

Alexander Mercouris: NATO Will Soon Panic & Risk War with Russia

Alexander Mercouris discusses how NATO's euphoria will soon be replaced by panic and escalation. The Duran: <https://www.youtube.com/@TheDuran> Alexander Mercouris: <https://www.youtube.com/@AlexMercouris> 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 today by Alexander Mercouris, the host of the very popular podcast, The Duran. So thank you for taking the time out of your very busy schedule.

#Alexander Mercouris

I'm delighted to be here again, Glenn, and it's always a pleasure to talk to you.

#Glenn

So the NATO-Russia proxy war in Ukraine over the past 12 years, it's taken place, of course, both on the battlefield and in the information space. And I would argue that to promote a long war, there are some quite consistent talking points: that is, that Russia invaded unprovoked, only to pursue empire. Ukraine is always winning, so we don't stop financing it. Russia has incredibly high casualty rates. Putin is always sick with some new disease. Russia's always running out of weapons. The Russians attack civilians. The Ukrainians go after military targets.

And people must usually repeat these catchphrases to show support for Ukraine, show that they care. But of course, in reality, it's designed to keep the war going. Well, the big talking point of the day appears to be that the tide has turned. For a while, people had to recognize that things were going very poorly for Ukraine due to its manpower shortage, its lack of military hardware, especially interceptor missiles. But now we are being told that Ukraine is suddenly winning. And how do you assess this claim, which now shapes, I guess, all narratives by the political-media establishment?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think that the claim is obviously wrong. And I think all sorts of people, including yourself, by the way, but others, Jennifer Kavanaugh, Daniel Davis, all sorts of people have refuted specific parts of it. We see that the Russian army continues to advance on the front lines, all across the combat lines. We see that the situation in Donbas, which was the epicenter of the war—it was where the war, in some ways, began—that that is becoming very, very difficult indeed for Ukraine. And Donbas is likely, at some point in the next few months, to be lost. So on the military side, things are not going at all as planned.

And I think also, if we're looking at the wider economic picture, the Russian economy has obviously had periods of stress. It had a time of high inflation last year. It overheated in 2024. It's had to go through a period of high interest rates. There have been budget deficits. But again, overall, the picture there is stable. And the Russians seem to be able to churn out weapons and to keep their army supplied and the overall living standards of their people stable. So if you're talking about the truth of this narrative, it is completely not true. I think the facts tell a completely opposite story to it.

There's a more interesting question, though it's one that you partly answered, is why it's been propounded, which is obviously to prolong the war, but why it has been propounded with so much enthusiasm. And over the last few months, you sometimes get the sense that some of the people who have been peddling this story about Ukraine regaining the initiative and Ukraine winning the war actually believe it themselves. It's as if the narrative has got so far out of control that it's captured its makers. And as I said, the question is: why did that happen to the extent that it did over the course of the spring and summer of this year?

#Glenn

I always wonder as well what happens afterwards, because within NATO, politicians, media, they build up this narrative so strongly that the Ukrainians are winning. And what happens then when reality has to be accepted, when they see the military problems across the front lines, when they see the economic problems, when they see the—I would argue there's some big political problems also brewing now in Kiev? What happens then? Especially, well, a lot of things could happen, but as you suggested, the main thing which can't be denied anymore is the front lines.

I mean, if Donbas now falls completely, what's happening east of Kharkov is kind of dramatic as well. Zaporizhzhia can be shut off, the main city, from the front as a supply line. I mean, there's a lot of things that are going terribly wrong at the moment for Ukraine. What does the West do then? Because it's not as if our leaders and journalists are going to say, "Well, I guess we got it wrong. We're not winning. Perhaps we should explore diplomacy." I mean, I don't see this happening. So what then? Yeah.

#Alexander Mercouris

The cycle that we see is firstly euphoria. There's a period of euphoria, like there was after Ukraine's 2022 offensives. Then, when the euphoria ebbs away and the realities start to settle in, you have a short period of panic. We saw that happen in early 2024 after the failure of Ukraine's 2023 offensive and the fall of Avdiivka, one of the key fortress towns in Donbas. And then some kind of equilibrium is found. And that equilibrium always comes back to escalation. There's always some Western escalation. We start sending heavy weapons to Ukraine. We start sending missiles to Ukraine which will hit targets inside Russia. After the disasters of last summer, we saw another period of panic, sort of panic, in the West in the autumn, and then there was again the escalation, giving the Ukrainians large numbers of drones, giving them all the help with drones that we can come up with so that they can conduct strikes deep inside Russia.

And then, of course, the weapons appear in the battle. And initially, they always have an effect. They always do. I mean, when the new weapons are introduced, by definition, they're going to have an effect. So you see the weapons being used. You see the missiles being launched into Russia. You see the drones being launched into Russia. You see the tanks being used on the front lines. And then you have another period of euphoria take hold because suddenly, you know, the weapon has been found that is going to change the entire strategy and strategic calculus. And of course, it doesn't. And then, as I said, we revert back to panic, and we're going to have another period of panic, probably in the autumn when things start to go very wrong, and visibly very wrong.

But the push again, almost certainly, is going to be for further escalation. That we haven't done enough to help Ukraine. That Ukraine had the Russians on the ropes in the summer. That if we'd given them more at that time, then they would have won. So what we must now do is we must redouble and treble and quadruple our efforts, and intensify even further. And of course, the last thing we should do when we are on the back foot is talk to the Russians, because if we talk to the Russians, that will encourage them and it will mean that they will simply take an even harder line. So that's probably the pattern that we're going to see over the course of the autumn and winter of this year.

#Glenn

Some other conclusion is always more war. That is, I've seen, especially in the British media, when they're in this, as you defined it, the cycle of euphoria, then I've seen headlines going, "Well, Putin is down. This is the time to kick him," essentially. So because we're winning, now we can't have diplomacy. And then when Ukraine is on its back foot, then it's, "Well, we have to put Ukraine back in a position of strength and then negotiate." So no matter where Ukraine is sitting in this cycle, it's always the same: this is not the time for diplomacy. Let's just do a little bit more war, and that's exactly what's required. But all of this propaganda, though, it does seem to have swayed Trump, at least. At least that's how it looks. He has bought into this. The tide has turned.

But, yes, I mentioned there's a few areas where things are going wrong. I think the front lines is the most obvious. But the political problems building up as well in Kyiv seem quite significant. We saw this conflict emerging between the commander-in-chief of the army and also the defense minister, Fedorov. And it wasn't clear how Zelensky was going to handle it. He decided to, again, fire Fedorov, and he was eventually replaced by Klymenko. And then you had the protests. Zelensky didn't know what to do. He couldn't really bring back Fedorov after dismissing him. So he got rid of Syrskyi as well, which seemed to be the worst of both worlds, and replaced him with Drapatyi. I'm assuming that this does mean the situation is resolved. It could be, but how are you assessing this political reshuffle or instability?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, the first thing to say about this is that if Ukraine was really winning, this crisis in Kyiv would not be happening. If the situation really had changed and the tide had in fact turned, then it's difficult to imagine that there would be these tensions and recriminations taking place between the civilians in charge of the Defence Ministry and the military on the front lines over policy. It is important to say that civil society, such as it is in Kyiv, political society, backed Fedorov. The uniformed military, without exception, pretty much—even Drapatyi was, you know, the one person who was a bit wobbly—but even all of them backed Syrskyi. They're basically saying, look, we see all these nice pictures of drones going into Russia and hitting things there, but our situation is getting worse and worse by the day.

And Fedorov doesn't seem to care. He doesn't seem to be really interested. What we need is something completely different. We need more men on the front lines to hold our positions. We are short of men. We are overextended. We are exhausted. These are words, by the way, I've taken from a recent editorial in the Financial Times describing the situation of the Ukrainian army: exhausted and overstretched, and we need more men. So they want mobilization to be intensified, which is, of course, not what wider Ukrainian society wants. So, sack Syrskyi, sack Fedorov. It resolves the crisis for a short time, but it doesn't resolve the underlying problem. Ukraine is outmatched on the front lines. The Russian army is bigger. It's better equipped. It's advancing.

Ukraine doesn't have the resources to stop it. So there's always going to be the demand from the military for those resources, which are more men, ultimately, which is more recruitment, more conscription, more of the brutal conscription, which is exactly what Ukrainian society at the moment is opposing. So this tension, this is now becoming structural tension. And as the situation gets worse and worse, it's inevitably going to flare up again.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think I can understand why the civilian population would be more enthusiastic about Fedorov, though. I mean, he's had quite a success, of course, with the drones. And I can see why it

seems appealing that suddenly, yes, we can win, but we don't even need to recruit more from the civilian population because we can simply magically defeat the Russians with drones. This is the new silver bullet. But of course, it's not real. Yes, you can inflict punishment in the rear on Russia, but if it doesn't affect the front line, you do still need to go in and do this very brutal recruitment of men, which is, of course, becoming very, very unpopular.

Yeah, you mentioned that if Ukraine was winning, they wouldn't have this crisis in the leadership. And indeed, I think there might be some crisis possibly coming around Zelensky as well. He's not—he's very popular abroad. The Europeans like him very much. He does exactly what we tell him. But among his own people, not so much. But if things were going well, why are suddenly the Americans turning back to diplomacy? I see this meeting now between Marco Rubio and Sergei Lavrov. From what I understood, it was a 35-minute meeting that didn't go very well. How are you reading the return of American, well, let's call it diplomacy for now?

#Alexander Mercouris

I think that the Americans wanted to talk to the Russians. And by the way, TASS, the Russian news agency, says that it was the Americans who initiated the meeting. They asked for the meeting with Lavrov. And I think they wanted the meeting with the Russians for a number of reasons, obviously. One was because they did want to see, to test the waters, about whether the Russians were interested in renegotiating Anchorage. The Americans found that whatever compromise it was they reached with the Russians in Anchorage, the Ukrainians were not going to accept it, and the Europeans weren't going to accept it either.

So Anchorage failed, and the Americans still want to extricate themselves from this war, and they want to renegotiate Anchorage, and they want to see whether the Russians will agree to less than they got in Anchorage. And the short answer from the Russians was no. The Russians are going to stick with Anchorage. Lavrov has said this very, very clearly in subsequent conversations. I think there was something else, too, which is we overlook the fact that the United States is involved in two wars. One is the one in Ukraine, and the other is the war with Iran. The war with Iran is not going well. There are shortages of weapons systems in American arsenals. The production rates of these weapons are not keeping up with the needs of the U.S. military.

And there are rumors and reports that the Russians have been giving help to Iran, denied by the Russians, denied by the Iranians, but perhaps believed by the Americans. So the Americans wanted to talk, I suspect, to the Russians about all of that, to try to get the Russians to stop helping the Iranians, if the Russians really are helping the Iranians, and to see whether some kind of negotiation on that issue might begin, and whether the Russians might help with Iran altogether. And again, I think the answer from the Russians was straightforwardly no. They're not prepared to pull America's coals out of the fire. As far as they're concerned, the Americans have walked away from Anchorage. They're assisting Ukraine in this drone offensive. Until that changes, from a Russian point of view, there is nothing really there to talk about.

#Glenn

Yeah, at best, I think the Americans will be able to offer them some strategic sequencing, if you will. That is, we'll lower the pressure on Russia until we defeat Iran. And if you help us do that, then we'll go back to killing you afterwards. I mean, it doesn't seem to get much better than this. But with all this, I also think it's quite likely. To be honest, I just assume that the Russians and Chinese were assisting Iran in order to pick targets. After the Americans waging a 12-year-long proxy war on Russia, I don't see why the Russians would restrain themselves anymore. But I guess on that topic of Russia shedding its restraint, the increasing attacks on Russia with these long-range missiles and drones, the way NATO countries are openly calling for financing it, arguing that this is what's needed in the war, bring war deeper and deeper into Russia.

And they see, of course, NATO's direct hand in waging this war on Russia. Everyone knows Russia has essentially two options then. Either they capitulate or they escalate. And of course, you don't capitulate in a war which you consider to be an existential threat. But many wonder, how will they escalate? Will they go after the Ukrainian proxy or go after the Western handlers? And it appears that, you know, so far they're going after Ukraine. But do you see any, I guess, structure there? Because you see now the blockade on Odessa, they're hitting Kyiv fairly hard. I think I'm surprised they didn't go after a lot of these weapon production facilities earlier in the war. I mean, four and a half years into this. How are you assessing Russia going up the escalation ladder, and how significant is this attack on Odessa and Kyiv?

#Alexander Mercouris

Yeah, I mean, I think if we talk about the restraint, the Russians have shown extraordinary restraint in this war, and one degree of restraint which has caused a certain amount of frustration on the Russian side. But I think that was there always in order to allow room for negotiations. The Western escalation is making the idea of negotiations impossible. It's discrediting the idea of negotiations in Russia. And I think the failure of Anchorage has also played an important role here. The fact that an apparent agreement was reached and fell apart immediately has strengthened those people in Moscow who say, "There's really no point in this. We've just got to go on, carry on with our business, which is winning the war, and forget about what the Americans and the Europeans might want, because ultimately, we're never going to negotiate a resolution with them."

So we are seeing the Russians shed their restraints. And coming back to Odessa, you see it now in the starkest terms. Back in July 2022, Russia agreed, at UN urging and with the support of the Turkish government and other Western governments, a grain deal to secure commercial shipping in the Black Sea. And the idea was that if the Ukrainians didn't attack their ships, they wouldn't attack the Ukrainian ships, and there would be no blockade of Odessa. And one of the reasons they did

that was because they found that many of their friends in the Global South wanted that. They wanted a ceasefire of this kind in the Black Sea, which would allow shipments of grain to enter the world food chain, which would keep food prices low in Global South countries.

Over the last few weeks, the Russians have put all of this to one side. They are now attacking Odessa relentlessly. They're attacking ships that are in the ports of Odessa. They have, in effect, enforced a total blockade, not just of Odessa, but of Ukraine's entire Black Sea coast. You see Ukrainian officials in despair about this, that Ukraine's ability to export basically has been blown away. There's been an analysis done which says that the alternative of shipping goods through Constanța isn't really cost-effective. So this has been a disaster for Ukraine. And we could see how all of those escalations, one escalation after another, have led to the Russians dropping inhibitions which, back in 2022, determined their behavior. What we are seeing happen in Odessa today never happened in 2022. And it looked for a time as if it would never happen.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think I read something about Ukraine wanting to take this to the United Nations, that has complained that the Russians are hitting their civilian ships. And indeed, you see this in much of the media in the NATO countries as well. You know, the barbarity of Russia striking ports and civilian ships. But the Ukrainians and the NATO media only a few days ago were celebrating how Ukraine was striking civilian vessels in the Sea of Azov. It's quite extraordinary. The only way you can get away with this strange thinking, when you celebrate attacking civilian ships one day and condemn it the next, it's always the good guy and the bad guy. Otherwise, how can you explain this? There's no common principles anymore. There's no rules. It's just cheering for the right side, it seems.

#Alexander Mercouris

Cheering for the right side and extraordinary levels of information manipulation. I remember in George Orwell's 1984, the novel, there's a passage in which they speak about the fact that the authorities, the state that there is in 1984, cheer on, celebrate atrocities when they're committed by their own side, even as they condemn them when they're carried out against their own people. And it's there. And that's exactly what we see now. You're absolutely correct. The attacks on Odessa began on this enormous scale directly after Ukraine began to attack grain ships in the Sea of Azov, Russian grain ships.

And the people who pushed for the grain deal in July 2022, people like Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, were silent about it. They didn't come out. They didn't condemn it. They didn't say this is wrong. They didn't say this is potentially going to destroy the whole shipping of grain. And the result was, the Russians said, well, in that case, there's no point in us abiding by these restraints anymore. We are going to strike Odessa. And Lavrov has spoken about this. He talked about this today. He said it was a UN initiative. The July 2022 deal was a UN initiative instigated by Guterres, which was made purely on behalf of Ukraine.

#Glenn

Well, I think, well, again, on the cycle, as things started going bad, I think, yeah, I think a good indication, as we just spoke about, is that Rubio and Lavrov are talking again. I'm not sure if this will lead anywhere. But on the European side, though, I'm not sure. Do you see an indication of a willingness to perhaps start talking again? Because I saw this report now of these secret German-Russian talks. I mean, it was leaked by the president of Azerbaijan because apparently the Germans and the Russians held a talk in Baku. But my first thought was, why would the president of Azerbaijan, if they want to host this meeting, why would you leak this unless the Germans would greenlight it? So I'm not sure what this is. Are they softening up the public, preparing them for the possibility of ending this boycott of diplomacy, or... how are you making sense of this?

#Alexander Mercouris

One would like to believe so. We've also had the debacle of the 21st sanctions package, in which the European Commission came forward with all kinds of proposals for further sanctions against the Russians, including a prohibition that EU ships, which means Greek ships, by the way, would carry LNG cargoes to third countries—not EU countries, but to third countries. And Greece pushed back about that. And other countries also pushed back to defend their own economic interests. And the result is that the 21st sanctions package was significantly reduced from what it was originally intended to be. So increasingly, European states are feeling the economic pressures of the decisions that they have made in the past.

And these meetings, which take place between basically German business and Russian business, clearly are an attempt to keep some kind of dialogue going, and clearly are an attempt to look beyond what, you know, the present situation, and to look forward to a time of a restoration of ties. So there are those voices, there are these rational voices in Europe, but we must not have illusions. For the moment, it is the war party that remains firmly in the ascendant. Kaja Kallas, who is the EU foreign minister, we can call her that, is now advocating that Western navies start seizing shadow tanker ships in the Indian Ocean.

Apparently. So she wants to expand the range of operations there. You could see the escalation relentlessly expanding, and in ways which would presumably impact on Indian economic interests. But she's still there. I mean, there were people who said they wanted her to go, but she's still there. Ursula von der Leyen is still there. Friedrich Merz has admitted recently that the higher price of gas has played a key role in undermining German competitiveness. But he doesn't seem to be drawing any lessons from it. So the war party is still in the ascendant, perhaps in time. And this is the other thing that perhaps one should say.

When we've had previous periods of panic, like we had to some extent in the autumn, when it looked as if we were in the early stages of the fall of Pokrovsk, there was the first serious talk about

appointing an EU chief negotiator, and there were talks about starting negotiations, and President Costa sent people to Moscow or tried to establish contacts with the Russians, and President Macron did too. So it could be that over the next period of panic, we will see something like that happen again. But I have to say this: unless there is a major change in the governments of one of the big European countries, Germany, France, Italy, or indeed Britain, then I can't really see that this is going to change overall.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, so far I dismissed some of the diplomatic outbursts. I'm not sure what to refer to it from the EU as, simply being nonsense that is pushing for a long war disguised as peace talks. I mean, when you have leaders of Germany, France, Britain arguing we need peace, and then they define peace as an immediate ceasefire which would allow NATO to send troops into Ukraine and restock the country with drones and missiles, yeah, you kind of get the impression that if this is peace, then obviously there won't be any proper or real good-faith negotiations coming. But I guess from Britain, though, do you think the change in leadership will have anything to say? I mean, is Burnham simply a younger version of Starmer, or does it matter at all, the change in leadership?

#Alexander Mercouris

He's a very different personality from Starmer. Also, unlike Starmer, one does get the sense that Burnham is much more focused on domestic British politics. I mean, he's been mayor of Manchester. His speech outside Downing Street after he became prime minister didn't refer to foreign policy at all and didn't refer to Ukraine, which was in some ways interesting. But ultimately, he's not going to be able to shift policy. I had it on excellent authority that one of the earlier prime ministers we've had over the last four years, Rishi Sunak, did indeed have serious misgivings about the extent of British support for Ukraine. He thought that Britain was over-invested in support for Ukraine, but he found it impossible to take the cabinet and the rest of the political leadership in London with him. And he quickly abandoned the idea.

And I'm sure that Burnham will be exactly the same. Burnham's position is not that strong that he can afford to change policy. If I had to say, policy is going to change in one of two countries, either Germany or France. France has elections next year. We will see how those go. It's always very difficult to predict the outcome of French elections. In some ways, very easy to predict the outcome of French elections, because Le Pen stands, whoever stands against her wins. And that's been the major pattern. But maybe this time it will be different. And in Germany, we now have a much more sustained opposition, not just to the CDU and the government there, but indeed to the whole policy of relations with Russia from the AfD, but also from the German business community, which we probably are not seeing in other European states.

But whether this is going to be enough to shift the dial remains to be seen. I think what is more likely to happen, and I think this is where you are absolutely correct, we probably will at some point

get a chief European negotiator, and that person will go to Moscow and will make exactly the same demands as the demands we have heard for the last few years: you know, an unconditional ceasefire on the existing conflict lines, and no movement on any other issue, no willingness to recognize any territorial changes, and of course this continued commitment to Ukraine's supposedly irreversible path towards NATO. So the Russians will obviously pay no attention and say, "We're not interested in any of this," and this very half-hearted and ill-conceived negotiation will never get anywhere.

#Glenn

It's kind of shocking. The EU, which tried to position itself as this diplomatic giant, all energy is going into whether or not we should talk to the Russians to begin with, because apparently you can't talk to your opponents. And if we do talk, who can represent us? I mean, even if we get past this stage, as you said, it's probably going to end up with someone going to Moscow asking how Moscow can capitulate. So it's not going anywhere.

#Alexander Mercouris

The Europeans spend all their time negotiating with each other in what eventually becomes an auction for who will take the hardest line. And it is the person who demands the hardest line who ultimately invariably wins. So that makes the proper conduct of diplomacy all but impossible.

#Glenn

Initially, there was a setup of the NATO-Russia Council because, well, they're supposed to have some dialogue between NATO and the Russians, also to calm down Russian anxiety about NATO expansionism. But one of the criticisms of Russia was always, as you said, they always negotiate among themselves, that is, the NATO countries. So first, they all come together, they negotiate what should be our position towards Russia. And then, yeah, usually whoever's more hostile will win through because, you know, you can't be soft on Putin. This is the, you know, this is the perpetual logic.

And anyways, the Russian criticism is always when they end up sitting around the same table at the NATO-Russia Council, they already have a position which is locked in. And if they want to try to negotiate, find a compromise, well, they can't do anything on the NATO side because they already came to an agreement and they can't open up this again. So I think this is going to be the same problem with the EU. The EU will come with a set position which they can't shift, and it's going to be so far away from anything that Russia can accept. So it does seem pointless, I guess.

#Alexander Mercouris

I absolutely agree. I mean, you've outlined it all in many places in your various books. If people want to see this, how this played out again and again and again and again, just go and read what you've written there, because it's all out there. As I said, they spend all their time, as I said, discussing all of these things with each other. They agree a very hardline position, and then, of course, they dare not risk reopening the whole negotiation. And it was the other thing that happens. One of the things that makes it impossible to reopen a negotiation is that if they do that, then whoever suggests it is accused of dividing Europe in front of the Russians, creating splits in Europe and weakening the European position vis-à-vis Putin and the Russians. Now, you cannot conduct negotiations in that way. That is not how negotiations work. You have to negotiate with the other side, not in this elaborate way with Europe. I mean, that ought to be obvious.

#Glenn

Let's say something goes wrong now, which it likely will. I mean, Odessa, of course, is struggling. Kiev is getting hit pretty hard. They might start to evacuate, do mass evacuations from Kharkov, if the Russians are making further advances from the east and the north, and Sumy as well. But let's say something really goes bad now, and it begins to collapse quickly, in a big way. How do you think the Europeans and Americans, for that matter? I mean, I know the Americans are trying to position themselves as negotiators, but at the same time, Rubio said that they're not neutral in this.

They're siding with Ukraine. So how will, I guess, the NATO countries then react once things start to fall apart in Ukraine? Because in your cycle of, you know, this NATO madness, the panic would set in, certainly. Would the Germans begin sending Taurus missiles? Are they going to do more severe sanctions? Are they going to start firing upon Russian ships themselves? Because it looks like we're getting quite close to a direct war. I mean, this is what's keeping me up at night, essentially. Yeah.

#Alexander Mercouris

It is what should keep all of us up at night. My own guess is this: if we start to see things fully fall apart on the front lines in Ukraine, and I think we're closer to that point now than we've ever been. We have information from Donbas, which looks—the situation there looks very precarious now, more so than ever. And the key thing about the situation in Donbas is that, if the current line of cities fall, Stanislav Kaprivnik has said this, I think, also on your channel, there is nothing—there is no other line of cities to fall back to after Slovyansk-Kramatorsk. Basically, it's open countryside all the way up to the Dnieper.

So things are becoming very fragile, and they're becoming very fragile in northern Ukraine. So I think there will be a panic much bigger than anyone we've seen before. And this is what I personally fear. At that point, you will see people say, "We have to take the step of sending ground troops to Ukraine. If we don't do that, then the Russians will advance all the way west. They'll come to Kiev and Odessa and Lvov and all of these places." So in order to prevent that happening, we have to

send troops. And I suspect that we're going to see an enormous increase in argument and discussion about that in Europe when we find this crisis escalate.

#Alexander Mercouris

Now, there will be support for it.

#Alexander Mercouris

I mean, we have to be honest with ourselves. There will be some people in Europe who support it. I mean, amongst the wider population, my own view is that the wider population will be overall extremely hostile in Germany, in Britain. There was an opinion poll, by the way, recently in Britain, which again showed that only minimal support for that kind of direct military involvement in Ukraine, or indeed in any conflict with Russia. It could be that that will be the moment when finally we start to have the discussions that we should have had 12 years ago, when this crisis first started, about what have we actually been doing in Ukraine all this time. But the very fact that deployment of ground troops to Ukraine and establishment of no-fly zones and all of that, the very fact that those conversations are likely to take place, and I think there is a strong likelihood that they will take place, is indeed something we need to be very, very worried about.

#Glenn

It would be good to actually have one of those talks because so far I see our politicians and media, they speak in clichés. They always say, "Oh, we should support Ukraine, should support Ukraine." But I mean, who doesn't? I also want to support Ukraine. The country risks collapsing. I've been arguing we should support it for the past 12 years. But supporting it doesn't mean toppling its government. It doesn't mean essentially reversing the election results from 2019. That is a peace platform. It doesn't entail pushing now for deporting refugees.

It doesn't mean not doing diplomacy with Russia when the vast majority of Ukrainians want diplomacy and want peace. Negotiate, and then enter this. So it looks like every time they say we have to support Ukraine, it always means the same thing: that is, just to push for this long war and keep throwing them into the meat grinder. So it would be good to take a step back and begin to, yeah, unpack some of these ideas, these catchphrases like supporting or helping, because I think the people who argue most for helping and supporting are the worst enemies of Ukraine, essentially. But we might be moving there. What you just said about, well, we're already talking about deporting refugees, but if the Europeans—or I don't see the Americans—but if the Europeans would send ground troops, would this be to the rear to free up Ukrainian troops that could then be sent to the front? Or do you think the Europeans would essentially be mad enough to start sending their own troops to the front lines?

#Alexander Mercouris

I think the rationalisation would be that they would send troops to the rear in order to free up the Ukrainians. But, of course, the moment you send troops into a war zone, obviously, inevitably, they're going to find themselves in combat. I think whatever European leaders say to each other, it would be an absolutely fatal step, a disastrous mistake to do. And I think there would be a real risk of a clash with what is by now an extremely battle-hardened, very proficient, technologically very advanced Russian army. And, I mean, the effect of that, I mean, it just doesn't even bear contemplating. By the way, on everything that you've said about Ukraine, that those people who say they support Ukraine have done Ukraine and its people untold harm, I think that is absolutely true.

The position that all of these people have taken has been deeply unethical, and the fact that they have stood in the way of every negotiated route which might have offered a way back to peace, from the original agreements that were made in February 2014 between Yanukovych and the opposition, through the two Minsk agreements, to Istanbul, the Steinmeier plan in the meantime—the fact that, as I said, these have been purposefully and intentionally sabotaged, mostly by us, by us in Europe, will stand in history as a deep point of condemnation of our countries and of our leaders and of the politicians who have led us into this thing.

#Glenn

I think people forget that from 1991 to 2014, only a small minority of Ukrainians wanted to be a part of NATO. And our leaders, intelligence chiefs, military leaders, they predicted and understood that this would trigger a civil war and the Russian intervention. So, again, it shouldn't be hard to make the case for why removing Ukraine from the front lines of a divided Europe would be the pro-Ukrainian thing to do, what it would, you know, to save that nation. But again, there's not much appetite anymore, I think, for such an argument from a political elite which has wedded itself completely to the idea that helping Ukraine means just pumping in weapons and, yeah, fighting Russia, you know. But yeah, there we are. Just a last question, though. You're following this conflict between NATO and Russia and Ukraine quite closely. How are you reading the front lines now? What is it that's, I guess, taking your attention?

#Alexander Mercouris

I think the major events are in Donbas. I mean, I think the Russians now are very, very close to breaking the lines in Donbas and to bringing the whole of Donbas under their control. The big uncertain question mark is what the Russians are doing in northeastern Ukraine. They've established a big presence in Kharkiv and in Sumy. And there are some indications that they're now planning to actually capture the city of Sumy itself. The point is, if they start to do that, then that brings them very close to Kyiv. Well, not very close in distance, but at least in geography, Kyiv itself. You can start to imagine, in that case, a situation where the Russians return to Kyiv. And whether that's what the Russians still actually plan, whether that's what they want to do, I don't think they wanted it at all earlier in the war. I think they were looking for a compromise.

That's why they acted with the restraint that they did. They wanted to leave the door open for negotiations and for a resolution. I think they did not want to cross the river. They did not want to go past the Dnieper. They did not want to be occupying Western Ukraine, where they know that they're not wanted. But with every day that this war continues and we continue to escalate, the risk is that the Russian calculus will change. And my own sense is that patience in Russia has worn not just thin, but to the point where basically the Russians are on the brink of giving up on any idea that negotiations on any topic involving Ukraine with the West is possible anymore. So when the Russians start to think in that way, then their military planning might start to change. And then what is happening in Kharkiv and Sumy region may become extremely important.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. If I was sitting in the Kremlin and I listened to the European leaders, how they define peace and the purpose of a ceasefire, and then I also look towards Iran, seeing what the lessons are in diplomacy there, I would reach the conclusion probably that there is no diplomatic path. And even if you sign a deal, there's zero chance that the other side would sign this in good faith and actually carry through their commitments properly, and instead just look for a strategic pause to regroup and then restart the conflict.

So in other words, I would see probably a strong reason why capturing territory would be the best source for a sustainable peace. And that's a disastrous conclusion, or a way of thinking, to pass on to the Russians. But essentially, we're setting up an incentive for them to take so much Ukrainian territory that Ukraine might not survive as a nation. And again, if someone cared about Ukraine, perhaps it's time to start to talk to the Russians and negotiate in good faith. Anyways, I will let you go unless you have some final thoughts.

#Alexander Mercouris

No, I don't. But just to say that I agree with your last conclusion. I think people who really care about Ukraine, it is essential to talk to the Russians now. I mean, this is probably the last opportunity this summer. And already it's going to be far more difficult than it's been previously because by now the Russians don't believe that we negotiate with them in good faith. And that's unsurprising. But if we don't do it, then, as I said, there is a real risk. For the first time, I felt this in the war, there is a real risk about the future of Ukraine and its survival as a nation. And that is something that fills me with great distress and gloom. But one has to be realistic about these things.

#Glenn

Well, Alexander, thank you so much for taking the time. And, yeah, have a good weekend.

#Alexander Mercouris

Thank you.