generation felt that Germany as a nation was guilty of the crimes of the Nazi era. Now, all of a sudden, you know, they could say, hey, we're not the only ones. The Russians are doing it too. Doing what? Fighting Ukraine. And as they inflate all these, you know, when you see the images of houses that are burning, that kind of makes the Germans feel we're not the only bad guy on the block. This is one reason why they feel this is the time to blame Russia. And a lot of students that I spoke to, they have that anger because they are sympathetic to civilians who they feel are suffering.

On the other hand, I think there is a kind of German imperialist tradition where the Germans, for example, say, you know, we won World War I, at least on the Eastern Front. We showed the Russians then a kind of German pride, that they're not only the losers of World War II. And now Ukraine is doing what we say. So in that sense, it's kind of a reaffirmation of German might. And this, for a certain generation, the older one, you know, when Merz says we're going to restore German might, that sounds kind of appealing. And in that sense, this is why there is some support for his policies of supporting Ukraine, but not for war with Russia.

Absolutely not. And of course, the figures of 40% or 30% in as many lands for AfD, the Alternative for Germany, show that German society is not gearing up to fight Russia. In fact, I am convinced that if a serious crisis occurred, the German government would fall. The German people are not going to allow any kind of fight with Russia. I think it's impossible. It's the same thing in France. I live in France. I know the French people. I communicate with them. They are not happy about Putin.

They're not happy about the war. But this is a far cry from fighting Russia. That's just absurd. It wouldn't occur to the minds of most Frenchmen.

## **#Pascal**

I'm quite glad to hear that from you because most people I talk to are much less optimistic. But, you know, I think I share your sentiment that in the general population, in most quarters, there is no ingrained hate for Russians on any kind of personal level. The difference, though, is when it comes to the—at least in my view—analysis of how the general population looks at the Russian leadership, which it blames for much of the warfare that's going on in Ukraine. And the other side is, of course, the elites within the political circles and media circles, which really, I mean, in my view, in a lot of European countries, just blast out a lot of Russophobia, including very, very dark stereotypes about Russia and the Russians.

And that's why I view, and what you said is why I view it as so important for the Europeans, or for the European leadership—some of whom actually would like to have a war with Russia, or at least work toward that, from what we can tell. That's why it's so important that the first strike—the strike against NATO, the direct strike—comes from Russia. So I view a lot of what they're doing as provoking Russia into the next phase of this already European war. But how are you viewing this current escalation? Because strikes against the Russian heartland, strikes against Moscow with drones and whatnot manufactured in Europe, would have been unthinkable in the Cold War. But now they are commonplace. And I view this as a way to actually convince the general public that, look, we always told you the Russians will attack, and attack they did.

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, I don't share that view, actually. I don't think the Russians will attack. I do not think they will attack because it's not in their interest. And I've already expressed it several times. Putin understands Germany and Europe very well. He speaks German, he worked in Germany, and he has friends in Germany. He refers to them all the time. What I think Putin's grand plan is—and we shall see if it works or not—is that the nationalist or right-wing, or whatever you want to call them, parties, or Euroskeptic parties, are on the rise in Europe. And this you can see very easily just by Googling, you know, the success of AfD in Germany. And that means, you know, the total unpopularity of Merz and the, you know, free fall of the German economy and the migration crisis.

And the very simple fact that, you know, the AfD says we're not going to be just friends with Russia. All we want is normal relations and to buy Russian gas because we need it. And it's absurd to deny it just because we don't like what they do. We don't like many things that people do, but that doesn't mean we cannot have normal trade relations with them. So this is why, you know, I think Putin—and I agree with him, I think he's right in kind of a long-term strategy—is that the Russia haters would

lose in elections, first of all in Germany, and most likely in France next year, because Macron is totally discredited. He's not only disliked, he's despised, he's laughed at, he's completely lost all his credibility. And this is not because of his foreign policy, but because of what's going on in France.

France is stagnating. The French economy is not growing. The modernization of French industry is not happening. And the crime crisis is ridiculous because, you know, Marseille is just, you know, a place like Los Angeles—it's gang warfare. The traffic with drugs is appalling, and nobody is doing anything. This is how the French people see it. So he is not going to make it, neither is his party. It's going to be either the left or the right. Both of them don't want a war with Russia. Both of them want normal relations with Russia—Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen. So whichever way it works out, it is not going to be the warmongers in France. Now, you also know, of course, the deep crisis that Britain is in. Yes, British elites hate Russia, but not the British people.

I also know Britain quite well, and I went there, and I studied there, and I have friends there, etc., etc. The British people are focused on their own problems, and they have very serious problems—with migration, with deindustrialization, with the political crisis, with the political system that's not working, with the political parties, the majority gets all, etc., etc. So I don't think the British priority is fighting Russia. And even if they wanted to, they have nothing to fight with. They have no modern ships. They have no modern army. They have no air force, nothing. Really, militarily, the British are at the bottom of their history, if ever they were that powerless.

So in that sense, I think that the European, you know, the European relations with Russia are very, very bad, but they may improve within a few years if the war stops, whichever way—either by Russian victory or by a compromise and a settlement acceptable to Russia. So I'm not worried about that at all, actually. The relations with the United States, I think, are much more dangerous than with Europe. Because in the United States, the Republican Party, all of the Democratic Party hate Russia. The elites hate Russia. The Jewish elites hate Russia. And a lot of war hawks in the Republican Party hate Russia—and hate Russia in the sense that they feel, "We're number one, we can do anything." Trump keeps repeating they're the strongest power. They're not the strongest power anymore. But they keep, you know, deceiving themselves that they are. The strongest military power on earth is China.

And after that is Russia. And only after that, the United States. But the Chinese are sitting quietly, and they don't show what they have. The only time they showed it was at their military parade. The kind of high tech they have is unbelievable. So anyway, why it is dangerous with the United States is because Trump is holding them back, trying to talk to Putin, trying to pretend as if there's some kind of normalization. There isn't any normalization. But what happens after Trump is totally unpredictable. And it may be that a small crisis could escalate quickly—over Cuba, over Venezuela. It's only the patience of Vladimir Putin that saved the world from another Cuban missile crisis. And over Iran, there are at least three that could ignite at any moment, because all three are Russia's allies. And it's only the patience of Putin that keeps them down at a manageable level.

## **#Pascal**

This is quite interesting. Your analysis is quite different from what I've heard also from a couple of European colleagues who are maybe too focused on what they hear in their day-to-day news consumption from their elites. And we've seen over the last couple of years how Russia has been very much willing, over the last two years, one and a half, of the Trump administration, to engage with the Americans—and the Americans being willing to engage with the Russians—which is completely different for Europe, right?

Europe, on a political level, has basically been trying for the last four years to completely just kill Russia with silence, as the Japanese would say. But your interpretation then is that overall, Russia is looking at kind of a natural regime change in Europe via the election cycle, and get Europe back together like that. That's why we're seeing so much restraint from Vladimir Putin toward Europe. But on the other hand, with the United States, it's really dangerous. So is it Trump that keeps the lid on, or is the Russophobia necessarily going to somehow lead to another round of escalation with the United States?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yes, Trump is keeping the lid down, and that's probably the best thing that he has done, with all the many other awful things that he's done. But you see, I want to put things where they are, put the emphasis where the Russians are not trying to... They don't hope that relations go back to the way they were before 2014. I wrote that in my book. The divorce between Europe and Russia is for a long time. It's a serious one. It's political, it's cultural, it's economic. Russia already made a pivot to the East. So they have very, very close relations with China, and Putin is maintaining this incredible balancing act with India and with Indonesia and ASEAN countries.

Great relations with just about all of them in Southeast Asia. So economically, Russia has turned away from Europe, but it doesn't want to fight Europe, and it doesn't want to be friends with Europe. And this is another thing. Speaking of society, Russian society is very, very anti-European now and anti-German, much, much more than Putin is, because they are told by the Russian media that all these missiles and all these drones are made in Europe. So they perceive that the Ukrainians are just tools in the European war on Russia. So in that sense, the Americans, they don't have any particularly hostile feelings because, you know, it's like a rival power that is just a superpower.

And they, you know, do get inimical once in a while. So from that point of view, the Russian political establishment is very, very anti-American. You can see it in all the talk shows and the media that you can never trust America. America is imperialist. America is, you know, warmongering. So it is just Putin, actually, the only one. You know, you look at what Medvedev is saying and what Gerasimov is saying very seldom, and just about anybody else, it's fascism. It's very, very distrustful of America. And from that point of view, this is a much more dangerous relationship long term.

## **#Pascal**

But, you know, I also belong to the people who don't trust the West in general, the political West, as Richard Sarkozy calls it, and more generally the United States. Because if I look at it from a Russian perspective, there's just time and time again they broke their agreements — not an inch to the east, the whole NATO thing, the Minsk Accords, the way that Istanbul 2022 was sabotaged, the revelations by Merkel and Hollande about how Minsk was always supposed to just buy them time, although we might qualify that a little bit as also retroactively justifying their own actions.

And we see it with Iran, right, how the United States keeps breaking the agreements it makes and keeps making agreements in order to break them, in order to lull the other one into complacency, and then strike at the right moment. So there's this pattern, and Vladimir Putin has been there now since 1999, right? First person to call after 9/11, George Bush Jr., and tell him, look, we're with you. But then all of that didn't help. All of that led to this escalation where we are today. How do you think, or in your analysis, how does that experience shape Russian decision-making?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, one thing we also have to keep in mind is that Russia is changing dramatically and very quickly. And, you know, Putin has been in power since 1999. And so we think, well, it's just 25 years, but Russia is a different country, not just from 1999, but from 2014. Exactly. And that is important because in 2014, when people in Donbass blamed Putin—why didn't you take it all in 2014? Why didn't you liberate Donbass then?—you know, the answer he would provide but cannot provide publicly is that Russia couldn't. Russia could not face militarily any West or even an armed Ukraine at that time. Russia now, it can.

Russia now can take on the entire NATO, I think, and win. This is how powerful Russia is. And people don't really understand how powerful Russia is, even without nuclear. This is why when I hear all this talk about nuclear, I laugh, because Russia doesn't need nuclear. Russia can, with conventional weapons, win against the entire NATO now, even including the United States. Because here's the point: Russia is very big, and to destroy Russia's industrial capacity is just about very difficult, if not impossible, because you would need to—if it's non-nuclear—you would have to have a whole lot of bombs and Storm Shadows and others.

And then there are the S-400s that would intercept them. And then they're spread over a huge territory. Europe is much more compact—much, much more compact. And so to destroy the military potential of Germany is actually quite easy, because it's all pretty much concentrated in a relatively small geographic area. So in that sense, I think that they're playing with fire. But I am convinced as long as Putin is in power, there will not be any military confrontation with the West, because the Russians think, and I think correctly, that time is working for them. With all the time that's going by, Russia is becoming stronger, Ukraine is becoming weaker.

The budgets of European countries are stagnating. And therefore, they're just wasting their billions and wasting their billions on a cause that cannot be won. And in that sense, he's not in any hurry. As I said, the only problem is what is going to happen in the United States. A lot depends on whether Trump wins or loses the November elections. If he loses, he's a lame-duck president, but he's still president, so all the Democrats can do is just sabotage his initiatives, but they cannot do their own policy. Suppose they vote another \$100 billion to Ukraine. Well, he can veto it, and that's it. There's no way they can override it.

So for the next two years, there's not going to be a major U.S. involvement. Another, as the political scientists say, variable or unpredictable factor is what is going to happen with Iran. Is Trump going to be foolish enough to launch a full-scale invasion? No. Well, my view is if he does, the United States would lose, and would lose not only that, but lose its power status as a great power. It's just simply impossible to win over Iran, simply because to win, you have to invade. To invade, you have to have a two-million army with all the logistic support, and you have to occupy. You cannot just parachute everything, you know, one division, and take over Tehran. It's not going to work because they're going to surround it and kill them all. So to win militarily and have a regime change is just about impossible for the United States.

And then they have to swallow the pill and accept some kind of compromise. But judging by the rhetoric and the injured pride of Trump and his entire elite, that's not likely. They're not just going to swallow it. They're going to keep fighting one way or another, and that means the conflict would continue, and that means that they're not going to get involved with Russia because they're not foolish enough to get into two wars at the same time. See, the problem with American elites, I think, is they overestimate the power of America. They really think that they are as they were 50 years ago, number one. Times are changing. China is a superpower now. It was not when Putin took power in 1999. It was just, you know, an industrializing third world country, just getting its population fed.

They could not challenge the U.S. in robotics, in arms, in missiles, in everything militarily. They could not come anywhere close to it. Now they can. And the American elites, they don't understand it. They really are comforted by Trump saying, we're number one, we're the greatest power, we're this, we're that. Well, it's very hard for them to say, sorry, guys, you are not. And nobody wants to say it because that's not the popular message. What are you going to gain by saying something like this? I say it, and I see that people don't like to hear this. When I look at the number of clicks and how my videos are doing, each time I say America is not number one, it just goes down. People don't want to hear it. But that's the truth, and that's the historical reality.

## **#Pascal**

So it's quite an interesting way of looking at the power dynamic, that overall you're portraying that time is in favor of both China and Russia, and in that case also Iran. And even if the United States tried, it would only speed up the inevitable, which is the United States having to find its place among

the other great powers and among the regional powers. And that actually, the U.S. foreign policy is the one that hasn't caught up with that yet. It's still trying to play in all theaters at the same time, as if this is the 1960s and everybody else, the power differential was this huge. Absolutely. What does this do, though?

Because one element of the U.S., and I completely agree, is that the neoconservatives, the neocons, they don't have any reverse gear, as Alex Christoforou tends to say. They seriously—Lindsey Graham will tell you at any point in time that the United States can produce millions of missiles and subdue Iran in one week. And they believe that. Now, if the people in power believe this kind of nonsense, then what happens downstream is that they start changing all of the military people, which they did. In the war, right, they had a purge in order to get yes-men who then start putting the levers in power that then produce something as stupid as the outcome that we have now with Iran. Do you think, is it not possible that something like that will happen again?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, yes, Lindsey Graham and others—and there are many, many others—who live in this dream world that America is still number one, and Trump keeps repeating it for popularity. But there are military professionals in America, in the Pentagon. And when I was a Harvard professor, I was always invited to all kinds of conferences, including with CIA analysts. And there are very many clever people there—very many. And some of them actually have their own shows as retired analysts now. Larry is one of them. And so they know what the limits of American power are. They know it very well. Moreover, it all depends on which way it's going to go.

It seems like if we want to talk about American politics, if J.D. Vance's wing of the Republican Party wins, it would be good because it would not be belligerent. Their position is America first and no foreign wars. So this would be a kind of position that America has to look inward. And there are plenty of things to improve in America in terms of its infrastructure, decaying bridges, the rails, all kinds of things, standard of living, poverty, and so on. So if they win, this would be a different kind of America that would be more ready to accept its partnership with China and Russia.

And, you know, I call it, in the video I did in January 2026, the Three Kings Theory — that the U.S., Russia, and China cooperatively manage the world, realizing that their responsibility is for peace. And then they compete in various other ways, but without military confrontation, which would be ruled as impossible for the sake of the world, for the sake of our planet Earth. Now, if that happens, then we're okay. If Rubio gets in — and these war hawks who hate Russia, hate China, hate communists, hate Cuba, hate Venezuela, it's just based on blind hatred — and this Kagan and these Jews who cannot forget pogroms from 120 years ago.

When I did a video which was very popular, it was called “Why American Elites Hate Russia,” and many people wrote to me in the comments that it's because the Jewish lobby, the pro-Israeli lobby, inherently hates Russia because they'd been told by their parents and grandparents that they left

Russia because of the pogroms. So now this kind of hatred is back. Now, one could remind them, of course, that the Russians suffered from some of the haters too. The Cheka was mostly made up of Jews, and the Jews were very, very well off in the Soviet Union. They had all the rights, and many of them served in Stalin's administration, and so on and so forth. So that's a difficult and different subject. But what I'm trying to say is that the politics in the United States is unpredictable.

One way may win, the other may win, or if the Republican Party splits, then the Democrats may win in the next presidential cycle. And that is also not clear which kind of Democrats — the leftists, the socialist types, or the super conservative hawks like Biden. So U.S. politics is quite interesting because it is still unpredictable. There are still many different ways it can go in the next two years. And it is for this reason, I think, that Putin is going to maintain this facade of good relations with Trump. And it is a facade. Putin is clever enough to understand you cannot trust Trump. You cannot trust any of those Western leaders. But you have to make it look like we're talking about possible this and possible that, as long as it doesn't lead to a big war. That's it.

## **#Pascal**

But aren't — or like, let's switch a little bit to Russia then, like the inside — isn't there a danger that with all of these drone attacks that are happening, and the civilians that are being killed — and let's be very clear, on the Ukrainian side civilians are also being killed — but on both sides, if more and more civilians get killed in the next phase of the war in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians, through NATO and so on, are shooting and targeting Russian civilians, isn't there a danger that the popular demand is suddenly going to be that now Russia needs to react? I mean, the Ukrainians make quite a point out of trying to create as much smoke — literally smoke — over Russian cities like Saint Petersburg during the forum, in order to show that "haha, you're vulnerable, haha." Now, doesn't that create the feeling of vulnerability in Russians who then say, like, "Mr. Putin, finally do something, put your foot down"? People like Mr. Karaganov actually talk in this way, saying, "Look, we need to escalate dramatically in order to finally scare the Europeans back into the realization that this is not a game and this is not a joke, but that this is very, very serious, and they need to go and stop this. Otherwise, we're all going to die."

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yes, let me comment on that, because my comment would be a little different from your other guests. So, on the one hand, yes, you're right. There is pressure on Putin to act, and he is acting. A few weeks ago, I did a video which is called "Go Slow," about Putin's way of conducting the war, which was really very, very, very slow. And there are reasons for that. And now he has changed. And there are many, many videos showing, among those who you invited, that Russia is geared up. It is now moving forward much more energetically. This is, in a way, a response to those drone attacks. And so let me repeat what I said: the more Ukrainians create this kind of havoc, the more determined the Russians are to move faster and hit harder.

So in that sense, Zelensky is hurting himself with this kind of policy. Now, what my view is different, and I want to emphasize this for your audience, is that the Russians are not going to be scared by, you know, five people killed here, ten people killed there. No. Because the Russians remember the 1990s. And in the 1990s, you know, a woman could be raped in the doorway of an apartment building and nobody cared. And if you called the police, the police were in cahoots with the mafia. It was total lawlessness and a wave of crime that was worse than what today is in Marseille. So the Russians are not scared by a missile flying and hitting an apartment building, one of a million buildings in Moscow.

That is a good photo for Zelensky, but it doesn't really add up to much. The burning storage facilities, that hurts. Yes, it does. And they're taking urgent measures now on how to protect those. And there are all kinds of things they do. They have begun doing that. There will be local brigades that would be, you know, on patrol day and night. And they would be defending those with cheaper missiles and machine guns and all kinds of other things to protect them from drones. And there are many, many other programs now the Russians are feverishly working on to defend from drone attacks. However, any of those drone attacks, even multiplied by a thousand, is not going to change the course of the war.

And this is why it is laughable when the British press says, oh, they hit a storage facility in Kuybyshev or, I don't know, in Voronezh. Now the Ukrainians are winning the war. That's absurd. It is simply absurd. Moreover, each of those who say Russia is weak because it cannot protect air storage facilities, let me just remind you that if today, you know, the Russians just sent one of their drones to hit a storage facility in Berlin, I guarantee you it would fly and nobody would notice, and it would hit that storage facility and it would be in flames, because none of the European countries are prepared to defend their critical infrastructure from low-flying toy airplanes that can ignite a storage facility with a match. That's all you need.

So this is all such nonsense. Ukraine is strong because they can ignite a storage facility of oil? Anybody can. All you need to do is throw a match on top of it. That's it. It's going to burn. So that's why I think that the Russian society is pressing Putin to advance faster. And that's what they're doing. You know, the calculations are by military specialists—and I'm not—that it would take them two or three months to take Kramatorsk and Slavyansk and clear the rest of Donbass. That would be huge because these are fortified towns with concrete bunkers that have been built over 10 years. So the big question is actually what happens next.

And there's one thing that is clear, and I agree with Prokarpivnik on that. The Russians are going to continue to advance. Putin said as much the day before yesterday. They're going to continue to advance all of Novorossiia. But he never actually—interestingly enough—he never specified where Novorossiia ends. Now, if you look at historical maps, if you just put in Google Maps "Novorossiia," it would show you the historical perception of what Novorossiia was. And that is very clear. This includes Odessa, Nikolaev, the provinces of Dnepropetrovsk and Kharkov. That's it. Now, some of the maps show Poltava and Sumy as well, historically speaking.

But Poltava is actually, historically speaking, Ukraine. But it's kind of a mixed Russian-Ukrainian language as they speak there. It's not like full Ukrainian as around Zhytomyr or Vinnytsia, for example, central Ukraine. So one can draw the borders of what is historically Russian Novorossiia. Let me just comment on this, that one of my books was about the Russian Civil War. But in fact, most of the Russian Civil War in the south was on the territory of today's Ukraine. And there were the Whites and the Reds, and then there were, you know, Ukrainians—they actually called themselves Ukrainian insurgent bands—that were the ones who expelled the French and the British in 1919 from Odessa.

So if you look at how they perceived themselves at that time, let me just say to you that the Cossacks of the Don, which is Donbas, never would have thought that they were Ukraine. In fact, I have documents shown in the book that they planned to fight the Bolsheviks together with the Ukrainians and then create friendly federative links with Ukraine. In other words, Donbas and Novorossiia were not a part of Ukraine, even by the Ukrainians of that time. The Ukrainian People's Republic did not include Odessa. It did not. They defined Ukraine the way they did, and that was the borders of Novorossiia. So this is their perception, the historical perception of historical Ukraine. Anyway, so that's about geography and perceptions.

## **#Pascal**

This is highly interesting. And here we would, of course, need modern-day data in order to figure out what the actual perceptions on the ground are. But at the moment, that's unfortunately, I think, not possible in an objective way. But we can leave that one aside. I mean, I found it very interesting how you described the strategy of Vladimir Putin and how the faster advance now is basically the answer to the problem, to the strikes, because this, to me, if I had to boil it down, what you said would mean that the current Russian leadership is kind of marrying two strategies.

One is what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. So if they keep firing at us, we're just going to figure out how to intercept the drones and everything. And we do that while at the same time doing "hide your strength and bide your time." As in, we're just going to continue ramping up our industrial capacity and make sure that if ever push comes to shove, we can then have overwhelming force. And if the Europeans want to underestimate us, go ahead, underestimate and continue doing that, because you're undermining yourself.

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yes, exactly. Moreover, this is exactly as you say, because I've heard from some of the discussions that the Russians are now putting a lot of effort into multiplying the production of Kinzhal missiles and all kinds of other hypersonic missiles. And this is one of the biggest advantages of Russia over the United States and over the West, Western manufacturers. Let me explain it like this. Everybody knows American missiles are super expensive. You know, one Storm Shadow, last time I checked, is

two and a half million. Why are they so expensive? Well, they're so expensive because everything is expensive. Labor is expensive.

You know, taxes are high. And this is why American missiles—this is the Achilles heel of the United States—is that their weapons are so expensive. And they're expensive because there's a huge markup, because it's not really a capitalist economy where the cheapest and the best get the order. From that point of view, I've been saying it all along: American military industry is Soviet industry. In other words, there's one producer and one owner. This is the United States government. There's no competition, and the U.S. Congress is willing to pay anything. You know, they say up front, we want the best, we'll pay anything it costs.

And this is why they drove up their prices to a point where it becomes impossible to have mass production. This is why there's a crisis of Patriot missiles, because it's just too expensive to produce them, and because they don't want to produce them en masse, because if they do, they'll become cheaper. But their purpose is not to arm their homeland for a patriotic fight against all its enemies. Their purpose is to make money, and that is the problem. Whereas in Russia, it is very much not the kind of capitalism that is in the West. It is very much what I call the Russian traditional political-economic system, which is the same as under Peter the Great.

Peter says, we need a factory here, and it's built, regardless of whatever it takes or whatever it costs. And then Peter says, we need a fleet, and then the Russians build the fleet and beat the Swedes. And that's the same thing now. Putin says, we need mass production of Iskanders. You do it. And then Medvedev is in charge, and they're going to do it. That's the way it works. And therefore, in both cases, cost doesn't matter. But in the American case, cost doesn't matter because they want to make a lot of money. In Russia, cost doesn't matter because they want to make a lot of missiles, regardless of the effort. That's the difference.

## **#Pascal**

This is so fascinating, you know, because it actually chimes with what I hear also from Greg Mello, who's keeping a very close eye on the nuclear industrial complex in the U.S. on the West Coast. And he says that these companies have a huge problem finding skilled labor because all of the good jobs are now provided by the IT industry. And overall, the whole nuclear weapons industry is actually also formed in the way that you're saying. It's just extremely, prohibitively expensive to upgrade all of these missiles and all of the technology they have.

So it's kind of atrophying for that reason, on top of the fact that the entire industrial base has been hollowed out and the United States is losing the ability to actually create that. And we see that now that the U.S. has run out of missiles. I mean, they had to redeploy missiles from East Asia to send to West Asia in order to at least try to still defend against what was coming from Iran and defend Israel against it, although that is not succeeding either. So we are learning that there's the final end of the infinite capacity of the United States, right? So in a sense, Russia is now—do you think they're

actively waiting out until that realization sets in and then has to force a change of foreign policy in the U.S.?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yes, yes, I think so. But let me give you just two examples. As you spoke, I thought of those, and I often cite this one. You know, the F-35 fighter jet, I think it sells on the world market for \$135 million. Now, if you look at the Su-57, which is the best Russian aircraft, which is comparable—some people say better—but at least it's in the same class, it sells to India for \$35 million. Thirty-five versus 135. So that just shows you that Russians can produce equally good or better equipment for a fraction of the price. Now, Trump himself said that America doesn't make shipyards anymore, doesn't make any ships—they have to revive those. Now, Russia has finished several first-class nuclear submarines in the last couple of years, and they keep building ships.

One of the shipyards is in St. Petersburg, another one in Vladivostok. So Russia is producing very, very modern, very advanced weaponry—ships and missiles and weapons, aircraft, and so on. So from that point of view, militarily, Russia is absolutely confident that it can take on anybody and win. Now, getting back to Ukraine, how that translates—you know, this is a very important point—that Russia cannot fight the war in Ukraine the way that the Israelis fought it in Gaza. They cannot fight it the way they fought the Germans or the way the Americans fought the Germans. They just bombed the hell out of Germany. Every time you travel in Germany, I'm sure you know that, there are pictures in the city hall of what Germany looked like in 1945. I studied at the University of Tübingen, not far from Stuttgart.

There was not one building standing in Stuttgart in 1945. All of it was bombed out by the Royal Air Force and by the Americans. So the Russians cannot bomb the way they do. Despite the pictures that are shown today on TV, if the Russians sent 600 missiles and drones on Kiev and 20 people died, that means they're terribly ineffective because that's less than one person per missile. They hit military infrastructure. They hit it at night. If they wanted to kill as many Ukrainian workers, they would have hit it during the day. They hit it at night so that they degrade and destroy the military capacity of Ukraine to wage war. This is what Putin is doing. That shows me two things, and this is from his latest speech. Russia does not want to occupy and incorporate all of Ukraine. They don't want these neo-Nazi, you know, Azov types, Bandera types, as Russian citizens.

They don't. What they want, I think—and this is my interpretation, reading Putin's mind—is that they want to liberate, as they would put it, Novorossiya. That is from Odessa, bordering on Romania and Moldova, and all the way to the north, minimum Kharkov, but possibly Poltava and Sumy. The rest of it would be Ukraine, but the kind of Ukraine that would be, well, kind of like a Russian protectorate. They would not be part of the Russian Federation, but they would not be a member of NATO. They would not be a member of the European Union, which is the same thing—that they

would be neutral and they would be monitored. And if they, you know, venture to violate anything, they would just occupy the rest of it and install their own government, just like the Americans did numerous times in Latin America.

## **#Pascal**

So on my channel, other people have compared the situation also to how Russia fought the war in Chechnya and in the end ended up with Chechnya, of course, still being part of the Russian Federation, but basically run by, you know, by proxy, by—what's his name—the Chechen leader, Kadyrov. Kadyrov. It's run by Kadyrov, who is basically doing the bidding of the central government, and Moscow is fine with that. So in analogy, you would say, okay, there's still a part of Ukraine that Moscow, that Vladimir Putin and so on, aims at incorporating fully into the Russian Federation in order also to consolidate. And that is manageable because the people there are sympathetic to Russia. On the other hand, the ones that are not sympathetic, you keep them over there. They're externalized, but probably under some form of Ukrainian Kadyrov type who will make sure that it remains independent, but not a threat anymore, and then call it a day at that point.

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yes, I think so. This is something where there are still versions of the plan possible. It could also be, when I listen to the Ukrainians—emigres or refugees who used to be members of government in Ukraine before 2014—when you listen to them, and they're quite vocal on Russian media shows, what they want is a Ukraine like Belarus, that they are a unified state with Russia, like Belarus, but they are still separate in terms of culture, in terms of even their currency, in terms of their domestic policies, so that the foreign policy is Russia-controlled or doesn't exist at all. But then they do have local autonomy, like Belarus does, with open borders and normal relations with Russia.

This is what they would like. It's the kind of status where Ukraine survives as an internationally recognized entity, a country like Belarus is, but at the same time, it is closely allied to Russia. So this is their idea. One thing that is quite interesting in this regard is what happens to Western Ukraine, the Lviv area, because this is the hotbed of the Bandera movement. And Putin said many times they don't want them in Russia. And the question is whether it would be a part of Ukraine or whether they would make it a separate territory. And then what happens with the Hungarian, Romanian, and Polish minorities in that area? So it's all kind of interesting to watch.

You know, some speculate that the Hungarians might want to take it back. It's a very small area, it's minuscule. But nevertheless, there are half a million Hungarians who live there. And Chernivtsi used to belong to Romania. So this is interesting—what is going to happen in that area? Certainly not a part of the Russian Federation, but whether they're going to carve it up or make a separate state out of it, I don't know. But all of this talk, let me emphasize, Pascal, Russia is going to win this war. It's just a matter of what form it will take afterwards in relation to different parts of Ukraine and in relation to the Europeans.

## **#Pascal**

It's quite interesting because for the longest time I've been wondering what winning the war would look like for Russia, because the European idea that Russia wants to absorb all of Ukraine is ridiculous and absolutely stupid. It would be a stupid thing to do, but what you just laid out might, from a strategic point of view for Russia, actually maybe make sense. Because whatever is left of Western Ukraine then is going to be in a really hard place, because we're seeing right now in the relationship with Poland that with the Europeans, they're also not going to be like—it's not going to be lovey-dovey.

The Poles, they actually observe what the Banderites are doing, right? They're not very happy about it either. Even if the entirety of the rest of Europe tries to pretend that nothing is happening and let's just close our eyes. I mean, even if you could paint Nazi symbols all over the government buildings in Kiev, Europe would still close its eyes to the fact. But the Poles kind of cannot really ignore this anymore, right? Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Yeah, I want to cite to you one of the conversations I heard, which is quite interesting. On the Western shows, nobody ever talked about it. This is why it might be interesting. Speaking about this kind of topic, what happens to Western Ukraine, I heard one Russian propose an idea to make a deal with Poland that they take over Lviv and the territory that used to belong to Poland before World War II. In exchange, Russia would get a corridor to Kaliningrad. This kind of a proposal, either carving it out from the Lithuanian position or Polish, or both. But Russia does need a land corridor to Kaliningrad, and it does not want to hold on to Lviv. So this is at least one proposal that I heard that sounded quite interesting.

## **#Pascal**

You know, it's just, and this is pure brainstorming, right? This is just pure thinking about the world in maps only. But we are back in a moment when this is thinkable, right? That the change of borders—and I usually say that in my European politics classes—the question is not if European borders change. The question is whether they change through force or not. Because it's hard to find a decade in which borders in Europe don't change in one place or another. Yeah, so how far do you think we are from a moment when we get to a new settlement? And, you know, the Europeans, unfailingly, every single time when we do this stupid stuff, like going to war with each other, every single time we end it with conferences. How far are we from the next big conference, the next 1815 Vienna, or wherever it's going to be? What's your prediction?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, I don't want to do any predictions because it's a matter of variables. It's a matter of how things go, you know, in which direction the wind is blowing. But there are certain things that are constant, that are given, that are axiomatic. One of those things is that Russia does not need anything to conquer European countries. It has more land than it can handle. It's the biggest country on earth with a population that is not growing very well. So they don't need land. What they need is security, and that includes security for Kaliningrad. And from that point of view, a land bridge would be a welcome thing for Russia. It would make things a little easier.

When the Baltics are saying, oh, the Russians are going to invade us, they might, but not because of territory. They might because 50% of Latvia are Russian speakers deprived of their rights. So they might. There may be a situation where they would think, well, Latvia, you know, we want to take it back. Or else you restore the citizenship rights, and they start dictating their terms. Same thing for Estonia. The Russian speakers have the status of non-citizens. This is unheard of. This is Europe. This is the 21st century. It's worse than colonial rule. You know, I lived in Morocco, and that's how it was. There were, you know, the ruling elite. There were French citizens there, and Jews were given French citizenship, but the locals were not.

They had different rights. They were locals. They were treated as such. And this is the way the Estonians are treating the Russian minority, but they are a majority in Narva. They are a compact majority. So, you know, if Russia wins the war in Ukraine, I wouldn't be totally surprised if they'd say to the Estonians, you either give them citizenship rights or we're moving in to liberate them. So there are these kinds of things. But Russia does not need occupation forces. They don't need to go to Berlin. They don't need any of that stuff. They're much, much more focused on making Russia great again and actually catching up not with America now, but catching up with China, because China is, you know, industrially more advanced than Russia.

It is amazing, the progress China has made. And this is what the Russians are looking at. They say, oh, if the Chinese can build up an automobile industry from scratch, having nothing in 1990, and now conquering the world with their car exports, why can't we? So this is now, I told you, different dynamics. The Europeans can't understand, and the Americans, you know, this sort of Euro-American Atlantic core, they don't get it that history has moved eastwards. They don't get it. The Chinese are making better cars, better machines, better everything, or at least as good as the Germans and Americans. And that's why the Russians are in this unique position that God gave them.

They are with one foot in Europe and the other foot in Asia. And Asia is becoming more important to them. Moreover, all the natural resources are in Siberia, which means in Asia. And they need time and money to develop it and to make it more livable. Because, look, one more thing. If you look at the geography of Russia, you know, there's just one railroad, the one that Witte, a German prime minister of Nicholas II, built. And then there is the one that the Soviets built. That's it. Two railroads. This huge Siberia, which is two times bigger than the United States, full of resources and oil and everything. So they need a lot of energy and people to move over and to develop Siberia, which is still a sleeping giant.

## **#Pascal**

You know, this is absolutely fascinating. I mean, I have a lot of things, also inappropriate things, I could say now about the Europeans, but, you know, they just don't get it. I think that actually hits the nail on the head, and that could describe the entire foreign policy of the last couple of decades. And absolutely, once the decision has already been made, and once the Europeans understand that they're not looking at the head of Russia anymore, but at the rear, and the head is already turned toward the east, maybe we will finally get to a point where things become a little bit more reasonable again.

And I agree, the future is in the East. Russia is huge. It starts right over here in Vladivostok, just across the pond. And it ends over there, not too far from where you are. So we'll see where it goes. And in the meantime, for people who want to follow your work, of course, I would recommend that they find your YouTube channel. They should find your book. Is there any other place where people can go to find your work?

## **#Vladimir Brovkin**

Well, I do. Yes, I have a Substack, and I'm going to actually make it much more than just current affairs. I'm planning to put a lot of historical articles on Soviet history. You know, I talk on YouTube mostly about current affairs, but I just want to add that where I think my biggest contribution to knowledge is, is in the Soviet history field. What I discovered in the archives about the 1920s—this is my book *\*Russia After Lenin\**—and what I discovered about the origins and the reason for Stalin's terror kind of went unnoticed.

This is interesting how, if you're no longer kind of in the middle of the profession, then you're ignored. But I think I have an original interpretation as to why the Great Terror happened and why Stalin attacked the peasants. And then there are many other things. Some of them are in my latest book, *\*From Lenin to Putin\**, but this is what I will do more on Substack. They can easily find me on Substack by just putting in my name, and it'll come up. Occasionally I post on Twitter, you know, a few thoughts about current affairs, but mostly it's YouTube and Substack.

## **#Pascal**

That's wonderful to know. Please, everybody, go and check out Vladimir Brovkin. And just one more fun fact on the side: history is not finished. Not only do we get new history every day, we also have a lot of not-yet-uncovered history. It fascinates me, and I'm telling you just because it's really fascinating that the Soviets had an embassy in Japan the whole time, because they were, of course, neutral until the 9th of August. And nobody ever worked on that. Nobody—not the Russians, nobody outside. Nobody knows what the Soviet diplomats did inside Japan between 1941 and 1945. It's fascinating. Right, there's still a lot of work to be done in the archives. And you're the right person to

follow also on those. So, Vladimir Brovkin, thank you so much for your time today. Thank you. Thank you, Pascal.