

Lawrence Wilkerson: Trump Sacrifices the Republic to Preserve the Empire

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. 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> YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@GDiesen1> Support the research: 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. Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson joins us today, the former Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of State. So thank you for coming back on the program.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Good to be with you, Glenn.

#Glenn

I wanted to ask you about the position the United States finds itself in now, because I guess the hegemonic position of the United Kingdom in the 19th century and the U.S. position in the 20th century as also hegemon, it was largely organized around the strategy of a maritime power—that is, by dominating the sea lanes, which physically connect the world. And by keeping the land powers divided, then we see that maritime powers can rule over the Eurasian continent and even the world from the maritime periphery. So for this reason, we also see splitting the Germans from the Russians as something the British always made sure of, or splitting China from the Soviet Union.

Anyways, a U.S. grand strategy after the Cold War, as the former U.S. National Security Advisor Brzezinski argued, cementing unipolarity meant that the U.S. had to do the same—that is, keep adversaries divided and weakened. He said the vassals would have to be kept dependent and, of course, for the U.S. to dominate militarily, economically, technologically. So I guess what defines this time in history, this shift to multipolarity, is in terms of the distribution of power. We see now the rise of rivals, big ones like China, Russia, Iran. Not only are they growing, but they're getting much closer.

We see America's partners or vassals. They're put in a much more vulnerable position. They're weakened. Their interests begin to deviate from those of the United States. And, well, essentially, the hegemon appears to be suffering from what Kennedy argued to be imperial overstretch, taking on too many global commitments at a time when it should be, I guess, adjusting to new realities. I was just wondering, do you agree with this assessment? And if so, what are possible pathways for the United States? Let's start with a massive question, shall we?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I do in part agree. But let me give a couple of side views, if you will. First of all, no one counted on, in this exposé of the way things usually happen, whether it's Britain or the United States now, or you could go back to other empires, no one calculated on this character we have at the head of our government right now. No one counted on the situation that is becoming, I think, rather dire for the American empire being so accelerated, deepened, and made more profound by, I'm going to say it, not just a mercurial, strange, in some ways showing signs of deep dementia, grifter. What other adjectives could I use?

President with almost complete power because of a juncture of what I call the national security state, and it's been building since 1945, in particular in its present configuration. The 1947 National Security Act sort of laid out the outline for it. Harry Truman didn't like it. He didn't like the fact all that had been associated with it, for sure. But that state, and then the other state—the other state is the predatory capitalist state. And all things we have in those two state-building efforts since 1945 in particular, they've been nascent for our entire 250-plus years, I'd say for decades—300 years if you want to throw the British in there as an adjunct to it or a teacher of it.

What you have now is you have crossovers in these two states. You have ExxonMobil, for example, whose prime customer in all the world is the Department of Defense. ExxonMobil being clearly a member of the predatory capitalist state, and the Pentagon being the premier member of the national security state. And the Pentagon is the greatest buyer of the product of the ExxonMobils and others in the capitalist state, the predatory capitalist state. And you have Lockheed Martin with a foot in both camps, as do most of the top six or seven defense contractors. They're making weapons for the national security state, but they are very much the latest, most highly paid members of the predatory capitalist state.

So you have those two state-building efforts that are crashing together right now, since 1945 aborning, crashing together right now. And the whole apparatus is totally misunderstood, maybe not even capable of being understood and being misused. And even in the configuration that they exist in, misused by an idiot. How do you get this? How do you get out of this? How do you get it in the first place? How do you get out of it? I agree with your summary, though, that we are looking at

another time where—and I think this is key for people who want to understand the global dynamics—Trump may be deepening them, making them more profound in certain areas. But he ultimately is not in control of these global dynamics, nor is anyone else in the West.

We can fight and push and so forth like we're doing, Europe in particular, us in particular. But you can't control these dynamics because I think they're inexorable. And you defined it. It's too simplistic for me to say it's the maritime powers versus the continental powers, with, for the first time in about 2,000 years, the continental powers showing every bit of their strength and penchant for victory, and the maritime powers basically retreating. And let me footnote that for just a second and say the very, very singular thing, a quintessential example of this, the maritime powers retreating, is going to be when Iran sinks an aircraft carrier, or whoever does. Someone's going to. Aircraft carriers, the capital ship of the maritime conglomeration, if you will, mostly in America, of course, but others have them.

That's going down. And when it goes down, it is, to a certain extent, going to take the maritime regime with it. The one reason that they aren't even approaching Iran is because they're dead afraid of crossing that line where Iran will be the country that does it. They're not Afghanistan. They're not Syria. They're not any of these countries you sail up to and send a few cruise missiles in, and then say, "Ah, see what I did?" No, they're going to knock out one of these capital ships that is the quintessential symbol of the maritime group, if you will, led by the United States, of course. And to have added another land power, essentially a land power, got some navy, but Trump has destroyed the whole navy.

But it's essentially a land power, and it's a vast land power, the size of Western Europe, 92, 93 million people, and in a good, solid geographic position with lots of natural resources that, if they were exploited properly, would make it even more powerful. Oil and gas aren't the only things they have. And you've added them to Russia and China. So now your continental powers are not only vast, they stretch across the world. Russia alone, the largest country in the world, add China to it, add Iran to it. Now the continental powers are awesome in their potential and in their actual strength. And the American empire and the maritime powers are receding. And in fact, the other powers in that group don't really add very much to the maritime element of their power.

The only really strong maritime power, and that strength is bleeding away every day, is the United States. So all to say that in this global struggle that is inexorable, I think it was just foreordained, if you will, by God and providence, that this power was going to shift back to the East, from whence it came 2,000, 3,000 years ago, and China would be the primary magnet. All of that is being contested, of course. But the contest now is bizarre. And it's bizarre because of this gentleman, I use that term guardedly, sitting at the top of the American empire, and the obeisance that the rest of the establishment our founding fathers put together is paying to him. The latest example of which is the Republicans caved and approved his lawyer as the attorney general, even though he's already de facto the attorney general.

So it wasn't much of a move. But we are just taking apart the very fabric, domestic fabric, of our being, our essence as a state in the world. At the same time, we're waging this contest with an utterly inept leader to wage it. And I'm not going to say that there's too many people below him in the legislature or the courts or any of the other parts of the government that are competent enough to take over either. And I'm not even sure there's anyone competent enough to beat him in an election and to reverse the fortunes, if you will, from that perspective. So we're in a pickle, Glenn. We are in a pickle. And because we did gain so much strength and we punished so many people in the world and we destroyed so many civilizations in the world.

I mean that we are now hated as much as we are looked at as being crazy. And I don't know how you compensate for that while you try to fix enough so that at least you can go out with a fairly decent, you know, maybe something like England went out after the '56 Suez Crisis. Not a really good example, but nonetheless, it's the end of empire. England had started—Britain had started going down long before that. But I don't know how you put this in geopolitical terms, in geostrategic terms, in inexorable power shift terms, and deal with it with what we have in Washington right now. I don't know how you can take it apart. He should have been impeached.

He should have been relieved of his duties. He should have been frog-marched out of Washington. Indeed, he probably should be in jail, but he's not, which, on a lower scale, demonstrates the inadequacy of our structure right now and the feebleness of our structure, as well as its having atrophied over the 250 years it's been in place. I'm reading David McCullough's John Adams right now for a second time, and I'm finding really interesting comments in there from Adams, Jefferson, Madison, the whole group of them, Hamilton and Washington. Even I'm finding interesting comments that I highlight and then draw a line out and write a little marginalia about how that applies to today.

And it's eerie how many of them saw this coming inchoately, but they nonetheless saw it coming. Adams, probably because he thought any democracy would kill itself eventually. But others saw it more in the terms I'm using now, expressed in their language, especially when the French Revolution broke out and everybody was kind of, you know, Jefferson was over here, "I love what the French are doing," and Adams over here saying what Burke was saying, "Watch out. This is a tragedy of the first order." Yeah. And out of that turmoil comes a sort of look into what's happening today that tells you we ain't getting out of this. This is the end. Now, what does that mean?

It doesn't necessarily mean that America is not a country in the world and got 340 million people and everything, trying to coexist and trying to get along. But it does mean our power is through. Our world-spanning power is through. The question is, how do we deal with that in this short term that could be highly destructive not only of ourselves but others too, and get through it to a flat plane, if you will, that's reasonably accommodating of our reduced power and continue as a country? I don't know how we do that, Glenn, and that's really strange to be saying that at the age I am and coming to the end of my days and watching my country essentially commit suicide.

#Glenn

That's why I was a bit optimistic initially during the election campaign for Trump. That is, he was so insistent on the need to end these forever wars and essentially scale back the global commitments and put America first. The way I interpreted it was essentially, well, based on what you're saying, I saw it through the same view that, well, I interpreted it as Trump wanting to scale back the empire to save the republic. Of course, he's doing something very different. But it's interesting, though. Whenever one, as a political realist, we tend to look at international distribution of power, but often one ignores the human factor or the crazy factor in terms of the leaders, because it may be irrational to assume that declining hegemons would behave all rationally.

And not just the US. I mean, if you look at the European leaders today, they see themselves as having a unique position in world history. That is, ever since the beginning of the 16th century, they connected the world by controlling the world's seas through their trading post empires, full-scale empires. So it's been 500 years now of Western dominance. And now, within a shockingly short amount of time, it's all slipping away. I mean, the Europeans thought that in the foreseeable future, there would be a collective hegemon standing on two legs, the US and the EU. And now it's all falling apart. And so they don't know how to behave. And for me, this is one of the things that stood out when I first read Krauthammer's piece in 1990, where he coined the concept of the unipolar moment.

He said essentially, well, now it's a unipolar moment. In the future, it's going to be multipolar. When other powers come up, then we'll transition. And this assumption of pragmatism of leaders is kind of astonishing, because we had three and a half decades of ideology about us being the liberal hegemon transforming the world. Once you give our politicians this godlike assignment, it's a bit strange to assume that they will then suddenly accept that, well, it's a new distribution of power. I guess the centuries of dominance is over. We'll accommodate the Chinese, the Russians, the Iranians. I mean, I think we overestimate the rationality.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think you're right. I think you're right. And your use of the term, and Krauthammer's use of the term, and others too—Francis Fukuyama comes to mind immediately—of liberal democracy, or liberal period, just makes a mockery of what we're doing. We are killing people on the high seas without due process of law. We have a president who talks about creating terror with his military, and we're the worst example of a great power going down that I can reflect on in history, at least modern history, in terms of the way we're doing it.

And the damage we are doing to all the good—and there was some good, some real good—that we did post-World War II, for example. It's unique in my study of history, anyway. I don't think there's a—I've looked really hard at Mary Beard's book about Suetonius's Twelve Caesars and the time between the establishment of the empire under Augustus, after Julius Caesar was assassinated, and

all the way out to Domitian and those Twelve Caesars, and how everything went to hell there. And I think Mary Beard wrote that book with her tongue in her cheek and thinking about us as she was writing the book. You can see the innuendo throughout the text.

So how much of what happened to that empire, how much of what happens to any empire, is a part of the character of its final or penultimate or somewhere-towards-the-end leader? And how much is just the atrophy of power, the entropy, if you will? I don't know. But I do know that this guy, this guy, Donald Trump, has put a special patina on the disappearance of the American empire, and the clear and present danger of him being single-handedly capable of doing all this. And here's the kicker, and this takes me back to Adams and Jefferson: the American people not doing anything about it. Period. Because we aren't. We are marching. We are campaigning, largely in the same old vogue.

We are doing all manner of things in the streets that we can get away with. But it's a very small group. The fundamental essence of the American people is quiescent. It's not doing anything. It's not raising its anger. It's not getting in the way. It's not throwing out roadblocks. It's not fomenting a civil war. It's not doing anything except watching. And MAGA, of course, is still, some of them anyway, watching and cheering. Although, as Judge Napolitano said the other day when I talked about the 26% approval rating, he said, "I don't know anybody in that 26%. Do you?" No. But that's curious. It's curious. Have we grown so fat and dumb?

And that's another throwback to Adams, where he says over and over again, the only way to, over time, protect any democracy is education. Well, we don't have education anymore. What we have is schoolhouses and pretend education. So we've thrown that out. But I'm just racking my brain on how you might be able to get something going in this country to where you would arrest some of the deterioration enough to slow it considerably. And you would get rid of Trump. You'd have to get rid of Trump. You'd have to— that doesn't do it. You have to have a replacement, and you have to have a replacement that fundamentally grasps what we're talking about and sets about trying to do as much as he possibly, or she possibly, can to arrest its momentum.

The first item of which would be what you were just talking about and what Trump said he was going to do, which is to regroup, to recalculate, to come home, if you will, from all these incredible burdens that we are trying to keep up, largely for monetary reasons. That's why I went through my notes after listening to your German general, and I'm looking at two things, episodes that told me. One was a seminar with Bill Perry, then Secretary of Defense, the only engineer ever to have been, and his disquisition on no one had ever achieved a shootdown of any airborne target more than 0.21, and as an engineer, he didn't think they ever would. Think about Patriot 2 and Patriot 3 right now, and all of Lockheed Martin's claims for all the rest of the missile defense. Nothing on the ground is going to shoot anything coming in from the air, no matter what it is, down with a higher frequency than about 21% of the time, or two out of 10 targets.

If they're nuclear, you're in trouble there. And at the same time, I was looking at what we were talking about at that particular seminar and that particular meeting with regard to what Bill had just brought back with him in terms of the idea about Russia. He'd just been to Moscow. And how did we go from Bill Perry, who at that particular moment in time echoed Colin Powell and Jim Baker and H. W. Bush and all the rest, and that German general too, that things were really looking good for that unipolar moment if we just made it multipolar immediately and husbanded, as it were, that manifestation into being, with the Russians being a polar, if you will, example of how that could be done and how it was going to be done.

No, we sacrificed all that. And what did we sacrifice it for? We sacrificed it for money. And that was Bill Clinton's reason for expanding NATO: money, because everybody salivated over the prospect of all those new NATO countries buying Lockheed Martin's products. And we expanded it finally with the group that grew up under George W. Bush and manifested itself mostly in the Biden administration. We decided we were going to take on this natural shift of power and start with Russia, and use the expansion of NATO, and in particular Ukraine, as the proxy to do that. How did all this happen, is my question.

How did we go from that point that you rightfully call the unipolar point to so messing up the transition to the multinodal, multipolar, whatever phrase you want to use, world, that we now are the principal culprit for killing it in its cradle? And God knows what's going to replace it. I know ultimately what's going to replace it: the continental powers, China, Iran, Russia, and others that will join them. And it seems almost inevitable that those others will be joining them sooner rather than later. If a lot of them haven't already, they just haven't announced it.

#Glenn

By the way, you kept referring to my German general. We actually discussed that before we started recording. That's a reference to a previous interview I did, the two of them, with General Harald Kujat, who was the former head of the German Armed Forces and the former top of NATO.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't want to get him in trouble, but he's a remarkably articulate man about the history that I know best.

#Glenn

I was immensely impressed with him, for a person to have that position and now accurately see where we are headed, and still speaking out despite the high social cost we have across Europe for contesting official truths and narratives. So it is definitely one worth listening to. I do want to ask you about: how do you interpret all this radical militarism you see? Again, I won't limit it to the U.S.,

because the Europeans now—I remember when they used to mock George Bush for his militarism. Well, George Bush is nothing compared to the average European leader today. But still, the whole idea in the unipolar moment was that the U.S. hegemon would bring in peace for two reasons.

One, it would end the great power rivalry because there wouldn't be any great power rivalry. There would only be one. Essentially, the international anarchy of the international system would be over. It would be mitigated because we had the U.S. as the world policeman. And given that this world policeman was also a liberal democracy, it would also elevate the role of more peaceful norms that would allow for states to coexist on a different kind of level. On the other hand, one also saw that it required continuing to keep rival powers weak. We saw that wars had very little cost for the U.S. and its allies because it was bombing weaker states.

Wars were also something that happened far away, and the political West could afford to absorb a lot of costs. In other words, could afford to make a lot of mistakes. Didn't have to prioritize strategic thinking. It's not really necessary. I was wondering, do you see this as being the source of this wild militarism? Or is it the military-industrial complex? Or how do you explain it? I know people like Ambassador Jack Matlock, he argues that they essentially had a militarized mindset when they started pretending that the Cold War was won by military force as opposed to negotiation. So, you know, there's a lot of different hypotheses, if you will. But how do you explain, though, this rampant militarism that now defines much of the political West?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's difficult not to see that as a manifestation of what we've done. I mean, let's face it. We have about 800 military installations across the face of the Earth, as compared with China, who has seven, I think. Someone said the other day one or two. No, they've got about seven if you count them all. And Russia, who might have 11 or 12, if you count everything that's overseas—not normally something that continental powers do, though, if you think about that for a moment. But the point is, what we've done, I think, in microcosm, but a very important element of the whole, is we have sacrificed diplomacy and all that that means—what Fred Hartman called the relations of nations. And I think that's a better term than anybody's ever come up with because it connotes the humans that are in their relations, the relations of nations.

And we've sacrificed it on the altar of what you just said: military power. And military power is a sad, sad, and almost always going to backfire on whatever state does it, replacement for diplomacy. Diplomacy should be the lead tool. It should be that which you practice in the world on a 24/7 basis. What Donald Trump has done is put the coup de grâce to that. I mean, coup de grâce, I should say. He's killed it. Absolutely killed it. We have no diplomacy anymore. He has to lie about the diplomacy going on with Iran. There is no diplomacy going on with Iran. He's lying about it. There is nothing going on. And there's nothing going on because we have no diplomats. We have no diplomacy. Literally, we have no diplomacy. Marco Rubio has gutted the State Department, and he's certainly no diplomat.

So we've taken what Frederick the Great said: diplomacy without the military is like an orchestra without instruments. Well, the reverse is true. If you don't have diplomacy as your lead approach to the world, and you are a fairly large power, there's no way you're going to deal with that world in a way that ultimately doesn't rebound to your discredit and your defeat time and time again. To discard it completely like we have done—we have no diplomats. Powell used to say the principal diplomat for the United States of America is the president of the United States. It's been that way ever since George Washington agreed to take the post. So anytime you see me acting as if I'm the nation's diplomat, slap me, because the president is the nation's diplomat.

The top diplomat. Now, yeah, you could argue that George W. Bush didn't fulfill that mandate too well either, but he fulfilled it a hell of a lot better than Donald Trump is fulfilling it. Donald Trump doesn't even know what diplomacy is. So, all to say, we've discarded probably— even if you're a receding power, you're going down and someone else is coming up, as is clearly the case today— diplomacy is a key instrument of your policy, of your approach to the world. I would argue that if you're going down and you recently were at the top of the heap, so to speak, diplomacy ought to be even more the instrument you deploy in the world. And yet we're not.

We have aircraft carriers out there off Iran. We have bombs. We have all manner of military paraphernalia. And part of it is because it's so money-enhancing for these CEOs and others working in the military-industrial complex. But part of it also is we've just become so accustomed to this. We don't know anything else, including diplomacy. And so we don't go, as Frederick said, with diplomacy and the military hand in hand. We go out with the military. Diplomacy is an afterthought, if it's even a thought at all. You can't do that. You can't do that. It's ruinous. And we're proving that right now. And then you throw on top of that the fact that we have real problems domestically.

I'd say the prospect right now for a civil war in this country a year from now is probably as high as 20 or 25 percent. I don't think I would have ever said that before. I thought we'd gotten the civil war business out of our system. But I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure. All across the country, there are signs of this sort of thing tearing us apart. If not a civil war, a dismemberment that would normally adhere to a civil war, just happening all on its own. So we're not in good shape. We are not in good shape. And I think there are lots of reasons for it. But right now, the personification of that is Donald Trump.

#Glenn

It is fascinating how militarism replaced diplomacy to such an extent. Also strange that that would happen in the United States, because the U.S., as a maritime power, has historically pursued, much like the British before it, that of an offshore balancer strategy. That is, land powers, they usually require large standing armies because they have a lot of borders with threats. In contrast, maritime

powers such as the U.S. have always been protected by the sea. So, without this large standing army, they can always focus more on economic development. And when they do enter wars, the idea was always for the offshore balancer to enter wars late, when the others were exhausted.

And instead of seeking large conquests on continental Europe, the objective was for the U.S. to restore a balance of power, to make sure that there was no one who would dominate Europe or Eurasia so they could challenge the U.S. But this is why land wars were never a good idea for the U.S., be it Vietnam or Iraq or whatever is being done now. Even democracy, you know, Alexander Hamilton, if I'm not mistaken, once made the point that if Britain had been a European land power, it would likely have been as authoritarian as the Germans or the Russians, because it would also then require a large standing army, and that could also be used against its own population, which meant that the people wouldn't have that much power against the monarchy. So, well, in short, the maritime power is kind of credited—its economics, its military strategy, democracy—a lot to this character. But what we see now is this hyper-militarization. All of this is reversed. It's kind of unique to watch, though.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, we've even come to the point now where we have people saying, as I heard one individual in an interview about three days ago say, that the all-volunteer force is just that: they're expendable. They can be used. You don't have to worry about them coming home in body bags. Oh, it's lamentable that they do, but don't you know they have wives and children? Well, it's lamentable that they die or are badly wounded or captured or whatever. But they volunteer. They volunteer.

Well, okay, now you are talking about, in very real terms, how much we've changed and how much the power we gained post-1945, in particular, changed, fomented, and helped that change take place. And we're not just a maritime power anymore; we are a global power. And our global power is exercised in two most harsh ways. One is when we actually reach out with our power to smack you, maritime or otherwise, and the other is when we sanction you. Some two billion people now living under American sanctions of some sort or another. So we have given a new reach and a new name to power, maritime or continental. And it's coming back to haunt us because we have so misused that power and that reach. And now we have a person who doesn't even understand a word of what I'm talking about and is just reaching out when he wants to, to smack people. That's what it really amounts to. I mean, you can't make anything up about this president that would be credible, that makes sense.

#Glenn

Well, there were some warnings in the past, though. You know, back in 1898, when the Americans won the war against the Spanish and in the process acquired all these colonial possessions, including the Philippines, you have people like Mark Twain making the point that this was, well, quite damaging for the soul of America. That this is, you know, once you begin to get into the colonial or

empire business, it's, you know, it's not just about morality, but some of the soul of the nation would be lost in this. I think you can say the same about contemporary hegemony, or dying hegemony, of the political West. I mean, the Europeans as well. I think that's what I thought was strange when Marco Rubio came to Munich and said that, well, we have to bring back European greatness. And he essentially referred to the European empires. I thought, I would love to bring back European greatness, but the empire was not supposed to be how that greatness was characterized.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Sorry, I had the last question about... Let me just make one. I love Mark Twain. I normally revel in his words. But Mark forgot about four million slaves.

#Glenn

We had a lot of practice with little brown people.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

A lot. A hell of a lot of practice. And it wasn't just in the South. I mean, I was somewhat stunned to read how many slaves were in Philadelphia, for example, as I was just catching up on McCullough's book on Adams, and how many slaves were elsewhere in the North, because it was very profitable there. And they were cheap. Maybe they didn't treat them quite as badly as some of the Southerners. But all to say that we had had a lot of experience with little brown people.

#Glenn

Yeah, and there were the Native Americans, of course, as well. Well, the point still stands, even though, yeah, one...

#Lawrence Wilkerson

No, it does. And Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet was a perfect example of, you know, flexing the maritime muscle. And I'm going to now rule the world and the waves, as well as my own dominion. We didn't very well. We retreated pretty quickly. And then World War One jerked us out of our reverie. But anyway, it's been a very variegated history. There's no question about it. But you can trace a line all the way from the very beginning. And let's say Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution, Jefferson's praise of the French Revolution, Adams kind of being in the middle but eventually siding with Burke. You can trace a line from that argument and that dichotomy of interests all the way to the time we're in right now. And you can make an argument for the strain that won was the worst one of all.

#Glenn

Yeah, but one can then make the argument that you're retrenching a bit, that this could be exactly what the nation needs to heal, though?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, and I thought Trump was going to do that, and I've got to admit that for a time there, I was flirting with voting for Trump because he was talking about that. And I thought, regardless of his past and his shady character and his grifting ways, if he would just retrench in a smart way, that would be a real contribution to our continued presence in the world without, you know, murdering people and eventually murdering ourselves. And I was really worried about nuclear weapons because I was seeing what was happening with nuclear weapons. We forgot all about the Cold War. In America, we don't even know the Cold War happened.

And in terms of nuclear weapons, we don't even know what they were, or what we determined about them, or what our doctrine was with them, or what the movies were about them—Dr. Strangelove coming to mind right away. So I thought that was coming. I thought the first thing Trump was going to do of great significance was to retrench. Did that mean coming out of NATO? I thought, yes, it did. It probably did. Maybe leaving our nuclear shield up for the NATO powers in Europe and Canada, but not being a practicing member of the alliance in that sense. But it didn't happen. In fact, he screwed that pooch from Sunday to Monday. I mean, look at what's happened. He's now back supporting Zelensky again.

#Glenn

Yeah, so Marco Rubio just made the point that, well, we're pushing for peace, but by having deep strikes into Russia, we can lower the expectations of Russia in negotiations and bring them together. So, okay, so we're doing attacks on Russia, and NATO is backing these attacks in order to make the Russians give more at the negotiation table. So how exactly is Trump different from Biden now?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Exactly.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Exactly. I mean, you know, he really didn't do very much of what he promised to do, period.

#Glenn

So, yes, sorry, let me get to my last question, which was about—I wanted to ask about the miscalculations again, not just by the U.S. but by the political West in general. That is, a lot of these rising powers which challenged, well, what is now a bygone hegemon, it was always assumed that

the adversaries were weaker than they were. So, for example, with the economic war in China, the assumption was if we cut off their access to American chips, their tech giants will begin to fall apart.

Essentially, the trade war was assumed to be, well, maybe not a cakewalk, but it was supposed to be easy to throw a wrench into the machinery of the Chinese economy. Same with the war on Russia. If you remember back in 2022, the assumption was, well, you know, we send weapons, the military will fall apart, they're a paper tiger. You know, when the tanks would arrive, the Leopards, the Russians would just flee from the battlefield, you know, in fear of the NATO tanks. So the military would be crushed. The assumption was that the economy would collapse before the end of the week. The ruble would become rubble, as we were told.

And internationally, they would be isolated. So that was Russia. And lastly was Iran. I mean, obviously, Trump had very different plans for Iran. He didn't know that they could fight back in this way, and indeed, taking out all these U.S. bases in the region, closing down the Strait of Hormuz, not being able to do anything about it. I mean, all of this, you can see the frustration, but all of this in common kind of shows a miscalculation that is underestimating the opponent. I was wondering, where do you think this comes from, though? I mean, is this poor intelligence? Is it ideology? Is it narrative-driven media? And Israel.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

And Israel doesn't. But I think your question is well couched. I think the main problem, not the only problem, but the main dilemma, if you will, is people like Kagan and Kristol and other neoconservatives, globalists, people like that, overestimated our power and underestimated the growing power of China. That power should not have been underestimated because even in '94 and '95, we saw very much how much China was going to be the country to be reckoned with in less than a decade and a half, at the most two decades. And we fashioned—and when I say we, I mean George W. Bush was in on this too, because he gave the China portfolio exclusively to Powell. Dick and Don wanted it desperately, but every time they tried, we'd beat them off.

And the president backed Powell up. The one really significant issue George W. Bush backed Powell on. And we started trying to fashion a policy that would not just help China enter, for example, GATT, or whatever we called it then, the WTO, and helping them enough to where they would be grateful, if you will, and at the same time, not enough so that they would move so fast that we couldn't at least keep a guard on it, a check on it. That was the way we dealt with them. And I think we created with Deng Xiaoping and others that followed him an idea that we were trustworthy, that we were really intent on strategic competition, which is the phrase we used.

I remember that. The Chinese, their ambassador in the office, having trouble translating that, the translator coming up with a Chinese term for strategic competition. And then they finally did, and the light went on. Oh, yeah, okay. We can compete together in a peaceful world. We can exist together in a peaceful world. Even if you become the number one economic power in the world,

which incidentally you probably will, we want to get along with you, and we want to continue to compete in the ways that we can and the ways that you can. Some people would say that was a pipe dream. Several people did. Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example. Henry Kissinger.

I don't know exactly how Henry fell out ultimately, because I didn't go in on the last meeting. George Kennan, old as hell—I think he was 99 at the time. He would die within that year, I think—he was kind of comfortable with it. But that was the way we approached it, and that was the only way we thought we could approach it, because we realized that there was a new world aborning, and we were going to have to live in it, and we were going to have to live in it in a way that was non-nuclear and that dealt with the climate crisis. Those were the two issues we were looking at, believe it or not, even in 2002 and 2003. 9/11 sort of perturbed that a little bit, but nonetheless, we got right back on it as soon as we could.

And then along came these people who had a very different idea, a very different idea. We're going to maintain our hegemony, come hell or high water, even though everything staring them from the world said, "You can't do this, because if you do, you're going down a lot faster and a lot rougher." They still went ahead and did it, and Biden was the most guilty party of all, recalling my conversation with Powell, where Powell talked about Lugar, the Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee who would rotate with Biden when the parties would change control of the Senate, and Biden, and talking about how Biden knew the issues and everything else, but he said, "Never make him president. He wants to be."

He wants desperately to be president. Never make him president. He'd be a disaster. Whoa, what a prophecy that was. So, you know, all to say, single people, characters, do make a difference. And we had several of them in a row. I think the presidents from H.W. Bush to Donald Trump were the worst presidents we've ever had in the history of America, with the possible exception of President Obama. But he made himself get close to that group by being such a chicken when it came to the nuclear posture statement and his healthcare, other things like that. But you can't survive that inexperience, that being led by the people behind the scenes, as it were, for that long a period of time.

You lost H.W., you lost Powell, you lost Baker, you lost all those people who knew the world and knew reality in that world, knew what was happening, and you gained a bunch of inexperienced people who were led around by the military-industrial complex, by the other interests in America that are not necessarily interested in her future and her health. And we're paying the piper now. We're paying the piper. And then we got Trump. On top of that, we got Trump. How could you be so evil as to merit divine providence giving you that whole series of leaders? Because they do make a difference. I know we think they don't, but they do. They make a difference. Their character, their ability to make decisions, their ability to get along with other people, their ability to select their cabinet, all of that matters. And we've had disasters.

Absolute disasters at a time when we needed the very best. And now we've got the very worst. I hope we get out of this, Glenn. I hope Europe gets out of its malaise, too. And you know how I feel about that. We helped construct the current Europe with the CIA and our efforts through USAID and elsewhere. One of the things I like Donald Trump doing was getting rid of USAID. Not necessarily the real USAID, the one that's supposed to help people, but the one that was out there using liberal democracy as a weapon to train European leaders how to be good liberal democrats and then come into NATO as a result. That was foul work. But we did it, and we're still doing it. We're still doing it. We're doing it in Georgia still. We're doing it in Azerbaijan. We're doing it all over the map, really. It's just not very effective anymore because Marco Rubio inadvertently disturbed it.

#Glenn

I often cite what you told me once, that when you were in the White House, you had these whiteboards of European leaders, you know, who we like to elevate, who we don't like to get away, push down. I mean, essentially selecting the political leadership. Those who are selected, make sure they have a clear incentive system and education in American loyalty.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, well...

#Glenn

But it's not just the leadership, though. It just seems like the political culture has changed fundamentally since the Cold War. From politicians, diplomats, journalists, academics, or regular citizens, they're only allowed to say certain things. In terms of miscalculating, we're only allowed to say, "We are strong, we are winning, we are virtuous," and our adversaries are always the exact opposite. They have no legitimate interests, they're always losing, they're weak, and always have belligerent intentions.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

And that attitude is absolutely fatal to diplomacy.

#Glenn

I feel the same, but it's so strange because if you say, for example, "Oh, well, the Iranians, no, they're winning," then they're saying, "Oh, no, no, that's a pro-Iranian argument," which is very strange. The same with Russia, because I made a point for the past four and a half years that, "Oh, well, the Russians are winning this," and then, "Oh, that's pro-Russian." But objective realities must stand on their own feet. I mean, why? I mean, you can't see a strategic advantage in the opponent

without taking their side. I mean, it's very... People talked like this during the Cold War. People would think you're crazy, but it's just become the norm. It's very... It comes at very high social cost in Europe if you even, well, disagree with the main narratives the governments are coming with. It's very... It's very strange. I mean, it's... Again, I just think there's something with leadership as well as the political culture about

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think Powell was right in 1989 when he told me that Mitterrand and Kohl and Thatcher and Major and Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Baker, Bush, all those people would be gone. And at least they had their fears as 12-year-olds or whatever in the war. Once we had a series of leaders across Europe that had no recollection, visceral recollection of the war at all, everything would change.

#Glenn

Well, sadly, I fear we're going to have soon enough politicians with experience from war if we continue down this path. But that is the old cliché, I guess, that each generation has to learn to fear war. And I guess our time is coming. But anyways, do you have any final thoughts?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I have a final thought about Germany. I'm hearing that Merz has got a real initiative going, trying to keep the AfD from having the power to capture the two easternmost states and thereby prevent any militaristic move towards Russia by Germany. Are you hearing that?

#Glenn

Yeah, I saw it in the Telegraph and some other British media. They were reporting that Merz was doing some secret deals in case the Germans vote the wrong way. He might strip the federal states of some autonomy and rights so they won't be able to hamper any possible war with Russia. According to the Telegraph, they were considered to be traitor states because they vote for AfD, not Merz. So this is where Germany is at the moment.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Shades of the conversation with Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, Trevor Nunn, Powell, and Baker, as I recall, where they sort of listed the things that might develop if Germany were reunified, left in NATO, and Russia accepted it. Besides the costs, Kohl was really stunned when he got his estimate from, I guess, the Treasury in Bonn. They told him it'd be 80 billion U.S. Of course, ultimately, I'm told it cost twice that much, the reunification.

#Glenn

People forget now that Margaret Thatcher and others were quite pessimistic or negative about Germany's unification. You had European leaders making the point, ah, they will get what Hitler couldn't give them. You know, this is German-dominated Europe. I mean, people forget this, but I guess it will be remembered soon enough if Germany continues down this path.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I can say this about Kohl, at least from my interpretation, and I wasn't there that often, but Powell gave me good debriefings. He was pretty comfortable with everything but the cost and what Russia might do were Germany to be reunified and allowed to remain in NATO. And Gorbachev and Shevardnadze convinced him, I think, that there was no problem with that.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

As far as they were concerned.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

They probably would think differently today. Yeah, likely.

#Glenn

Anyway, thanks again for taking the time.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Surely, surely. Thank you. Thank you.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Take care.