

Gilbert Doctorow: Russia Must Restore Its Deterrence to Survive

Dr. Gilbert Doctorow discusses why Russia must deter NATO to survive. Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined again by Gilbert Doctorow, a historian and political analyst, to discuss whether Russia is winning or losing. So, first of all, thank you for coming back on the program.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I'm glad to be back.

#Glenn

Well, before we start, I just want to say that in these debates and discussions, there are obviously very strong competing perspectives. And I think it's very, very important to avoid making it personal. I say this because I recently hosted a talk on this topic in which there were some, I would say, yeah, very derogatory comments being made about you. And, well, no name is required. And for that exact reason, I think it's important to keep us focused on the topic rather than making it personal. So I wanted to at least personally apologize to you for the insults by one of my guests, as it was obviously quite offensive. And I think it's important, though, to flesh out the differences and, indeed, why we have these competing perspectives.

That being said, I think one of the reasons that the topic itself creates a lot of heat is because it's quite important. That is, at the moment, we see a lot of discussions in Moscow about how to restore Russia's deterrence. There's a good reason for this. That is, people do recognize that this is a key thing that Russians have lost. We now have leading voices even arguing that it might be necessary to use tactical nuclear weapons against the European NATO states simply because the collapse of Russian deterrence is too dangerous. So, well, I guess to flesh out the core of the discussion, on one hand, there's an argument that, well, Russia is obviously winning. It's more powerful.

It's advancing both in terms of territory, but also in the measure of attrition warfare. That is, the casualty rates clearly favor Russia. The depletion of the Ukrainian army has set Russia on the path to victory. On the other hand, one can argue that while Russia's deterrence has been weakened, NATO is now very obvious in its direct involvement in attacks on Russia, with the clearly stated objectives of striking deeper and deeper inside Russia, hitting both military and economic targets, and there doesn't seem to be any fear of any Russian retaliation, even nuclear deterrence, which means that Russia's ability to manage deterrence versus reassurance has, well, I would say, almost collapsed.

So a lot of what we're seeing now was unthinkable during the Cold War. And while many people in Europe and the U.S. see this as a positive development—that they can strike Russia without Russia striking back—I think the longer this goes on, the more dramatic or drastic Russia would have to be in restoring its deterrence. So I guess all of this goes into the topic: how does one measure whether Russia is winning or losing? And so I guess that's my first question to you: how do you assess these competing metrics for what victory looks like for Russia?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I have a direct answer to your direct question. But before I get to that, I'd just like to touch on the question of why there is so much heat and passion, we can say, and venom in discussions among people who should be colleagues or are looking to inform the public, the broad public, on what is going on that they do not receive from major media. And the reason is that you are a longtime expert and follower of Russian affairs. I am a longtime expert or student of Russian affairs. But most of our colleagues are not. And most of the audience is not.

And that is not accidental, because the whole question of what is Russia and who is Mr. Putin has a meaning to our audience and to many of our colleagues in these discussions quite separate from what you and I look for and discuss. That is to say, Russia stands for the opposition to global hegemony by the United States. And it is seen by a great many people, and self-promoted by Russia itself, as one of the defenders of what used to be called the Third World, and is now the Global South, against the colonizers and imperialists of Western Europe and the collective West today. So it has a great symbolic value, which gets people very emotional and gets them interested in following programs like this.

Because before the war, the level of public interest in these matters was very low. I look at my own—I'm preparing now a third volume of my memoirs dealing with my years in the opposition at the start of 2010—and I see the waves of interest and fading interest over the last 16 years, with, of course, an enormous increase in public interest after 2014 and the sanctions on Russia, and the growth and seeming vitality of BRICS. So for that reason, a lot of people who do not really know Russia, and frankly speaking, do not really care about Russia, are following closely and are passionate about what Russia stands for in the global opposition to American hegemony.

So that, to my understanding, brings us real heat to the discussion, which does not help intellectual discourse. Now, the question of whether Russia is winning or Russia is losing, I'll state right at the outset. I do not dispute the information coming largely from Russia, but not only, which indicates that on the ground, particularly in the Donbass and in Novorossiia—that is, the four regions or provinces, or oblasts in Russian, that were incorporated into Russia, as well as the preceding oblasts, the two regions in Crimea, going back to 2014. In 2022, in September, they voted to leave Ukraine and to join Russia, and they were effectively incorporated into Russia. Well, in these oblasts, Russia is making progress.

It now has about 75% possession of Donetsk and has 100% possession of Luhansk. And it has a significant presence in the two others, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. So on the ground, we read every day about this hamlet or that hamlet that has been taken by Russian forces, mostly in the area of Kharkiv in the northeast, but also in Donetsk. As they approach, they're only eight kilometers away from, I believe it's Kramatorsk or Slovyansk—I forget which one of the two—but they're in very close proximity, in artillery range and, of course, in drone range, of these major remaining fortified posts of the Ukrainian army, which is what remains of their defensive line keeping their hold on Donetsk oblast.

That is clear that the Russians will, in September—whether this September or next September, because these dates seem to slip—they will own the whole of Donbass and possibly take the whole of Novorossiia. Does that mean victory? This is what I'm putting in question. I'm saying that this constitutes, according to the information that I'm using to reach my judgments, which I'll explain my sources in a moment, this constitutes a Pyrrhic victory. Because compared with the aims which Vladimir Putin outlined when, in February of 2022, he initiated the special military operation, they will have achieved none of them. And 400,000 Russian soldiers are probably dead.

And you multiply that number by two or three to find the number of Russian soldiers who have been maimed for life. That is a very heavy price to pay for a consequence which amounts to territorial acquisition. Territorial acquisition was not among the featured reasons for going to war in February 2022. It was about restoring Ukraine to its 1992 constitutional declaration of neutrality. It was ensuring that NATO does not use Ukraine, as it is presently doing, for attacks on Russia, that NATO personnel, that other militaries' personnel and installations have no presence in Ukraine. It was to denazify Ukraine, which means, to put it in simple language, regime change—to remove the Nazi-dominated, Nazi-controlled president and cabinet and military leadership that have been in place since 2014, holding Ukraine, the people of Ukraine, in their thrall.

This will not have been achieved. On the contrary, what I see is ever-growing, ever more threatening attacks on Russian infrastructure, civilian infrastructure, starting with the energy infrastructure, which have had an enormous impact on Russian fuel supplies domestically, and which have removed Russian exports of diesel fuel, of refined petroleum products, where Russia had

accounted for 12% of global diesel exports or global diesel trade—gone. And there has even been the risk, which may have been realized, of Russia improperly refining petroleum products because so much of its refinery capacity has been blown out and will take months, if not longer, to reinstate.

That is what we read about in the newspapers. But what I want to get to now is what you don't read in the newspapers, and which I bring to bear on my statement that Russia is now experiencing a Pyrrhic victory. I was privileged to be invited about a month ago to participate as one of maybe two or three representatives of Belgium in a teleconference that was to include 30 or 40 countries, hosted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and organized by its delegation to arms talks in Vienna. And that was a very interesting event. I didn't speak at it. I was stunned. My computer was on for three hours, and the first two hours were fascinating, but not in the sense that they were intended to be.

It is demonstrative of how we all can look in one direction and think we know what we're doing, and miss completely how it can be construed or understood by others. The audience is probably not aware of the major effort made by the Russian investigative authorities, under their leader, to document all of the attacks that can be considered attacks on civilians or war crimes, that have been perpetrated by Ukrainian armed forces from the start of the conflict up to the present day. People who watch Russian state news will be aware of this because after each attack, the reporters show a video of the investigators with their measuring sticks—where the bomb struck, where the crater is, where somebody's leg was blown off.

All of that is then documented and presumably going to an archive, with the belief that there will be a Nuremberg-type trial at the end of this war, and the Ukrainians will be held accountable for their crimes. Now, this may be a very strong belief within the Russian governing class, certainly within the Kremlin, but I, for one, find this utterly nonsensical. There will be no Nuremberg trial. The Russians will have accumulated a vast archive, and that's what it will be—an archive for historians later to dig into—but it will have no relevance to the outcome of this war. Well, the event that I heard or participated in, this was intended to spread to the international community the crimes against humanity, the crimes, the war crimes that Ukraine is perpetrating in Kherson or Bakhmut.

And the first speaker, the most important speaker, was the governor of Kherson. He detailed, and then several authorities who were involved—medical, so to speak—these were some of the most prominent doctors in Kherson who have treated the victims of Ukrainian attacks, and families of victims, and victims themselves. This went on for some time, and the intent was that the people, well, I think Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Cubans, and even some Belgians, would listen closely to these crimes and would spread the word about the horrors that Ukrainianism is inflicting on civilians. The organizers of this did not consider for a moment how it could be viewed otherwise, as the way I viewed it.

This was proof positive that Russia is losing the war. When you heard the governor of Kherson say that his region has become uninhabitable because of daily Ukrainian drone strikes, what he was

talking about was the dropping of landmines along the roads and sidewalks of all kinds of towns in Kherson Oblast, so people can't even walk out to get groceries without fear of getting their legs blown off. He was talking about the fact that Kherson, at the moment of this teleconference, had no electricity. The whole region was without electricity. And the organizers had some difficulty reaching a few of the interviewees because the phones—well, they had no electricity.

All right. So one of the four regions that was, you can say, the result of the victory of Russian force of arms, is declared by its governor to be uninhabitable. Okay. I put this together with what I hear both from private sources and from public sources in Russia. The public sources are the ticker news that I see every morning when I go to Dzen.ru, which is a subsidiary of Yandex. Yandex is the Russian equivalent of Google. So it is very authoritative. It is watched by millions of Russians. And it is not a government voice of Russia; it is a private commercial enterprise.

And they report all kinds of things going on, whether it's the unavailability of fuel in this region or that, or civilians that have been killed daily in this region or that by Ukrainian drones. And I listen to what they say about Crimea. And I also listen very closely to our friends from Petersburg, close friends for 20 years, who every year go to their little house—call it a house, cottage is also an exaggeration. It's two rooms on a hill, which they bought for \$100 back in 1995, when the south was still very much Ukraine. And a group of journalists from Petersburg all went in and bought up a hillside. Sounds terrific. And the region is terrific. It's the east coast of Crimea, Feodosia, which is a naval port but also a leisure port.

And so they go every year to the \$100 house, which they fixed up a little bit, but mostly to enjoy gardening and company, because they have all these other journalists and writers around them, and to travel around to friends in Crimea. Well, this year, what didn't happen? Well, I had a 20-minute discussion less than a week ago with these friends who were now back in Petersburg, very happy to be back in Petersburg, and were among the fortunate ones because they were of quite advanced age, and they were given privileged rights to leave on the first train that had a spare room. So they got train tickets. And when they got to the Feodosia train station, they found hundreds of fellow Russian visitors who were hoping to get out of Alushta.

Why do these people want to leave? Well, for one thing, there's no fuel. There was no fuel for several weeks, then a little bit of gas became available. They share with others on the hillside the services of a Crimean Tatar who has a car and offers a taxi service. And so when times were good, up until this year, he would take them down to the town with us here. We could swim and we could get provisions. In recent weeks, he had no gasoline. And so we did him a great favor, bringing him provisions once a week, but couldn't do more for them. And they were very lucky that he could take them to the train station. No electricity. And drones every day, you know, flying by. So it was unsupportable. We also know, again from Glenn Diesen, from the daily reports, how effectively Ukraine has cut off Crimea. They've bombed bridges.

They've made the coastal road, which is otherwise the main transport link between Crimea and mainland Russia, very dangerous because of constant drone attacks. They have caused suspensions for 12 hours at a time of automobile use of the Kerch Bridge connecting the mainland. There's a railway bridge, the parallel bridge, and traffic has been suspended, with 1,500 cars at a time waiting their turn for it to be reopened. They have banned trucks from using the bridge for fear of a bombing. And we also know—and you'll find this anywhere in major media—that the Russians gave orders to withdraw a lot of their military from Crimea. Now, since the acquisition of Crimea was a major national event for Russia, which restored self-confidence and set off a wave of patriotism that Mr. Putin rode very well after 2014 during the hard times that followed from the sanctions.

It is unmistakable that this is a losing war. The first big prize has now been made uninhabitable for visitors. Russians had planned, as every year, to send tens of thousands of schoolchildren from across the Federation to camps in Crimea, sports camps, for the summer. Canceled. Now, if this is victory, then what does defeat look like? And these are the objective, third-party, responsible, authoritative sources that I use to reach my conclusion that the war is going badly. I don't pay any attention to the propaganda coming out of Kiev, coming out of General Syrskyi, as he's licking his wounds, saying that he's recaptured 700 square kilometers of Russia-occupied Donbass this year. I don't pay any attention to that. But I do pay attention to these Russian sources.

#Glenn

One of the things the initialist said was about the lack of knowledge about Russia and Ukraine. This is one of the things that worries me a lot, because the war propaganda we're seeing today is unprecedented in my lifetime. And I think the reason why it has worked so well is because of this general level of ignorance. I often come across the usual pushback from, you know, the people who are supporting NATO's contribution in the war, saying that the Ukrainians, for all these years, were trying to escape the shadow of Russia, and finally they'd been able to do so, and then Russia came after them.

All the evidence, all the history proves the opposite — that there was no interest in NATO, that from 1991 to 2014 the overwhelming majority didn't want NATO. I think in 2008, when they were promised NATO membership, more people associated NATO as an aggressor rather than a protector. And anyway, this is something that shapes people's assumptions, but also how Russia sees this — the idea that people assume it's just Russian territorial ambitions, as opposed to the idea that Russia sees it as an existential threat, something that would have been common sense in the 90s with NATO moving into Ukraine. But anyway, I think a lot of this impacts how we measure things, because the NATO escalation we see now, well, from my perspective, it can only lead to Ukraine being destroyed and possible nuclear war.

And I guess this is where I'm also a bit wondering what defeat then would mean, because I can't see Russia possibly being defeated — not because it's all-powerful, but simply because it's an

existential threat. And that's why I often say that, you know, people say, I support the West, support Ukraine, support Russia, you're pro this or pro that. It's kind of pointless, because, you know, war itself here, I think, is the enemy — that we can't, again, if we risk a nuclear showdown. And, well, if we accept that Russia sees this as an existential threat, one has to ask, is this a hard time for the Russians? Because, obviously, I think people living from Belgorod to Odessa — sorry, to Donbass, down in Crimea — that life's become quite miserable for many. But in terms of the end results, I'm wondering, how will this look?

Because from where I'm sitting, everything in the West that is being celebrated as victory — look how much the Russians are suffering — from my perspective, it only means that the Russians will escalate to a more aggressive level. Now, we haven't really seen that happen in terms of attacking NATO, for example, but the dilemma for the Russians has remained the same since 2022, or if not 2014 — that is, the involvement of NATO. They always had two options: either hit back and make sure that NATO remains deterred, but then they might face a more aggressive NATO looking for retaliation, which then has a powerful Ukrainian proxy ahead of itself, or just focus on knocking out Ukraine first, if not only, but then allow its deterrence to slip. And I think they have always gone for the second option.

But it was always premised on the idea that you can only do this for so long before it's necessary to take action directly against NATO. And it just seems that Moscow's recognizing, as you said, that something has to change, given that there is now this unacceptable pain being brought to a large part of the Russian public. So far, it doesn't seem like it's going after NATO. But if you look at the quite brutal attacks on Kiev, the now essentially blockade of Odessa, if not also Nikolaev, it shows an escalation of violence. And it looks to me that the next logical step would be to hit a Baltic state or Germany. But essentially, the dilemma still remains: does it strike NATO and then risk a powerful NATO retaliating, or not? Because I think this is always the problem. And I guess that's my question: what are the options for Russia here? Because I don't think NATO is counting Ukrainian casualties.

This is, again, where the war has gone on since 2014. That is, NATO's fighting with Ukrainians. And so if Russia wants to restore deterrence, it has to strike NATO at some point. But then... I think NATO can go two ways. One, it would be the third, recognizing, okay, we took it too far, let's dial it down. Or the opposite, that would be escalation. And it seems like the Americans might not mind using the Europeans like they used Ukrainians. So I'm not sure if the calculation in Moscow is that it's better to wait, possibly strike when Ukraine is in a weaker position. Or, again, I was wondering how you see it, because I hear a lot about production numbers in Russia of armored vehicles, or Rosgvardiya units. They aren't really being used.

Is this intended as a possible deterrent once they strike a NATO country? The nuclear doctrine shifting, this obviously preparing for a possible escalation. I'm just wondering, if you were an advisor to the Kremlin, how would you... how would you address this issue? How would you reverse things? Because, again, there is no losing it. I mean, if it's an existential threat, well, what does losing mean? If Russia pulls out, NATO will move in. Long-range missiles, drones, everything will be there.

All the problems they have now will be so much worse. The war wouldn't stop. Why would NATO not use a powerful Ukrainian proxy? So... how would you see the Kremlin reacting to this? What are the options? Sorry, that's a very long question.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I'd say at the outset that my thinking on this hasn't been evolving over the last few weeks. If we spoke—and we did speak several weeks ago—I would have said Russia should first knock out the proxy. And if they remove the proxy, then there's no basis for Europe to rearm. Europe wants to fight Russia the same way the United States did, through Russia—Ukrainian bodies—and not through their own sons and daughters, who are not willing to go to war and would create enormous political disturbances within Europe if they were, at this point, to call for a draft and impose military service on their young people.

Well, now I have a slightly different view. I believe there should be strikes within NATO, but in a way that removes the possibility of this escalating to a generalized war. That is, to act within the constraints of international law, which give Russia the right to strike, for example, those German factories or British factories that are producing the advanced drones that eventually hit deep within Russia and destroy infrastructure. That's within international law, and it doesn't necessarily lead to any kind of declarations of war. But before we get to that point, I'll answer your last question. What was my recommendation to the Kremlin?

#Glenn

Can I just put in one little note there? Sorry, I apologize for interrupting. But I often notice that among the general public, if one makes recommendations for Russia—in other words, one tries to put oneself in the shoes of the Kremlin—I often notice that if I say, oh, this is in the interest of Russia, this is, you know, what their interests are, these are the options, I've often heard, oh, Glenn Diesen wants this, Glenn Diesen wants that. So I just wanted to put that out there. Sorry.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, in what I'm about to say, I'd like to speak on, as I see it, the interests of Russia, not the interests of its president or his minister of defense or of individuals. But again, in the general public, which has relatively little information or interest in information about Russia—because Russia is an abstract concept used to oppose the United States and global hegemony—the details of what life is like within Russia, who runs it, and so on, don't interest them. For the general public, Russia is one man, Vladimir Putin. I object to that understanding of what 145 million people are like. They are not one man, and they have many different views, and they have very different and many different concepts of what constitutes patriotism and service of national interests.

So I look at it more broadly. I've let the chips fall where they may. My advice is, fire the general staff to start with. The reason I say this is it's very timely considering what's going on in Ukraine now. In one of my latest essays, I was saying that President Zelensky has been overactive in firing his military staff and violating the cardinal rule of war that you don't change horses midstream. The recent removal of Syrsky follows what, two years or less after the removal of his predecessor, for political reasons internal to the management of government in Ukraine, without necessarily having any bigger strategic sense to it—although in the case of Syrsky, perhaps there is a strategic sense.

#Glenn

On the other hand, the Russians haven't done anything.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Where I'm insistent, I'm going to go back to the mutiny of the Wagner Group founder, Prigozhin. This is, what, March 2023. And all of us, everyone, condemned Prigozhin for this impossible challenge that he issued to Moscow. He's marching on Moscow, he's killing some Russian military as he went on his way. This was a terrible offense, in which we overlooked, without too much concern, Prigozhin's death in very suspicious circumstances in the plane crash. I think it is time for us as historians to re-examine, re-evaluate that in light of what's going on today. Prigozhin's loud insistence in the months leading up to his rebellion that the defense minister and the general staff are incompetent and corrupt. After he died, after a decent interval, Shoigu was removed. He was kicked upstairs.

And Shoigu is still around. We see him on this mission or that mission, heading to North Korea or wherever, performing defense-related tasks for President Putin. But he was removed. Gerasimov was not removed. And after 2024 and the Kursk invasion by Ukraine, he should have been court-martialed. And all of his fellow general staff members should have been court-martialed. Why? Because we understood at the time of the Kursk invasion that Gerasimov and his close colleagues had underestimated the possibility of such an eventuality, though they were tipped off it could happen. They said it made no military sense, and that was where it ended. Well, it made military sense, it made political sense, as we all learned in the following seven months of Ukraine's marauding through Kursk Oblast.

There's another reason, which we found out a little bit later, which was never all over our newspaper headlines — that a lot of money had been allocated by the Russian federal government for the defense of border regions like Kursk. They were supposed to build cement fortifications to prevent invasion. The money was stolen by the local bureaucracy, and Kursk had sand instead of cement to protect it against the Ukrainian invasion. The fact that there was no investigation, no control, no check by the commander-in-chief to see the actual state of the defense lines against Ukraine should have brought about a court-martial. It didn't. And so I'm saying that Russia's holding to the old rule

of "don't change horses midstream" has not been good. It has cost Russia dearly in lives and in the morale of its soldiers.

#Glenn

So that is a place to start.

#Gilbert Doctorow

And now the Ukrainians, even after the firing of Fyodorov by his replacement, who was apparently also very sophisticated in his knowledge of drone warfare and promotion of it, and in replacement for Sirsky, who was probably also more sympathetic to drone warfare, have changed their military leadership in keeping with the changes, the evolution of the war. Russians have not. Regarding drone warfare by Ukrainians, I believe there's a lot of justice in saying that the small drones they're using to attack across the border, as in the case of the Kherson region, or to attack on the battlefield, making it possible for 10,000 or 20,000 drone navigators, drone technicians, to hold back 500,000 of the Russian army, are probably largely locally manufactured, although many components certainly are imported.

The sophisticated drones that make the news by destroying this refinery or that refinery, by destroying vessels in the Sea of Azov or on the Black Sea — these drones, I submit, are almost certainly coming from Western Europe. In our BBC broadcast, they speak glowingly about Ukrainians and how they now have the advantage, and the offensive is in their hands, and the drone warfare is in their hands. They are very quiet about where these sophisticated drones come from. They would have you believe that they were all Ukrainian-designed because Ukraine was so sophisticated and so important a supplier of all kinds of weapons in the Soviet Union.

#Glenn

Well, the Soviet Union stopped existing in 1991.

#Gilbert Doctorow

People's professional careers, you know, they move on. Half, 40% of the population has probably fled Ukraine since 1992. So where are all those wonderful engineers and production people to enable Ukraine to be world leaders in drone technology? I ask that question openly. I don't believe in it. Therefore, Europe is deeply involved, up to its neck, in the offensive against Russian infrastructure. Russia could and should respond. As I say, the latest news, again, from the provocations coming out of Estonia, Latvia — oh, the Russians are going to attack, the Russians are going to attack, there'll be a new provocation, that's where the next move will be. Oh, the Poles are cinched out. This is rubbish. It is good for the New York Times.

It's good for the Financial Times. I don't think it's good for this program or for our audience. I don't believe in it for a minute. But if the Russians should strike the factories that are making these weapons that are being used knowingly and perhaps with the control of the Europeans, that is a necessity. They also should strike, if they want to strike anywhere, it should be in southern Poland, where the vast majority of military equipment is being delivered to Ukraine. I think this is a perfect military target, and I don't think the Russians should apologize. We hear about these massive attacks that Russia has made in the last week, the last days. You have 40 missiles and 160 drones, and there's one fatality.

There's one casualty. That tells you that the Russians are doing exactly what they say they will do. They are attacking production facilities, which they know are vacant, have no workers on site. They are very prudent and very legal in a war that they are conducting in the most legalistic and unmilitary way imaginable. The factories that are being destroyed — some of my colleagues are talking about repeating what Moscow is saying — should have been destroyed three years ago. Why did they wait until now? Russia is rarely lagging in escalation that can affect the outcome of the war, and that should be reversed. Well, that is my overall analysis of what should be corrected if this war is not to be a Pyrrhic victory.

#Glenn

Something interesting in how we measure, well, I guess you could call it NATO propaganda in terms of our involvement. Because on one hand, our political leaders and their talking heads in the media, they can't stop bragging about how they're spending hundreds of billions of dollars to help Ukraine. They talk openly about common weapons programs, the long-range missiles they help to supply Ukraine, the intelligence — all of this falls under helping and supporting, they say. Yet they say no involvement. But there's no conceptual discussion about when one becomes a participant.

And this is kind of strange, especially for European leaders, because the EU countries largely didn't supply weapons to countries at war for this exact reason. That is, you cross the line from not being a participant to being a participant. But there's no real debate. What are we doing? And exactly what does it entail to become involved as if... We don't want that discussion at all because perhaps the public would be less interested if they knew the risks. But again, from the Russians, I think they took quite a few on the chin here. That is, last year we saw the drones being smuggled in the same way as they were in Iran, and then they were used to strike Russia's nuclear deterrents.

They were used to strike also in separate attacks. They struck the early warning radars of the Russian nuclear deterrent. I mean, it's quite shocking. And also the way they openly backed the invasion of Kursk. And now there's talk about making all these ballistic missiles. I mean, where does this go if the NATO countries now aim to produce thousands of ballistic missiles to strike deeper and deeper inside Russia? When is it uncomfortable for Russia? When is it unacceptable pain? When is it

existential? I mean, either way, at some point, they have to retaliate. So I guess just my last question, how do you see the possible retaliation? Because, again, they can strike against a proxy, that is Ukraine.

That means, you know, remove all restraints. That is, they're going very heavy even within Kiev. And as I said, it's kind of strange they didn't go after these targets before because they knew where the factories were, or even the blockade on Odessa. They knew this as well, that a lot of the weapons were delivered this way. So either they can go, as you said, against the proxy, but if they go against NATO, they still have different ways. They can do the incrementalism, the salami tactics that NATO usually uses. That is, they can do some hybrid attacks, smuggle in some drones, even if it's minor FPV drones, something to attack critical infrastructure.

They could use a proxy. I see the British, now their new leader Burnham, he wants to involve himself or involve Britain deeper in the war on Iran. Why not donate 100 ballistic missiles to Iran, which they can then use to retaliate against Britain? I mean, this is essentially what NATO is doing with Ukraine, using it as a proxy. Or, just as you said, make no apology, arguing you are involved in this war, you're striking, these are your weapons manufacturers, you're already setting the date for war with us. We're gonna hit them, they're legitimate targets, as the Russians have already said. So how do you see the Russians possibly going forward with this?

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, I'd like to go back to conversations we had six months or nine months ago discussing what deterrence is, what constitutes deterrence. And you called out the fact that you mentioned three different dimensions to deterrence, and having the wherewithal was part of it. And this is the part of it that seems to attract the entire attention of Vladimir Putin. He rolls out for the public descriptions and then rolls out performance results of new, unparalleled, unrivaled offensive weapon systems of strategic value. And he's content that that is deterrence. But from the definition that you gave, and I support completely, that is utterly inadequate. Another most important feature is that the opponent, the enemy, is persuaded that you will use these weapons, these so-called wonder weapons.

And on that ground, the Russians have failed miserably. So they fired one Iskander here, another Iskander there. And this is not persuasive, and this is not escalation to de-escalate, as Sergei Karaganov wanted. I do not believe there's any reason for Russia to go to nuclear weapons. I believe within the range of their conventional weapons, they can achieve their objective of restoring deterrence. But I don't yet see the willingness in the Kremlin to do that. I believe we're facing a question that Lev Tolstoy posed both at the beginning and in the long epilogue to War and Peace, which comes down to: do the leaders control the people, or do the people control the leaders?

We're now at a turning point in Russia where I believe the test will be whether the people control the leader, whether the people impose on Vladimir Putin the only safe way out of this dilemma and out of this conflict, which is massive violence, destruction of the leadership, military and political

leadership of Ukraine to begin with. And if that isn't enough, then to take out these factories in Western Europe. Putin had a wonderful sense of timing, of the window of opportunity, when in 2022 he launched his special military operation, after having rolled out, at least in principle, the new offensive weapons that Russia possessed and was about to put into serial production. He has a window of opportunity now, when Europe is utterly unprepared for full-scale war against Russia. If he is wise, he will use that. If he is not wise, then Russia will lose the war.

#Glenn

I remember when I was teaching security strategy at uni earlier, we made the point that deterrence relies on the three Cs. That is, you need capabilities, communication, and credibility. First, you have to have the capabilities for retaliating — Russia definitely has those. As you said, Putin always focuses on the advanced weapon systems they have. But it also has to be communicated exactly what triggers this retaliation. And here again, I think it's been more unclear. Why make a big deal out of the involvement of Estonia, which was caught on tape attacking St. Petersburg? Why make a big deal out of weapons factories being legitimate targets if one doesn't follow through? The communication is quite important.

What has to happen in order to trigger what kind of response? And the last, I think, is a bit problematic — that is, the credibility. Will they actually do it? This is the problem often with nuclear weapons, because it threatens the destruction of the whole world. The power in itself makes it less credible. It's almost mad to use this. And again, I think the fact that if or when Russia retaliates against NATO, it risks unleashing a third world war — or, if we're not already in it, a nuclear war — which makes it less credible. That's usually what you hear: "Oh, they wouldn't dare to attack. Would they understand what would happen if NATO would trigger Article 5?" And yeah, well, this is a problem of deterrence — that is, the credibility is weak.

But again, I find it strange, the idea that the weakening of Russia's deterrence is somehow seen as a positive thing, even by the people who hate Russia the most in the West. I mean, if Russia doesn't have its deterrence, NATO can increasingly strike Russia with impunity. It's not going to capitulate. It's not going to be defeated. At some point, the desperation will reach a level where it has to do something extravagant, in which we all essentially risk dying and perishing. So it's quite a terrifying situation. And that's why I always make the point, I don't care if you like or hate Russia, surely you don't want the world's largest nuclear power to fear for its existence, for its deterrent not to be respected. I think we all lose then. But it's a hard argument to get through to a very heavily propagandized West. Anyway, do you have any final thoughts before we wrap up?

#Gilbert Doctorow

No, I think we're all watching the TVs. I don't think, but I'd like to make the point that we make our best guesses, and we are using different sources of information. What I mentioned earlier in this program, none of my peers seems to be aware of or using. So we arrive at different conclusions, but

there have been so many unexpected turns in the evolution of this world that it would be unwise to speak with any confidence about what the outcome would be.

But there is the possibility for the Kremlin to change the direction in a way that will shorten this war, that will save lives on both sides, and will prevent it from progressing to a nuclear war. And it is within this realm—this was the big sense of the new weapons systems that were introduced in 2018—that they were conventional. They could be conventional, and therefore avoid opening this Pandora's box of nuclear weapons. And they could be credible precisely in the way that nuclear weapons are not credible. So why aren't they being moved? That is the question for today.

#Glenn

Yeah, the Avangard looked like a nice middle stage between conventional and nuclear, which would then be incorporated into the escalation ladder. Anyway, as always, I appreciate your perspective, and thank you so much for taking the time.

#Gilbert Doctorow

Well, good to talk to you.