

Episode 182: "Are We Misreading Putin's War Aims" with Dr. Peter Vincent Pry

Bill Walton ([00:01](#)):

Normally, I don't bring people back so quickly as guests because it's more evergreen and we want it but we're right in the middle of something I'm very worried about.

Peter Pry ([00:10](#)):

That makes two of us.

Bill Walton ([00:11](#)):

And what I want to do is a gut check with you. We talked four weeks ago, three weeks ago, and we talked about a nuclear war scenario. It seems to me events are bringing us closer to that, not further away. That's what we want to talk about. That's going to be, in a sense, a part two to our last conversation so I'm going to want you to bring us up to date with where you think we are and what we ought to be telling our political class to do.

Peter Pry ([00:44](#)):

Sure. There are developments on our side that are extremely disturbing-

Bill Walton ([00:49](#)):

Yeah.

Peter Pry ([00:51](#)):

... where the Biden Administration seems to be clueless about major decisions. Like canceling the B83 bomb, which is our most powerful nuclear weapon and also terminating the [inaudible 00:01:03], which at the other end of our deterrent spectrum would have been the best tactical nuclear weapon right in the middle of a nuclear crisis with Russia.

You combine that with his keeping our forces at their lowest readiness level, DEFCON 5, and canceling Minuteman ICBM test launches, it's showing a profound fear. I mean he's playing right into convincing the Russians that not only can the United States be nuclear blackmailed, but Biden personally really believes you can't fight and win a nuclear war and he probably can't because of his values and his views. That's going to-

Bill Walton ([01:44](#)):

Okay. I'm going to start our show because you're saying interesting ... everything we want to ... we're going to be covering. Of course, this is going to be-

Speaker 3 ([01:55](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([02:15](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Well, about three or four weeks ago, we had Dr. Peter Vincent Pry on the show at talk about sort of the most troubling conversation you can have which is nuclear war. And I titled that episode A Nuclear War Scenario. Well, it seems like events have brought us maybe closer to that scenario than we were even three weeks ago and so I've asked Peter to rejoin to talk about where we are and what we can be doing now to head off what I think could be a nuclear cataclysm.

To remind, Peter is Executive Director of the Task Force on National and Homeland Security and he served as Chief of Staff of the Congressional EMP Commission and Director of the US Nuclear Strategy Forum and he put out a piece recently called The Nuclear Crisis Nobody Knows.

Peter, welcome back.

Peter Pry ([03:16](#)):

Well, thank you so much for having me to talk about this grave subject matter.

Bill Walton ([03:21](#)):

So just to sort of frame it from a layman's perspective, we talked about Putin and we were worried last time about a Putin cornered as a more dangerous Putin and the conventional war, by all reporting ... now, of course, you don't really know what the reporting is or whether it's accurate ... is that it's not going all that well conventionally and that the US ought to be talking to Putin about, well, look, why don't we stand down and broker a peace here and deescalate this. Instead, we've got Joe Biden, he goes to Poland and first calls ... I can't remember what he called Putin in Poland but most recently he talked about genocide, which is sort of the ultimate lowering of the gauntlet. And then I also read today that the Pentagon is escalating the number of weapons they plan to send to Ukraine. So just at the time we ought to be taking some of the temperature down under the pot, we're turning it up.

Peter Pry ([04:26](#)):

Yeah, that's right. And I agree with you that we should be cautious about what we believe of what we're being told in Ukraine and about the performance of the Russian army. But if we do take it face value, what we're being told every night by all of the media and by political analysts on both sides of the political aisle, then Russia is on the ropes. Russia every day is doing worse and worse in Ukraine. It looks like it could lose the Ukraine War. They're claiming that Putin could fall from power as a consequence of that, which means that Putin's life would be at risk because if he falls from power, he and the elites who support him and his family could be executed.

And that means that he will do anything necessary to not fall from power including rolling the nuclear dice. Because the greatest thing that Putin has going for him is that Russia has a vast preponderance over the United States in the numbers and modernity of their nuclear weapons and in their capabilities to prosecute a nuclear war. And they believe in the possibility of winning a nuclear war. It's in their military doctrine. They've practiced it for decades. That's why Putin, as we speak, is in one of his deep underground shelters that's pretty much impervious to nuclear attack with his general staff and his forces are still on high alert. They have not deescalated from that high alert, despite what our intelligence people say. They say they see no evidence of that.

Well, they wouldn't because the Russian strategic posture is very different from ours and they are postured in such a way that they can launch most of their forces in just a few minutes without giving, telegraphing any messages to us because most of their warheads are on ICBMs which are multiple warhead missiles. And even their submarine ballistic missiles carry ICBM warheads. So most of these could be launched in a matter of a few minutes.

Bill Walton (06:29):

Why is nobody talking about the nuclear scenario? It seems to me that night after night, you look at the coverage on TV and in the newspaper ... Of course, it's The Washington Post and The New York Times, but nobody seems to be gaming this out as to a cornered Putin as a dangerous Putin. Nobody seems to be concerned about this. Why are you and why am I so concerned and nobody else seems to think that a likely option?

Peter Pry (06:59):

Well, I think there's a couple of reasons. The first and most obvious is that the White House doesn't want the American people to believe that there's a elevated threat of nuclear war from Russia because this would reflect very badly on Joe Biden. He would be put in a position of having to explain why has he involved us in a war where the United States has no vital interests except avoiding its escalation into nuclear conflict and yet his policies have brought us to the edge of a nuclear war with Russia, a crisis that's worse than the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. And I say worse because Kennedy had a five to one advantage over Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis and that relationship is more than reversed. Russia's got a ten to one advantage over us in tactical nuclear weapons and probably has big advantages in strategic nuclear weapons because they're probably cheating on the New START Treaty and they have modernized their forces whereas we have not modernized our forces.

The other reason I think that they're saying that is that the woke administration, the Biden Administration, is the most anti-nuclear administration we've ever had. Their belief system, their world view is very similar to that ... In fact, many of the same people who have served professional lifetimes in the antinuclear movement are actually in the Biden Administration as advisors. Biden has got a kitchen cabinet of antinuclear lobbying groups. The Congress of the United States, the Democrat Party has an important part of its political base, guys like Adam Smith who's the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee is himself obviously an antinuclear activist.

And these people, part of the reason, part and parcel of having this view is that they don't take seriously the idea that you could fight and win a nuclear war. They have a mistaken belief that everybody thinks that way, that Putin has the same fears of nuclear war that we do, that they do and therefore it's not credible that Putin would cross the nuclear line. And so the that's the most dangerous kind of a combination we've got. And yet the Biden Administration is doing things on the advice of these people that break precedent and are contrary to what past presidents have done.

For example, Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis, one of the things that enabled him to prevail is that when the Russians on Khrushchev's side raised the readiness of their forces to threaten us, Kennedy did not leave that unanswered. He raised the readiness of our nuclear forces to DEFCON 2, which is one step short of actual preparedness for nuclear war, of an actual nuclear war. And that helped back Khrushchev down. When President Bush, in the aftermath of 9-11, President Bush raised the readiness of our strategic posture to DEFCON 3 to ward off Russia, China, anybody else who might be thinking of attacking us in that moment of crisis by that demonstration of strength.

Biden has done just the opposite in the face of Russia's nuclear threats, in the face of their stepping up the mobilization of their forces, this special combat posture that is basically one step removed from watching a surprise attack against us by keeping our forces unmobilized to DEFCON 5, which makes them more vulnerable to surprise attack. And on top of that, he has done other things in the midst of this crisis that are extremely unwise, that suggests that the United States could at minimum be blackmailed, nuclear blackmail, could encourage the Russians to actual nuclear use and nuclear escalation, believing that they could resort to nuclear weapons to win the Ukrainian crisis.

And if I could just name a few of those things, for example, he has suspended test launches of Minuteman-III ICBMs to deescalate the situation. I mean it's kind of ironic that, on the one hand, they're saying there's no nuclear crisis with Russia but, on the other hand, they're acting as if they are by saying, "Well, we're not going to launch the Minuteman-III ICBMs and these long scheduled tests. We've canceled these tests because we don't want to escalate the situation accidentally and get into a nuclear war."

Simultaneously, the classified version of Biden's nuclear posture review has been provided to Congress and some of the provisions have leaked to the press. Biden wants to cancel the B83 nuclear bomb which is the most powerful nuclear weapon in the US inventory. It's the only nuclear weapon that's capable of having some chance of retaliating against guys like Putin or Xi or Kim Jong-un when they're in their deep underground command posts. It's our only nuclear weapon, it's a [1.2 00:12:06] megaton weapon that could generate a shock wave powerful enough to possibly destroy those deep underground command posts and he's canceling them. He wants to cancel them.

Bill Walton ([12:16](#)):

Well, let's talk ... I want you to tick down your list but let's talk about that underground bunker. I think you may have described to me or somebody did, these are not your ordinary bunker. They're vast cavities that house 20,000-30,000 people-

Peter Pry ([12:32](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([12:32](#)):

... built during the coldest of the Cold War time and really prepared to have Putin and all his loyal people in there with him. Now, by what evidence do we have? What reports are you getting from your sources in the intelligence community that he is, in fact, in one of these bunkers? I've had two people tell me, "Oh, no, no, he is not." It's kind of funny. You do one of these shows and you end up with somebody on my comment section say, "Well, I live in Russia and I live a hundred kilometers away and the bunker that you were speculating he may be in, well, he's not there."

Peter Pry ([13:14](#)):

Well, I don't know how they would know and I-

Bill Walton ([13:16](#)):

Well, that's my ... yeah. But it's interesting to see how many experts you've got surrounding this.

Peter Pry ([13:20](#)):

Yeah. And I can't speak to anything that the intelligence community has said. I can only talk about unclassified open source stuff, all right? But Putin wouldn't want you to know which bunker he's in because there's more than one. There are, in fact, hundreds of these deep underground facilities. He could be in any one of them. There are thousands of other shelters that are designed for mid-level military people and for the civilian population. Even the subways in Russia have blast doors on them. So, unlike us, they have a very good, very advanced civil defense system for their general population. Just a few years ago in 2016, they did a major civil defense exercise that [inaudible 00:14:08] about 40 million people going into shelters like this. So we don't know which facility he's in. It doesn't make sense that he

wouldn't be in one. Well, why wouldn't he be down in one of these deep underground facilities since they have declared a special combat alert? And he hasn't been seen. It's the safest place for him to be.

So I don't know for a fact that he is there but it would be irrational for him not to be in one of these facilities. It's exactly the scenario we're in in the Ukraine right now is exactly the scenario that these things were designed for. And also, he has the advantage of the command and control assets that exist in these deep underground facilities that are mostly hundreds of meters under solid granite and they're generally impervious to any nuclear attack the United States can make. The only weapon we have left in our inventory, our only megaton class weapon, is the B83 that might possibly be able to drive a shock wave down deep enough to damage one of these deep underground facilities.

And the Biden Administration decision to cancel the B83 is an extremely imprudent thing to announce at this point, to allow to be leaked from the classified nuclear posture review, because the thing that would most likely deter someone like Putin or Xi in China or someone like Kim Jong-Un is their personal survival. The ability to hold that leader at risk so that he would personally die if he decided to launch a nuclear attack is the best deterrent. And the B83 is the only thing that ... It's not a guarantee we could kill him with it even. Even the B83 probably may not be powerful enough to collapse one of these facilities, but it's the only one we've got that would have a chance of doing it and Biden wants to get rid of the B83.

Bill Walton ([16:05](#)):

Well, this is The Bill Walton Show and I'm talking with Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, and we're continuing a conversation we've had in the last couple of months actually, as we think back about the likelihood of Ukraine provoking a nuclear war.

Peter, I'm interested, though, also in your assessment about why Putin has conducted the war the way he has with mainly conventional strategies. There doesn't seem to be any real aggressive cyber warfare that's been brought about. I've heard various theories about this and one of them is that he wants to try to capture Ukraine unscathed. Another one is that they actually need the cyber connections for their own Russian forces. What's your take on how he's conducted it so far and what would his thinking be at this point?

Peter Pry ([17:04](#)):

The fog of war is so thick over the battlefields of Ukraine that there are a number of other possible realities that are going on because, as we said initially, you really can't trust what we're being told now about what's happening in Ukraine and that the Russians are losing and losing badly. Maybe they are. Maybe that's the truth but that truth is based almost entirely on what the Ukrainians are telling us. We don't have our boots on the ground. Our intelligence sources are far removed. And as we all should remember, it was less than a year ago that we had the experience of Afghanistan that proved that even when we do have our own boots on the ground, and we've had years to do intelligence assessments and years of being able to study that ground, we can be completely wrong in our assessments as we were in Afghanistan, where we were defeated by the Taliban quite easily and our assessment of that reality was completely in error.

So we should not be highly confident in anything we're being told, especially the optimistic scenarios which we, as a strategic culture, are always most likely to embrace the optimistic scenario that, oh, the Russians are not 10 feet tall and they're being beaten very badly in Ukraine. Which, ironically, based on the previous part of this conversation we were having, is actually not a best case scenario for us. The worst the Russians are off, the more likely they are to escalate-

Bill Walton ([18:39](#)):

That's my fear. That's my fear. I think you back Putin into a corner, I think it makes the likelihood of using, I guess euphemistically, a tactical nuke which is, I guess, just nuclear war writ small but it's still nuclear and it's still catastrophic and it seems like that's more likely.

Peter Pry ([19:00](#)):

Yes. Well, there are a lot of strange things that seem to have been done where the Russians, the way they conducted the Ukraine War, that violated all the fundamental elements of their military doctrine. They didn't go for tactical and strategic surprise. They attacked basically in the face of the West. Why didn't they do cyber attack? There might be several reasons for that. The Ukrainian grid is also tied into its neighbors, NATO member states, and if they blacked out the Ukrainian grid, perhaps they were concerned that it would've gone beyond and affected NATO member states which would've made it an Article 5 attack. And we had warned that a cyber attack that blacks out Poland, for example, as well as Ukraine, would be considered an Article 5 and would justify NATO coming in. Although the Russians every year have demonstrated the ability to isolate their cyber attacks to Ukraine itself. So it is puzzling that they didn't do that.

Perhaps it's the same reason they haven't committed some of their best conventional forces. For example, their best and most modern tanks haven't been committed to Ukraine. They're using older models. They've got 20,000 tanks. They've only committed a small fraction of those forces. The air force has almost been absent without leave. The Russian air force hasn't been sent in in its best capabilities and it's been doing a very limited capability. That was one of the reasons why the government, our own defense department, assessed that ... and our intelligence community original assessment ... was that Russia could overrun Ukraine in three days because they have such overwhelming air power, that they should have been able to unleash that air power and use it in Ukraine but they didn't. And maybe it's possibly because they don't want to expose to the West what their best capabilities are in cyber warfare, in conventional warfare, whether it's on [inaudible 00:21:07] land.

There's another possibility here, another potential alternate reality, that hasn't been considered by anyone except by myself and that is-

Bill Walton ([21:19](#)):

That's why we're talking.

Peter Pry ([21:22](#)):

And that is most analysts when they were looking at that, including myself, thought that the relevant scenario was Crimea and that the Russians would go for quick, almost bloodless, victory but there was another Russian way of war that was right under our noses. And that was a long protracted war that was going on in Eastern Ukraine in [inaudible 00:21:49] and [inaudible 00:21:51] for eight years, basically this long bloody protracted gorilla war. Now, that's another kind of war, the way the Russians conduct war. The way they have done business in the Middle East as well where these things are long and protracted.

Maybe Russia didn't want a quick bloodless victory but wants to have a long ... turn the Ukraines into sort of the Balkans. Russia benefits from chaos. It raises the fears of NATO. It makes NATO more compliant when there's a conflict because we dread wars and their escalatory possibilities. Maybe he deliberately wants this thing to go on and on because it will give him in the long run, even though there's all of this noise coming out of NATO that, well, we're going to spend more on defense. They always say that but then, in the long run, they don't spend more on defense. They're always willing to reach accommodations with Russia. So maybe he wants that thing to go on. It also increases the price of

oil. It also makes arm sales ... Russia's second greatest source of income is arm sales so when Russia creates the sense that the whole world is on the verge of World War III and we've got chaos going on everywhere, it increases arm sales.

No, another possible scenario and they're not mutually exclusive but another possibility that's going on there is the Spanish Civil War scenario. Before Nazi Germany started World War II, it flooded its troops in the Spanish Civil War and it tested out its tactics and new weapons in the Spanish Civil War so that it would be sure everything worked. It used the Spanish Civil War as a way to weed out the worst officers. And that's what could be going on. If Russia has aspirations to win World War III, maybe Ukraine is the equivalent of the Spanish Civil War for them. They're [crosstalk 00:23:53]-

Bill Walton ([23:54](#)):

Let me just run with that. So you're saying this could be the ultimate war game-

Peter Pry ([23:59](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([23:59](#)):

... which is extremely interesting. The other thing that's happened is that we're supposed to have imposed these crippling sanctions on Russia and, yes, they've been hurt. Their GDP is probably going to drop 10% this year but the ruble after plummeting has now recovered and they're still selling oil and gas, and they're beginning to broker deals to sell it. I guess they've demanded that Germany pay for its gas with rubles and the head of one of the big chemical companies in Germany just recently said, look, if we get cut off from Russian gas, the German economy's going to melt down.

Peter Pry ([23:59](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([24:39](#)):

And so the European consumers are paying a big price for the sanctions against Russia as are American consumers beginning to pay a big price. I mean just wait till we get our ... Food prices are high now. Wait till next year because all the fertilizer comes out of Russia or sourced largely with Russian gas. We're not going to be able to grow crops if we don't get that. So that's a very interesting idea that they could be waging this war, grinding us down, making us pay the price economically. And in the end, they end up in a pretty good position.

Peter Pry ([25:19](#)):

And there's another possibility that is also equally interesting. I call it the Austerlitz scenario. Napoleon's greatest victory was the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, much studied by the Russian general staff because they were a victim of the Battle of Austerlitz. Napoleon had rushed his troops from France into Central Europe, forced marches to get there very quickly and he faced the combined armies, the greatest land armies in Europe at the time, the combined forces of Russia, Austria and Prussia on the battlefields of Austerlitz, and Napoleon convinced his adversaries, the reason he achieved this great victory, he convinced them that he was losing, that he was going to lose the Battle of Austerlitz. He sent defectors to tell them, "We went on this forced March. Our supply lines are over extended. Our guys are starving to death. We're really demoralized."

He deliberately had whole regiments of French troops retreat and run away from the Russians. Everything to convince the other side that all they had to do was attack and they would win the Battle of Austerlitz. But he had hidden, on the field, divisions that they didn't know about and when the Russians did attack, they were hammered. There was a famous part of the battle where the Russian army had to retreat out onto a frozen lake and Napoleon used his cannons to break up the ice and many drowned, but that single victory made Napoleon the master of Europe.

And it's possible, when I look at what the Russians are doing, it's almost like they're deliberately doing everything they can to try to provoke the West to intervene, to jump into the war. Americans abhor adversaries who act like war criminals, who kill the innocent, and the Russians just every day seem to do some new thing that almost seems calculated to try to encourage us to intervene. Don't forget that this part of the world is called the Bloodlands because during World War II, Russia was willing to sacrifice 30 million of its soldiers to conquer this area from the Nazis. So Ukraine has been used as a killing field by them as recently as World War II.

Maybe they want us to intervene. Maybe the Ukraine War is not about taking over Ukraine, but it's about using it as a Battle of Austerlitz writ large, where they can have a final solution to the problem of NATO and the United States, by encouraging us to project our forces and we'd have a hard time getting our forces out if we lost. That's at the very edge of our ability to project power. If we projected forces, our NATO allies and the United States into that area, would be trapped in Ukraine and then they could bring to bear their ten to one advantage in tactical nuclear weapons and wipe us out and perhaps achieve a final solution to both of us.

And even if we don't project our power in, this whole thing may be aimed, again, not at Ukraine but at the destruction of the NATO Alliance because the consequences ... I mean NATO has never really had to face up to a big war. The consequences of this thing for NATO economically and in terms of their security, are they going to really have the political will to increase their defense spending? I would say not because in the past, whenever all of these promises have been made by NATO, like when they took Crimea, we had the same reaction from NATO and they said, "Yeah, now we understand Russia's the enemy. We've got to increase our defense spending." But they never do it. They're always used to the United States taking up the burden of their security for their defense. This could be if they can't defeat us, if they can't get us to attack Ukraine and win World War III on the battlefield by tactical nuclear weapons or unleashing those 20,000 tanks, they could win without war.

And maybe that is their ultimate goal by just putting such stress on NATO that we come to the realization that the NATO Alliance is really a paper tiger, that it's hollow, that it's really a military alliance in name only. And I think as this thing goes on and we see the fractures in NATO grow and grow because Germany, as you noted, can't afford to go without Russian oil. When our allies are forced to make these hard choices and the American people see the prices going up at the gas pumps and we're starting to pay the price for it too, that people will say, "Well, we can't go on doing this for years and years." That's a way of destroying the NATO Alliance without war.

And according to Sun Tzu, that's the greatest way of achieving victory so that could be part of the calculation here too. It's really not about the Ukraine, that this whole thing right from the beginning might have been aimed at creating a long period of chaos in the center of Europe that's going to put such stress in the NATO Alliance that the NATO Alliance will come apart at the seams.

Bill Walton ([30:37](#)):

Well, it's also putting great stress in the global world order-

Peter Pry ([30:41](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([30:41](#)):

... and all the economic arrangements and it's ultimately putting stress on the dollar's world reserve currency status. I mean there are all sorts of tectonic plates that are shifting here that are consequence of this. So this would mean that Putin is really still a chess player. There's some people I know and like ... I won't get into who they are ... that say, well, no, Putin's changed. He used to be more of a rational actor and now he's behaving irrationally. But you just explained that this could be a very rational, long term game, that he knows he can suffer some of these casualties or some of these losses of the conflict but in the long term end up the winner.

Peter Pry ([31:26](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I don't agree and I see no evidence. I mean the chief evidence that people offer for Putin has changed, that he's no longer a good chess player, is the assumption that Russia has run into some disaster that threatens the Putin regime in Ukraine. And it's sort of a self-rationalizing explanation but those assumptions may not be true. I think it much more likely that Putin has thought this out, his general staff has probably thought this out and that this is probably ... He's still proving that he beats us at chess and that we're playing at checkers because we haven't thought deeply enough into the game. And we're taking actions, especially where our nuclear deterrent is concerned, that significantly increases the nuclear risk to us, especially if they're right, that Putin is on the ropes.

Bill Walton ([32:30](#)):

So we've got a couple of minutes here. Where should we go from here?

Peter Pry ([32:36](#)):

Well, I still think, and it's a harder thing to do politically because of the hatred of Putin and the belief that he's a war criminal and all the rest, but what I think Biden should do is, if I were president, I would immediately put our nuclear forces at least on DEFCON 3 and mobilize them and do what every other president has done in the past so that our forces are less vulnerable to a nuclear Pearl Harbor. I would simultaneously use all communications means. And by the way, that's another thing we haven't even talked about. That Putin isn't returning phone calls from the White House, the general staffs, and talking to our Pentagon, their Minister of Foreign Affairs. They've basically stopped communicating with us. That isn't the action of a country that's badly losing a war and is desperately seeking an exit. If that were true, they would be talking to us to find a way of getting out, to negotiate a solution.

So I would raise the DEFCON level, mobilize our forces. Simultaneously, I would communicate by all means that are remaining to tell them we don't want a nuclear war. The only reason we're going to a higher readiness level is because you've mobilized your forces and you've left us no choice but to mobilize our forces. For the interests of humanity and for the interests of both of our nations, we need to stand down our nuclear forces and we need to bring the Ukraine War to an end right now and have a cease fire agreement, an immediate cease fire in Ukraine, and we will negotiate with you on the basis of the peace treaty that you offered before you invaded Ukraine.

That peace treaty, contrary to what the Biden Administration says, had many reasonable points in it and we could have negotiated, I think, a piece with Russia. And we have an interest in doing that because we have forgotten that our real object is the new cold war with China and that Russia and China together, and this Alliance includes not just Russia and China but it includes North Korea and Iran, they are the most powerful, most formidable power block that we have ever faced in our history. And I don't

think we can defeat the Sino-Russian Alliance. We need to split it up and try to make Russia a neutral or even a strategic partner. And a step in that direction would be meeting the security guarantees, and they do have some legitimate interests in terms of the peace treaty that was offered to hit the reset button again with Russia, to see if we could bring them into our camp or at least make neutral so that we could isolate China in the new cold war.

It would be a significant step forward toward achieving a diplomatic victory and it would bring Russia and China back from the military brink. The aggression of both countries, I think, is based in no small part on the fact that Russia has such a nuclear advantage over the United States. It encourages China to be aggressive because their aggression is protected by a Russian nuclear umbrella and, of course, it encourages Russia to think it can intimidate and win by blackmail and do whatever it wants because it's protected by its own nuclear forces. So isolating China from that would turn the competition between East and West back to the diplomatic and economic level and pull us back from the brink of a World War III. We're on the edge of that right now in Europe and in Asia.

Bill Walton ([36:19](#)):

Well, I would that you would be President or at least advising our President. We've got Joe ghost gun Biden at the helm at the moment who is distinctly unserious and it's hard to express in words how dismaying it is and how I think that our ability to bring to bear this kind of rational outcome. And you're right, we ought to be working to deescalate this, talking with Russia. They won't take our calls.

Peter Pry ([36:52](#)):

Yes, and we're doing just the opposite. We're feeding weapons into it. The Biden Administration is taking the worst possible position. We're not willing to defend Ukraine but we're willing to fight to the death of the last brave Ukrainian and kill as many Russians as we can in the process to punish Russia as if Russia is not a nuclear threat to us when, in fact, they are. And it's not just the President but his whole administration because these people, you look at who he has put in charge and who he trusts from, whether it's General [Milley 00:37:29], one of the worst chairmen we've ever had for Joint Chiefs of Staff, or Wendy Sherman and Tony [inaudible 00:37:36] there in the State Department. These people, when you look at their backgrounds, they are not competent people. These are not Henry Kissingers that we have in charge of our foreign and defense policy. They're some of the worst people that we've ever had.

And that, of course, is another reason why Russia and China are on the move right now because they understand that the fish rots from the head down and we've got some of the worst political military leadership this country has ever had and as evidenced by what happened to us in Afghanistan, which was a failure not just of diplomacy but of the military as well, that we couldn't even pull off Afghanistan successfully.

Bill Walton ([38:21](#)):

Well, Peter, thank you. Sobering but I think very useful and let's plan on talking again in another three, four, five, six weeks, if we're all still alive and the worst case scenario doesn't come about, but I think this is an extremely useful way to think about it. And I want to get this line of thinking out there. So thanks, Peter.

Peter Pry ([38:46](#)):

Thank you so much for having me and I seriously share your concern about whether we're going to be around three, four, five or six weeks. This is, I think, the gravest nuclear crisis this country has ever undergone but thank you again for having me.

Bill Walton ([39:00](#)):

Yeah. Well, thank you. And thanks for joining The Bill Walton Show, and I know this has been a sobering assessment, but I hope you're here for just that because we've got to find out what's true, what's right and what's next. And in this case, there's a lot at stake. So stay tuned. We'll be back for more and, again, wish you well. Thanks.

I don't think anybody's ever ... I haven't heard anybody talk about the idea that this could be an opportunity for Russia to draw us in to something protracted, destroy the European economy while exposing the fact they're not really a military coalition and really rule the day in that part of the world.

Peter Pry ([39:50](#)):

Yeah. People don't understand that the Russian way of war, that there's another option for it. They think the Russian strategic culture is exactly like ours and that we want quick, relatively bloodless victories, the way Crimea was or the way the Persian Gulf War went. But right under our noses, what Russia has been doing in Eastern Ukraine for eight years is evident and the trouble they've stirred up in the Middle East that's gone on and on and on, there's clearly this other approach that they take and they know we're extremely vulnerable to it. We don't do protracted wars very well at all. Our political willpower for it, it doesn't last. We're always anxious to reach accommodations and to surrender.

Bill Walton ([40:38](#)):

Yeah.

Peter Pry ([40:40](#)):

Even the Taliban were able to beat us that way.

Bill Walton ([40:47](#)):

Okay. All right. So we'll be talking, I've got Mike Waller coming in tomorrow. We're going to talk about the state of our intelligence industry.

Peter Pry ([41:01](#)):

That's a bad news story too.

Bill Walton ([41:04](#)):

That's another bad news ... I'm just filled with them. Anyway, got to be reality based.

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