

Ukraine War Narrative COLLAPSES. Europe Starts Panicking | Ian Proud

It is sinking in that despite the Ukraine's much touted "successes" with drone warfare, the battle field is about to change dramatically, as Russia consolidates the last Ukrainian strongholds. Time is running out on the war narrative and the European Elites know it. Ian Proud, former British diplomat and writer behind The Peacemonger, joins Pascal Lottaz to discuss the Ukraine war, Iran, Western media coverage, and Europe's political and economic problems. They examine Russia's restraint, Europe's support for Ukraine, rising energy costs, the EU's future, public discontent, and the need to rebuild relations between Europe and Russia. Links: Ian Proud on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@IanProud> The Peacemonger on Substack: <https://thepeacemonger.substack.com/> Ian Proud on X: https://x.com/proud_diplomat Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00 Ukraine, Iran, and US support 05:39 Western media and the war narrative 08:55 UK policy and public discontent 17:01 Russia's restraint and Europe's limits 26:49 Energy costs and Europe's future 34:50 Hungary and double standards in Europe 40:14 Russia's ties with Europe 46:24 What to watch in the months ahead

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with an update by my friend and colleague Ian Proud. Ian, welcome back. Hey Pascal, very nice to see you again. Nice seeing you too. This time not in person, as we did in Tbilisi, but still good seeing you. Tell me, Ian, you are a former British diplomat. You've seen a lot of diplomacy over the years, and right now we have a complete absence of diplomacy again. We've got these two wars that are going on, and in the last days, we saw how certain forces seem to be working on merging the two, as the Ukrainians apparently attacked an Iranian Navy ship, not even in the Black Sea but in the Caspian Sea next door. What did you make out of that?

#Ian Proud

Well, clearly, Zelensky, one of his objectives, it seems to me, is to keep the Americans in the fight and to keep Trump in the fight. You know, in Ukraine, this kind of war really should end because it's absolutely devastating Ukraine and, you know, really kind of devastating the people of Ukraine as well in the process, and is also actually facing increasing resistance domestically because most Ukrainians want the war to end. But Zelensky doesn't want the war to end for his own reasons, and part of his strategy is to kind of keep Trump interested. And, of course, the best way to do that is to kind of turn against Iran as well, to open a second front. And therefore, by striking an Iranian sort of

cargo ship in the Caspian Sea, he's kind of nodding to Trump that he's on Trump's side, it seems to me.

But, of course, there are risks to that too, because, you know, the Iranian ballistic missile technology, which has been shown to sort of good effect really since the start of the war in February, you know, there are risks that actually Ukraine now is going to be subject not only to increased ballistic missile attacks from Russia itself, but now from Iran too. And in circumstances where Ukraine has kind of lost the ability to really intercept missiles because it's running out of anti-aircraft missile batteries and munitions, then it's going to make its cities and its people increasingly vulnerable. So this seems to be yet another desperate attempt by Zelensky, but actually not really thinking about the interests of his people, who will suffer if Iran starts to get involved and, you know, striking Ukraine directly.

#Pascal

We know that Mr. Zelensky is about to go to the United States to the funeral of... What's his name? Lindsey Graham? Lindsey Graham, the famous warmonger and neocon who recently passed away. And, of course, he will there probably have a meeting with Donald Trump as well. And do you think this is now going to be another round of war diplomacy in order to raise some funds and to convince the United States to keep bankrolling the Ukraine war?

#Ian Proud

Of course it is. Zelensky hardly seems to spend any time in his own country while his country people are being subject to kind of daily missile bombardments. I mean, that is just the sad and devastating nature of war. If the war ended, of course, these things would stop. But actually, Zelensky is determined to get more money, get more weapons, get more critical-level support, in particular from the Americans. And therefore, you know, clearly his aim in going to the U.S. is not really to kind of pay respects to Lindsey Graham, somebody that I certainly myself won't miss, but it's to drum up more support for the war, and that is absolutely obvious. I mean, he's always, always traveling. He's in the UK, you know, yesterday there at a naval base in the UK, was talking about additional kind of drone-jamming capabilities.

It's all about providing more tech, more money, more political support. And that's really the only thing that Zelensky kind of cares about. And the bizarre thing is, you know, I mean, I think British mainstream media newspapers are becoming increasingly comedic. The Telegraph, which is perhaps the worst here in the United Kingdom, had this headline yesterday that, you know, Trump is meeting two people in D.C., you know, Zelensky, who's desperate for peace, and Netanyahu, who's desperate for war. And it's just, oh my goodness. It was just yet another kind of clownish mainstream media report that actually Zelensky is somehow the peacemaker.

#Pascal

He clearly isn't. I keep wondering, you know, the mainstream media have now looked at them for the last four years or so that have been doing this, four and a half. And they just seem to be getting worse and worse with the propaganda that they have to resort to just in order to somehow cling to a certain image. Right now, it seems that they... Did the mainstream media in the West, let's say in the UK, did we already pass the point where they tried to pretend that actually Ukraine is winning? Because it seems that it's sinking in that on the battlefield, it's not at all winning.

The only thing they're managing to do is to blow up Wildberries warehouses, civilian infrastructure. Well done, Ukraine. You chose a huge, huge target, a massive, massive warehouse, and you managed to hit it and kill civilians in there. That seems to be the one thing that they've got going. But on the other hand, the mainstream media now seems to be catching on to the fact that actually on the battlefield, the Russians are advancing very systematically. And Odessa is now directly in the crosshairs. What's the situation in the UK in the mass media?

#Ian Proud

Well, the mass media completely censors real analysis, I'd say. Not even real debate, but real analysis. You know, real evidence. And it lacks that strategic perspective on the war. So, okay... You know, Wildberries attacks, you know, things go bang, big explosions. They make good photographs in newspapers. You know, these are held up as signs of success. Clearly, the strikes on oil refineries, not just the fact they're happening, but the fact they're happening deeper and deeper inside of Russia. There was one in Tyumen recently, which is a very, very long way from Ukraine. And, you know, the fact Ukraine can do this is held up as a sign that it's got even better capabilities to really kind of bring Russia to its knees.

But, and of course, that is causing petrol shortages. You know, in Russia, we know that. I mean, Russian contacts say, you know, that is true. But when you step back from the canvas, actually, nobody's really thinking about what the strategy of the war is. And this has always been an attritional war. Wars are won by economies, not by armies. As we know, Russia has the industrial base, it has the economic size, it has the population size, and it has the industrial capacity to keep fighting much longer than Ukraine has. And as you say, you know, small, very incremental advances are being made on the battlefield. But that's not really the kind of strategy, it seems to me. From the Russian side, they're really looking to bleed the Europeans and the Ukrainians white.

But the mainstream media really never focuses on this bigger strategic picture. They like pictures of things exploding as signs of success, and that's what they cling to. And I don't really know what the tipping point is when they realize actually things are going badly wrong because, you know, Ukraine is already depopulated. It's got about two-thirds of its pre-war population left in the country. There's one pensioner for every one worker. It's totally reliant on economic aid, you know, from the West. It has massive AWOL problems, with people deserting, increasing domestic unrest where busification is going badly, and people are turning against, you know, recruitment officers in the streets.

You know, they're changing their defence minister and their head of the army while they're saying they're winning militarily. You know, they can't even pass budgetary laws through the parliament because, you know, Zelensky faces an increasing struggle within parliament. Corruption is happening all the time and, you know, these sorts of things. But the West simply never focuses—not just they don't focus on these, but they don't even talk about it—because the only thing they want to talk about is the things that go bang, the nice pictures of explosions. And so that's where we are. And I don't really know what's going to break that almost trance, that kind of trance that journalists are in.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. I mean, we're seeing right now in the UK how even a change of government doesn't really impact anything. I mean, your new prime minister, can you tell us a little bit about it and what has been like this first week or his first 10 days in office now?

#Ian Proud

Well, you have to bear in mind that his big priorities are the domestic agenda. You know, there's a real feeling in the United Kingdom that public services have been neglected, ordinary people's needs have been forgotten about, even by his predecessor, Rishi Sunak, who came in on a pledge to kind of fix these problems. You know, we have 100% debt-to-GDP in the United Kingdom, the highest debt servicing costs in the developed world, and yet we need to spend more money. Lots of people want us to spend more money on defence and that sort of thing. So his biggest priority is to kind of fix that.

But, of course, you know, what he's therefore doing is not even trying to kind of say, well, actually, should we maybe think about our foreign policy too, and maybe connect the linkages between our domestic challenges in terms of our economic problems, high energy costs, cost of living crisis, you know, social discontent, and the fact that these wars are happening? There's just no possibility to connect the two. So what you actually see is statements that actually, well, we're just going to have exactly the same foreign policy as the previous person had, which is to support Ukraine come what may, and actually to say, well, you know, the situation in the Middle East is bad, but we want to see it end. And, oh, it's really, really sad about Gaza, but we have to make sure that we support Israel.

So it's absolutely no change at all. And one of the reasons for this is, A, they don't have the bandwidth to kind of come up with new ideas because the domestic is their biggest priority. But B, because he's the seventh prime minister in the space of 10 years. And, you know, our leaders are coming and going so quickly that actually they no longer really have the agency and the power to set policy decisions. The policy is set by the people who are there all the time, what some people call

the deep state, you know, the men and women in grey suits in the background. They own the policy. And when the new guy comes along, they say, "Well, this is the policy, say this." And that's what our elected officials do. So that is the nature of our democracy, sadly, today.

#Pascal

So people, faces come and go, but the agenda remains. And the agenda still today seems to be very firmly anti-Russian and pro-war. I mean, no, not pro-war with Iran. I mean, in Europe, the Iran war is not popular. But there is no opposition to it. I mean, in my perception right now, European leaders, including the UK, they just basically are silent on this, right? As in the United States, you do what you have to. We're not going to oppose anything, but we're not directly going to join. Or what's your perception of how they are approaching this one versus the very, very noisy kind of drum-beating of war against Russia?

#Ian Proud

Well, there are some people in Europe who do speak out. For example, the Spanish prime minister has spoken out about the completely crazy, nonsensical kind of policy of Donald Trump. But of course, the Europeans feel less able—the mainstream Western Europeans, the main powers, Britain, France, and Germany—essentially feel less able to do that. A, because they don't want to annoy Trump even further, and B, you know, make him go further away from their goal, which is to defeat Russia, you know, in Ukraine. So therefore, they have to go soft on Iran to keep Trump in the fight in Ukraine, firstly, and also because they're massively beholden to vested interests that actually want the war to continue. The media interests are avidly Russophobic, the defense industrial interests that see huge profits from the war continuing, you know, and that sort of thing.

And the whole Overton window, which has become so small that actually, you know, elected officials are now prisoners of a policy that they no longer create. So that's why you get this odd disconnect between, I think, you know, the two, because, you know, if we weren't so invested in Ukraine, it would be easier to kind of speak out about Iran. But actually, you know, we can't do that because we need Trump's help in Ukraine. And everybody knows—I mean, I was talking to Dr. Jennifer Kavanaugh the other day—that actually, you know, the Ukrainians won't be able to strike 2,000 kilometers inside of Russia without U.S. intelligence. So for as much as Trump says that actually, yeah, he wants to end the war in Ukraine, the Americans are still knee-deep in that war. Everybody knows it. And the Brits, the French, the Germans want to keep it that way.

#Pascal

This is part of the thing that is so frustrating also for, I believe, for us here that are trying to do some analysis, because the theatrics of it is actually part and parcel of this entire war game, right? The way that the war is fought as much in the minds and hearts of people as it is fought on the TV screens, in order for the United States to be able to pretend to be a neutral outsider and just

throwing out proposals in order to end this horrible war, when in fact they're the driving force, of course, behind this slaughter continuing on the NATO side. Do you see any kind of resistance to this in the general population? I mean, it seems to me that the European frustration in the population about these wars is actually growing, and especially the opposition to Donald Trump inside Europe seems to be growing. What is your sense for public perception?

#Ian Proud

Well, I think there is an increasing resistance to the essentially rotten policymaking core at the heart of our elected governments, not just in the United Kingdom, but in France and Germany as well. We see that with shifting alliances, shifting voting preferences towards newer parties like AfD, like National Rally, like Reform in the United Kingdom. But the reality is that actually... there's a British Foreign Policy Group survey that said that actually most people still get their news, you know, most British people—I assume the same for the French and the Germans—from televisual news broadcasters more than anything else by far, about two-thirds in total.

The work that you do, Danny Davis, Glenn Diesen, and Alexander Mercouris, and others, is really important. But you still form a tiny proportion of the mix in terms of how people get access to their news. That is shifting, but that shift is going to take several years to kind of work its way through. And the mainstream media is overwhelmingly sort of pro-war. So it's very, very difficult to kind of shift that public perception when all you see is photographs and pictures of Ukrainians and people saying, "Oh, isn't that great?" And Royal Marines landing on a Russian oil tanker, which absolutely makes no difference at all, really, to the big picture of Russia's export kind of model and that sort of thing.

What I think is happening right now is that actually, despite the mainstream media having a complete stranglehold on how the war is described, people nevertheless feel discontented with their governments. They haven't yet made the intellectual connection between how war is actually making their day-to-day lives worse, how sending four to five million pounds a year to a war that can't be won in Ukraine is contributing to a reduction in the quality of their public services and also an increase in their cost of living because energy prices are so high. But they feel that discontent, and actually, you know, I think that sort of eventually that connection will be made. I don't think it's been made yet. But, you know, the discontent won't go away, and people are looking for the alternatives. And the alternatives available are those people who say, well, actually, why can't we just have a normal relationship with Russia? For example, in the case of AfD.

#Pascal

Since you've worked in Russia for many years, what is your take on how they are now dealing with this situation? The U.S.-NATO-Ukrainian alliance has been shifting their strategy away from trying to impact the direct battlefield, which is something that the Russians are doing systematically, into these long-range strikes, and they've chosen different types of targets, right? First, it was the

petroleum manufacturing plants all over Russia, but then Russia got better at defending those. Then they've tried to hit these industrial sites, and the Russians seem to be willing to kind of absorb the strikes, and they are not escalating on their side.

I mean, they're escalating towards Odessa, but it seems to me that what the Ukrainians and NATO are really looking for is to provoke Russia into a larger strike against Europe, especially Ukraine, right? Ukraine would love this war to finally break out in the entire NATO area, because that's kind of the only thing that can still save them at this point, if anything at all. But Russia's not taking the bait. I mean, what's your take on Russia's reactions and how it is actually still sticking to what others, Alexander Mercouris and so on, call maximum restraint policies?

#Ian Proud

I actually agree with that characterization that they're using maximum restraint. And, of course, people watching the mainstream TV news in the UK can't see that because all they see is, you know, like a shopping mall was struck with a ballistic missile yesterday, for example, as a direct reprisal for the war base, for example. So, you know, they see Russian missiles landing, and they say, well, Russia is this evil terrorist country. They don't make the connection to the Ukrainian missiles landing in Russian oil refineries and war base depots. It's enough that the Russians are doing these bad things, and therefore Ukraine has to do the same in return, for example.

So, but I mean, I think what I can absolutely say about the Russians is that reciprocity is absolutely hardwired in terms of their doctrine. I remember actually sitting in St. Petersburg at the International Economic Forum, you know, one year, maybe 2016, perhaps, and Putin sat on the stage and he quoted Newton's, you know, law that an action produces an equal and opposite reaction. And he actually said that on the stage. And you see that in everything that Russia does. Ukraine strikes air bases, they strike a shopping mall. Ukraine strikes an oil refinery, Russia strikes a port facility, closing off Ukraine's ability to export grain to the world, basically making Ukraine a landlocked state, essentially, which is what the strikes on Odessa are doing.

So everything that Russia does now is fully locked in the reciprocity, you know, mode where, you know, you do something, we'll do something in return, and possibly even harder than you've done to us. And, you know, I often say about the Russians to people who've never been to Russia, never really met a Russian person, is that, you know, if you offer a Russian friendship and a handshake, they'll be your friend for life. If you invite them out for a fight, they'll take you up on the offer and try and hit you harder than you hit them. And that is just, you know, my understanding, having lived and engaged and made friends with Russians, of their doctrine.

So the question is, you know, why Russia doesn't go further? You know, that is the salient question. But I mean, I think the answer to that is they don't need to. You know, they don't need to because they have the resources to keep doing this for as long as Ukraine wants to do this. And Europe is going to run out of resources to support Ukraine before Russia runs out of resources.

But Putin's challenge is actually, how does he manage the different factions within Russia, where there are some hardliners like the Karaganovs and so on that say, well, we should just nuke someplace in Ukraine, or we should strike some depot in Ukraine inside of NATO territory and escalate that way. Steve Jermy's really good in terms of how that scenario, that war scenario, the conventional strike on NATO, might play out, and it probably wouldn't play out very well for Europe itself. But nevertheless, Putin doesn't want to do that because A, he doesn't need to do it, and B, he does ultimately, I think, hold out hopes of some sort of equalization, normalization of the relationship with Europe over the long term. And he's aware of the much more catastrophic risks to Russia from escalating with NATO, even if NATO may suffer badly in the circumstances.

So he's always, always playing a balancing act. But by now, he doesn't need to escalate. He can just do the tit-for-tat, the rest of it, the reciprocity approach, you know, for as long as he needs to, while managing those constituencies that want him to go in harder. And it's also helpful for him in some ways to do that because, you know, when you get Karaganov saying, "Well, let's nuke someplace," then actually that kind of spreads fear and panic in Europe. And Putin, you know, he never really engages with this discussion. You know, you get the Medvedevs talking about the nuclear torpedoes. Putin never says anything, but that's part of the game too. There's a certain element of kind of scaring the Europeans in this as well.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, the whole point of Karaganov is that the scare of nuclear war needs to come back to the Europeans, right? So if they actually perceive that this is a discussion in Russia, that would actually be, in his sense, even without throwing a nuke, right? But the point to me is a bit that the Europeans at the moment don't seem scared. They don't seem scared of war with the Russians, which worries me a lot. On the other hand, I think I absolutely agree with your analysis. The Russians know that their approach is working. The battlefield is developing the way that they want to. The strikes that they are enduring are still on a level. I looked it up the other day. We must just keep in mind—I hope I got the right number now, but I need to look it up again—around 12,000 people die every year in Russia of car accidents.

Something like that. I'll look it up again just to make sure that I got it. So we're still on the level, you know, where, I mean, 12,000 people in car accidents you don't even notice, right? Because that's just statistics. But of course, these kinds of strikes and so on, in this sense, from Ukraine are not massive, but they're quite influential with the public politically within Russia, and that's certainly a danger. On the other hand, just like with Iran, I think Russia and Iran both believe that they figured out how to answer these attacks that are coming, and they're willing to implement that over the long run. How long do you think Europe is still able to actually keep going? Because if it is now a game of who has the longer breath, it seems to me that Europe might actually be at the shorter end of the stick.

#Ian Proud

Well, I've said that for a long time, that that is the case, that Europe doesn't have either the democratic or the economic means to sustain this fight longer than Russia does. And that's an analysis I maintain even today. And I think the tipping point won't be events on the battlefield, but there'll be actual elections in individual countries themselves which lead to some sort of change in the kind of balance of power in those countries, starting with France next year with the presidential election, where, you know, Le Pen, you know, has a very, very good chance of winning that, which, you know, could have seismic implications, not just for domestic politics in France, France's relationship with the EU, but actually Europe's relationship with the war in Ukraine as well.

Because a Le Pen government is not going to want Ukraine to join the European Union on equal terms. For the first time, the kind of, you know, the truth that people refuse to speak, that actually Ukraine is too hot a potato to allow to join the EU, would actually be much more brought to the surface by the French, who say, "Well, we're not going to give our French farmer subsidies to Ukrainian farmers." It's something that everybody knows about. The politics are exactly the same, but nobody ever talks about that. So that's that. And say, "Well, actually, and by the way, why are we sending all this money to Ukraine to fight a war that they're losing, and their country is falling apart and becoming a failed state on the periphery of Europe?"

That conversation would come front and center as well. And, you know... Fast forward to 2029, you've got the German elections, you've got the UK elections where, you know, AfD, if not the outright winners, they could be in some sort of greater position of power within the German federal system. Reform could be in power. I mean, these things are going to be the kind of democratic events which change radically the conversation, you know, the policy conversation, which has been completely absent for the past 12 years, about actually, are we really doing the right thing in Ukraine? So I think it's that, you know, these democratic shifts are going to be the things that change.

And that brings us back to kind of ordinary people feeling actually left behind by the mainstream status quo, which actually seems to prioritize wars in other countries over domestic problems and things that ordinary people really care about. Because we all know that ordinary folk, they don't really know anything about Russia or Ukraine. Ordinary people think about their day-to-day needs, their kids' health and happiness, whether they've got food on the table. This is what people care about. Ultimately, that's the thing that will decide the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Foreign policy always starts and ends at home.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah. But that's the point where these politicians or these systems actually then whip up populations into the willingness to go to war, right? And it's absolutely horrible. And we saw that happening. We saw how it went down in Ukraine, where Mr. Zelensky was elected on a peace

mandate, right? He was elected as the peace candidate, the man who was supposed to make relations with Russia better again. And in the end, everything went completely south with the constant incremental salami-slicing tactic of escalation bit by bit. And in the end, it was Russia that invaded Ukraine, that went over the border, yes. So you see how you can create this kind of reciprocal relationship that in the end then gives the warmongers actually what they want: the big fighting.

But my question was rather also meant about the economic situation, because the sanctions that the Europeans put on Russia put already quite a bit of strain on the European economies that are deindustrializing and that have lost access to cheap energy sources. And now with the Iran war, we've got another energy crisis that is also hitting the Europeans hard again. I mean, how long do you think it is before the gasoline prices, and especially diesel prices, jet fuel prices in Europe are actually going to rise? Because we are nearing now the end of these strategic reserves that several countries have been dipping into, especially the United States. Do you have any feeling for where we are economically?

#Ian Proud

Well, economically, I mean, as you say, the Iran war is putting further downward pressure—or, for that matter, upward pressure on prices—in Europe, which have precipitated this kind of deindustrialization. So I think people can see that. But what people aren't doing, certainly in terms of the mainstream narrative, is connecting that linkage between Iran and actually the war in Ukraine, which is the thing that really started the energy crisis and then did deindustrialization in Europe itself. So they're trying to kind of put all the blame on the Iran war and say, well, if we end the Iran war, then actually the energy crisis will end.

But clearly that isn't actually true because without access to cheap Russian energy, buying expensive American energy, the economic picture will still be worse. I mean, the UK has the highest energy costs in the G7. You know, for example, we're an island nation and so on. But people aren't making that sort of intellectual connection with the fact that actually this is also related to the war in Ukraine. So economically, of course, Europe's situation is bad. Nobody's joining the dots except the citizens who are actually feeling it in their pockets.

And again, it comes back to the democratic point that actually, you know, our governments aren't actually making good economic policies that ensure that our cost of living is manageable, that our economies are sort of producing jobs and opportunities for people and providing public services. It always comes back to that. And actually, the situation in Europe is quite bad. And ordinary people are feeling it increasingly and feeling that their governments aren't actually providing the policy responses that they need to resolve the situation. I think that is a bedrock of the discontent and disenfranchisement we see across Europe right now, which ultimately will outlast the war in Ukraine, whether or not individual citizens even think about the war in Ukraine as a causal factor.

#Pascal

What do you think this is doing to the European Union? I mean, you're sitting in a country that actually said—the only one yet—that, no, we're leaving. Bye, guys. Exactly 10 years ago, actually. To me, retrospectively, it seems like not the worst decision to take. At the moment, I thought it was horribly bad. But the UK actually figured out a way to still rekindle its relationship with the EU. It seems that there are forces in the UK now that would rather like to rejoin again, but I don't think that has any kind of majority. Then again, these people don't necessarily go for majorities. They go for what they can do. Because I wonder about this right now. I mean, Europe is so deep, so deep in a hole that they dug themselves that I just wonder how to get out of that.

Because we are also actually seeing this increasingly draconian approach of the Europeans toward their own people, right? With Jacques Baud, with Nathalie Yamb, with the sanctions, with the UK, how the UK treats its own dissidents against the Gaza genocide, with Palestine Action, like even arresting grandmothers and whatnot, arresting Jews, by the way, who oppose the genocide. And are we headed in Europe, actually, toward, you know, this moment where, once the Ukraine war kind of—once it becomes clear that this is not going to be a Western victory, how that these systems are then going to start looking for more enemies from within? Or am I just being very pessimistic here?

#Ian Proud

I think the European Union project itself is under significant pressure, actually. And I think the reason for that is because its purpose and its *raison d'être* have changed. And it's changed because of the bureaucratic forces within the institutions of Europe that actually demand increasing power and authority for themselves at the expense of sovereign nations within the project itself.

So it's a crisis of actually the institutions of Europe rather than Europe itself, because what is Europe? You know, Europe is the European Union, these 27 countries, but there are many more countries than that that are part of Europe, right? Including, actually, you know, Russia, of course, which, you know, in geographical terms is also kind of part of Europe. Europe is the people, you know, the civilizations, the societies, and so on. And the big success of Europe for many years, you know, the European Union project, was in actually reducing barriers between peoples and actually, you know, having sovereign nations where borders were nevertheless open and people were able to engage with each other: economic, social, and cultural collaboration, something I talk about a lot.

You know, what has failed has been the incremental move towards the politicization, the militarization of the European project itself, which in the process of becoming ever more centralized is creating the sense that sovereignty amongst nation states is being eroded, and citizens are reacting very badly to that. So, you know, that's why what's happening in France, Germany, and the UK right now is happening, because actually lots of people like the idea of visiting Europe, but what they don't want, and certainly in the UK, you know, ultimately the Brexit result happened because of a sense that actually unelected officials in Brussels were making decisions for British people which

were increasingly out of touch with what British people wanted. Well, that sense, you know, of disempowerment amongst the Brits, you know, ultimately led to people deciding that on balance they should leave.

That doesn't mean citizens in Europe don't like Europe. It means that actually they have problems with the democratic deficit in the European institutions. What that brings us around to is that if you see some sort of shift in the politics of Europe, you know, in nation states, I hope that leads to some sort of managed decline of the institutions themselves and a sort of refocusing on what's important about Europe in terms of the people of Europe, the community of Europe, including Russian people and, of course, including Ukrainian people and Moldovan people. But I think actually the bigger risk is that the whole project falls apart, and that creates even bigger risks in terms of conflict and so on, which maybe you should want to hope for. But yes, managed decline is my hope. I'm less convinced that we'll get that sort of model.

#Pascal

Wow. If managed decline is the best-case scenario, then we're really in for a rough ride. But do you have any—I know you're not very close to there, but maybe you followed it a bit—like, what's happening in Hungary? I was quite taken aback that now it seems that the newly elected government seems to be going after the old government, and the Fidesz party is being taken apart and its politicians are being barred from running for office. Did you follow that story at all?

#Ian Proud

I do, actually. I should talk to Philip Pilkington. He's kind of quite good on these things. He can be a bit out there sometimes with some of his prognostications, but he's quite a good character to kind of, you know, talk to. I mean, look, I mean, essentially, Peter Magyar is like Hungary's version of Zelensky. You know, he's somebody who kind of fits. He's somebody who fits the required model for Europe. He says all the right things. He's ultimately not going to block Europe's anti-Russian policy. He's not ultimately going to block endless military and financial support for Ukraine.

It's a much more complicated relationship between Hungary and Ukraine, as we know. But nevertheless, he's going to do his best to kind of toe the European line, if that makes sense. So he fits, and Orbán didn't, because Orbán said uncomfortable things, that actually this war is a disaster. Why should we, you know, make Hungarian people worse off and that sort of thing? But actually, as with Zelensky, as with Magyar, he is actually an increasingly repressive person within his own borders. In Ukraine, men are dragged off the streets like dogs by the busification squads.

In Hungary, a president can be asked to stand down because of his political affiliations, and opposition groups, colleges can be closed, public broadcasters can be shut down, you know, freedom of speech can be shuttered—all the things, and actually worse, than the European elites actually accused Viktor Orbán of for many years. The one difference is that actually Peter Magyar is

saying the nice things to the Europeans that they like, and therefore they're happy to ignore that, in the same way that, you know, Zelensky always smiles when he meets von der Leyen. And therefore, the Europeans are happy to ignore the epic-scale corruption in Ukraine, the busification, you know, the disastrous kind of war prosecution and that sort of thing. You know, so a bad leader is fine as long as they say the right things to Brussels. And I think that is essentially the best way to summarize Peter Magyar. It's very cynical, but I'm afraid that is how I see it.

#Pascal

Yeah, it's a good way of actually also summarizing where we are at in Europe. I mean, I would say the largest change we've seen in the last 10 years compared to previous decades is that, at least from my perspective, in previous decades, the whole human rights discourse, the law discourse, the diplomacy discourse, was more or less believable. It was kind of, you know, there were always these gray areas. There were always these kinds of things where you had academics who could go and drill down and write books about the hypocrisy of the whole system. But overall, it looked believable. And now we're just at the point where it's absolutely ludicrous.

It's so far removed from reality that we actually understand, ah, no, these are speech acts that have nothing to do with what's happening and everything with who does it. Our friends can do whatever they want. They could go out and murder children in the street, which they literally do in Gaza, right? And we are still calling them the only democracy in the Middle East. Magyar could do the same in Hungary. We would still call him a good friend of democracy and whatnot. But if anyone of the political opposition somewhere does something even just slightly similar, they will be called out as the greatest dictators and threats to democracy. And by now, this is getting clearer. Do you also have that sense that we are getting to more clarity, actually, at least in our quarters?

#Ian Proud

Well, I mean, we understand that very well. Whether ordinary people understand that, I'm less clear. I suspect they really, really don't. But, I mean, of course, any analyst like us, I mean, we spend all our time looking at these things and thinking about these things and seeing the utter rank hypocrisy in it. But I think, actually, the vast majority of people just don't.

#Pascal

I mean, how many ordinary people in the UK think about what Péter Magyar is doing in Hungary?

#Ian Proud

I would suggest very, very few. So, yeah, I mean, you know, and, of course, we are marginalized because, you know, television media takes up two-thirds of how people get their news. And while we are a small and growing thing, we are still very small. So, I see, you know, that what changes

the dial is kind of how people feel about their lives. And I think that that is what's making people realize that we're just really badly led, you know, as countries in Europe.

#Pascal

But 10 years ago, like, did you have the impression that, oh no, the West is such a hypocritical beast? I didn't. How about you? This is new to me and kind of new to me. I mean, I am very disillusioned with where we are in Europe. How about you? Were you already 10 years ago disillusioned, or was it still fine back then?

#Ian Proud

Well, 10 years ago I was in Moscow, so yes, I was already pretty disillusioned because I thought, well, why are we doing this? Why can't we just resolve this conflict, have normal relations with Russia? Clearly, the Ukraine thing is difficult, but we have these kind of peace plans. We could kind of follow them through Minsk II and that sort of thing, which, by the way, the British and the Americans kind of, you know, hijacked. And the Russians actually wanted that. They wanted to know.

This is the kind of really frustrating thing. Living in Moscow for four and a half years was a remarkably normal experience. They wanted close relations with Europe. If you went to St. Petersburg, you could get a train journey to Helsinki without any border control. You'd see lots of European visitors. I mean, they wanted to develop commercial links. They wanted to develop social and cultural links. Universities were collaborating with each other. The Bolshoi Theatre could perform in London. And they just wanted to get along, but we didn't. So yes, I'm afraid, unlike you, I was already disillusioned 10 years ago.

#Pascal

I didn't pay enough attention back then, obviously. But yeah, I still wonder how to—not only how to get out of this, but how to somehow manage this apparent drive of Europe to somehow find a significant other to antagonize. It's happening also in West Asia. The United States is constantly doing it around the world. That is illogical, right? How to rein in this apparent Western obsession with finding an enemy?

#Ian Proud

Well, I mean, they found the enemy. They've got the eternal enemy in Russia, you know, a place that's geographically much larger than Europe itself, which therefore can just, in any picture, be characterized as a threat just because of its size. You know, you can throw in the snow, you can throw in pictures of bears with their long claws. It just invites all these wonderful opportunities for people to say, "It's a threat to us." And the fact that, by the way, they have 6,000 nuclear weapons. So, you know, and they're Slavs, so they're different from us, even though, FYI, Polish people,

Ukrainians—let's not get into racial stereotypes. But whatever. I mean, we're all just people, you know. But actually, Russia invites being, I don't know, just characterized as the other, and it's the only other that we need.

Because, you know, if you look through history, whenever any kind of, you know, political leader of a state is in trouble, what do they do? They find an enemy to kind of mobilize public support. Well, that's Russia. But, I mean, Russia doesn't want to be seen that way. I mean, very clearly not. It feels clearly excluded, you know, from the West. It feels threatened, by the way, by China to its east, you know, because if you're in the west of Russia, you've got all the biggest cities there. If you're in the east of Russia, you've got a population density of one to two people per square kilometre. You know, so people's characterization of Russia is all wrong. I mean, you meet Russian people, they're just like us. They're really nice people if you're nice to them.

#Pascal

I was for the first time in Russia very recently. And one of the things that struck me is just how European Russia actually is, down to the languages that they speak. There's so many people who don't only speak English, but also French or German. Or you find others who can—I mean, Czech is a language that some Russians can converse in. It's quite amazing. I mean, much more cultural diversity, actually, and knowledge about the Europeans than... and interesting.

#Ian Proud

You know, I'd go to different cities, you know, outside of Moscow, and you'd find English pubs, Scottish pubs. I went to one cocktail bar once. There's an English, you know, black cab from London parked outside just to show the Englishness. People are still... You know, the guy, I mean, he's pretty out there in terms of his pronouncements, but he was telling me the other day about this new brand of English beer they've got in Russia that... Well, now, I just like the interest in stuff European. Even during the Soviet Union, there's that fascination with European culture. You know, Russian people don't want to feel isolated from the world. They're fascinated by the world. But actually, they're also very proud people. And when they feel under threat, they'll fight back. That doesn't mean they don't want to have a normal relationship with us. I've always felt that they do.

#Pascal

Well, this is actually a glimmer of hope to me, you know, for all the Russophobia and the hate for Russia that we find in Europe at the moment, and all of these horrible stereotypes, that we actually in Russia don't find that, and that we rather find this kind of constant question mark of how to get things going again, which was also the question that the organization that invited us to Russia asked, is like, how to rebuild the bridges. That these questions are asked in Russia is something that gives me quite a bit of hope.

#Ian Proud

Yeah, exactly. Exactly right. I mean, you know, the Russians are always utterly confused, you know, why Europeans hate them so much. I mean, of course, yeah, and the war's happening. You say, well, war's happening. Well, yeah, but why is the war happening? You know, because... You know, look back in Russia's history: you know, the Mongols, the Lithuanians, the Swedes, you know, the French, the Nazis, and so on. They feel a sense of foreign threat. But actually, if you reach out the hand of friendship, they'll return it to you. I'm absolutely sure of that.

#Pascal

Yeah, and after 27 million dead Soviet citizens in the Second World War, it's quite a surprise that after all of that, there's still all of this goodwill toward the Europeans. Because some of our Russian colleagues, especially Stas Kropivnik, also point out that it wasn't just the Germans who invaded. There were massive, massive contingents of European soldiers who invaded Russia, the Soviet Union. But in any case, maybe just to wrap up our discussion now, what are the things that you are looking at at the moment in terms of what's coming up on the political agenda? Because we are nearing August, and the hope is that things get a little bit more quiet. But I'm not sure about this, since there seem also to be preparations for the Iran war underway. What are the things that you are looking at at the moment, or that you think will be significant in the next couple of weeks?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, I think, you know, I'm obviously focused heavily on the UK agenda right now and what's shaping kind of UK foreign policy. But, I mean, unfortunately, I see very little kind of change, particularly from the early pronouncements of the Burnham government. So that shifts attention, therefore, to the Iran war and the big question about, you know, how long can Trump keep kind of playing this game? The closer that the midterms— I mean, the big defining sort of political anchor point for this season is going to be the midterm elections in the US. And actually, the closer we get to those, the more the pressure will come on Trump to kind of find some resolution at a time when he'll face increasingly kind of vocal calls, you know, from European partners to actually, you know, bring this to an end because of the devastating economic consequences it's having for Europe itself, but for the global economy in particular.

I mean, again, within the context of Trump, I mean, I want to talk to Michael Hudson again, you know, on this sort of geoeconomics, because obviously Trump is now threatening another tariff round, you know, 100% tariffs on, you know, countries that buy, you know, Russian oil and gas, which is therefore, you know, China, which is therefore India, which, you know, Turkey, which takes us almost back a whole year in politics to when he tried this last year and failed. The big question is, on the Donald Trump Monopoly board, you know, he keeps passing Go and he keeps not collecting \$200. How he's going to play that, and what this actually means for US politics, because I'm absolutely certain that actually whether it's a Democrat in charge or a Republican, I'm not really sure

that's really going to change the foreign policy mindset in Washington, DC. So the big question is, how can Europe save itself and actually have its own, and how can Britain save itself and have its own foreign policy identity which allows itself to be more detached from the Americans and doesn't see kind of a greater separation between, you know, the Europeans and the Americans as some sort of big strategic threat, which makes us even more vulnerable to the Russians.

How can we have more kind of self-confidence in foreign policy terms? So we're actually, you know, it's totally fine if we are more detached from the Americans. We can speak out more on the Gaza genocide, we can, you know, and this sort of thing. But I just don't see that kind of split happening before next year, when the elections start to hit. And I still think the war in Ukraine is going to go on for another year, unfortunately. So, yeah, just getting into the detail of all those kind of shifts that are happening and looking around the periphery in Hungary and so on, what's happening in China, going into China in October, which I'm really looking forward to. So, yeah, so much to kind of focus on. But I mean, the big defining moment will be the midterms.

#Pascal

The midterms, yeah. So we're all looking toward November already. It's only July, but this was a very good overview. Thank you very much for kind of giving us the picture also about how you're looking at Europe. People who want to find you, they should, of course, go to The Peacemonger on your YouTube channel and on Substack. Just look out for The Peacemonger. Any other place where people should go?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, I'm on X, but I mean, Substack and YouTube at Ian Proud, which is The Peacemonger, is exactly the place to find me. I'm just quite new, but I'm really enjoying getting into this space and having these conversations, which are desperately needed right now. So, yeah, as always, thank you, Pascal. We've known each other for a couple of years. You really helped to inspire me on this kind of pathway we're all taking together. Let's hope collectively our group of dissident realists can start to slowly shift the dial against huge tidal waves, frankly, of propaganda on the mainstream media.

#Pascal

I hope we can do exactly that. More discussions, more brains, more voices, in order to not only analyze what's happening, but then also maybe give some outlook at how to make things better, which would be wonderful. And again, everybody, if you want to follow Ian, Google his name, find The Peacemonger on YouTube and on Substack. It's highly recommended. He's very, very active, especially on Substack in written form. It's a wonderful platform. Ian, congratulations on this, and see you again next time.

#Ian Proud

Thanks, Pascal. Always a pleasure. See you soon.