

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

Well, we're back to talk with two of my favorite geopolitical strategists, Stephen Bryen and Brandon Weichert. They've been on the show many times, and I'll remind you of their biography as we go through the show, but I wanted to get right to the discussion today. I want to talk about Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. There's some serious hot spots in the world, and we need to focus on it and hopefully raise some noise about some of the blunders that are being made. You've heard the phrase saber-rattling. Well, I'm afraid some of the people, particularly in Europe NATO and some of the people in our own administration have not only rattling, but they've got the saber out of the scabbard and they're ready to go. It's alarming. Alarming and the extreme, and I'll kick it off with Stephen. Stephen, you've written about this recently. What's the latest posturing on Ukraine and where are things on the ground?

Stephen Bryen ([00:01:00](#)):

Well, everybody wants to send weapons that can reach into Russian territory. That's the theme of the day for NATO, the NATO Secretary-General, of course, the French Macron, the German Schultz. Now Lincoln is considering the idea, which means he's going to do it. Anyway, they've been doing it right along. So it's not new. It is just that now they're owning of them taking responsibility for what they've been doing, but it's very dangerous.

Bill Walton ([00:01:36](#)):

Well, hadn't Macron, France also said there's this big debate on the words, whether they were mercenaries or the French Foreign Legion, but now he's saying they're just going to go ahead and send in French troops.

Stephen Bryen ([00:01:51](#)):

Well, that means they're already there.

Bill Walton ([00:01:53](#)):

Okay.

Stephen Bryen ([00:01:54](#)):

You have to translate the French. It's a funny language.

Bill Walton ([00:02:00](#)):

Hey Brandon, what's your take?

Brandon Weichert ([00:02:02](#)):

No, they have already been there, the NATO. Different countries have already been there. In many cases. They have their troops, what are known as sheep dipped in the uniforms of Ukrainian military. But I've spoken to, personally... About a year ago, I spoke to an Australian special forces operator who was there with a contingent from Australia who were volunteers and they were fighting for Ukraine, but in fact, they were tacitly serving the interests of NATO fighting in the war, and we have that playing out throughout the country.

([00:02:45](#)):

I'd also like to remind your audience that at least this morning I saw the report, it looks like Ukraine has fired another missile fuselage into Crimea, and Crimea is the red line for Putin. They will risk nuclear war if it looks like Crimea, the Port of Sevastopol, which is there, the Russians only link to the warm water port in the Black Sea. They will risk a much larger war if it looks like that's going to fall or that's going to be under some severe threat. And there's Macron and NATO banging the war drum even louder. So this is a very dangerous and explanatory moment, and I fear the Americans are not in control.

Bill Walton ([00:03:24](#)):

So the timing of this, the Crimea piece, didn't Russia take Crimea in 2014 or when did they-

Stephen Bryen ([00:03:33](#)):

2014.

Bill Walton ([00:03:35](#)):

So wasn't on the table when with this recent marching into Ukraine, and now we're putting it back on the table?

Brandon Weichert ([00:03:45](#)):

It's always been on the table. And I document this in my book. You have to remember, the Port at Sevastopol was actually built by Catherine The Great, it was a Russian military port. Crimea was at one time part of the Russian Empire like Eastern Ukraine was. It was also at one time part of the Soviet Union, even after the Soviets ceded Crimea to Ukraine, which was a Soviet controlled enclave. So it was really not that big of a deal when Khrushchev did it. But even then, the Soviets leased the Sevastopol port. And in fact, in 2010, this was one of the big fights because I remember back on the hill, this was a big deal.

([00:04:27](#)):

The Ukrainian government at the time in 2010, the Russian lease for Sevastopol was up, and there was a push by America and NATO to get the Ukrainian government to not renew the lease. And had that happened, it would've been a major disaster for Russia's national security. And just a few short years later, of course, you have the Russians moving in force to take Crimea and expand their holding in Eastern Ukraine. This is a geostrategic priority for them, holding Sevastopol.

Bill Walton ([00:04:59](#)):

Stephen.

Stephen Bryen ([00:05:00](#)):

I agree with that. I think that's correct. I recall that the Russians were pushed out of Sevastopol, and actually at night, in the dark of night, pulled their aircraft carrier out with 1/2 skeleton crew to try and avoid the Ukrainians taking it. So this is very sensitive, extremely sensitive.

Brandon Weichert ([00:05:28](#)):

And Bill, I'd also like to point out there is a, and I know this for a fact, because once upon a time, I actually spoke with Ned Price and Ben Rhodes's team years ago when they were running the White House into the ground, there was a quiet consensus among Obama era national security people that the United States needed to roll back Russian military power from those warm water ports that are not

within Russia. So Russia has Vladivostok, which is there in Russia proper. It is their one warm water port there, but then they've got a warm water port along the Baltic Sea in the Kaliningrad. They've got the Syrian warm water port of Tartus. And then of course, they've got the Sevastopol, a warm water port in the Black Sea.

(00:06:21):

And if you look at what happened even before the Ukrainian crisis beginning in 2014, the US government under Obama got heavily involved in the Syrian Civil War. This was not just because we wanted to get rid of Assad, it was because Assad was a client of Russia, and we were trying to get rid of Russia's warm water port in the Mediterranean in Syria. So this is part of a concerted strategy by the neoconservative, neoliberal cabal, for lack of a better term.

Stephen Bryen (00:06:51):

But it didn't work?

Brandon Weichert (00:06:52):

Didn't work, and it's still not working. And now we're all going to pay the price for it because Russia's not going to back down this time.

Bill Walton (00:06:59):

Well, Brandon, you're about to come out with a book, I think later on this summer, maybe early-

Brandon Weichert (00:07:07):

October.

Bill Walton (00:07:08):

... early fall, October, authors would know the date. What date? October 22nd, I guess. I hope you've got the thing written already.

Brandon Weichert (00:07:16):

It's all done.

Stephen Bryen (00:07:16):

I'm reading the Dallas now.

Brandon Weichert (00:07:16):

Yeah.

Bill Walton (00:07:21):

It's called A Disaster of Our Own Making: How the West Lost Ukraine. For people that haven't been really following this, our view, we talked about this for the last couple of years, is that we made a lot of blunders along the way, starting with after the Cold War, ended in 1991, or in that era. We could have done a lot of right things with Russia, could have done a lot of right things with Ukraine, and we did almost none of that.

Brandon Weichert ([00:07:50](#)):

Yeah. We had our hands wrapped around the wrong choice at every turn. And as I point out in the book, it's really because of this, for lack of a better term, cabal of neoconservative and neoliberal elites who have worked in both Republican and Democratic administrations who have a fixation on not only rolling Russian power back, but also, and I know because there are some people I know even at Hudson Institute who have spoken about this with members of the National Geospatial Intelligence or the National Ground Intelligence Center, forgive me, NGIC, back in 2005.

([00:08:28](#)):

I have a friend who told me explicitly members from the Think Tank community briefed his team at NGIC, which is up in Charlottesville, Virginia, about a plan to basically contain Russia rolling it back to its medieval borders, and then inevitably getting Russia to break up into its constituent components so that it's never again a threat to Europe and the West. And this is all fantastical thinking, this is childish thinking, and now we're going again, we're getting ready to pay the price because Russia knows, or at least they think that's what's happening here, and they're not going to let it happen without a fight.

Stephen Bryen ([00:09:08](#)):

Well, it's not going to happen. But I think the underlying error, and I think it was a huge error, was that to confront a nuclear power, a significant nuclear power with the dismemberment. We're going to break up the Soviet Union, now Russia. We're going to break it up even more. We're going to dismember it, and we're going to sponsor the opposition in Russia, the Navalny and people like that, and somehow create this great transformation. But we're messing around with the nuclear power.

Brandon Weichert ([00:09:51](#)):

And Stephen, this is the thinking that got us into the Middle East. This is the exact thinking that led us down the wrong path in Iraq and then the Arab spring.

Bill Walton ([00:10:04](#)):

Well, these guys, you've been looking at this forever. I've come to this story later.

Stephen Bryen ([00:10:11](#)):

You're lucky.

Bill Walton ([00:10:14](#)):

Yeah. The more I learn, the unhappier I get. My wife is telling me, "Why don't you really go play golf? This hobby of yours is affecting us." But it seems like we've got woke children in the administration and in Europe, and they're complaining that people are wrecking their safe space. Jeffrey Sacks, you know him. He was on Tucker, and there was something he said, I copied it. It said, "It's not about Russia, it's about the US. The neocons are very explicit the US must be the unchallenged superpower. In every place in the world, in every region, we must dominate." That's quite a load for US American people. What they say is, "We're going to be a constabulary duty holder," which is basically of a fancy word for saying we'll be the world's policeman.

Stephen Bryen ([00:11:08](#)):

Yeah. Well, this comes from the notion of there was going to be only one superpower and it was going to be the United States. And since we're the only one superpower we had to take on these

responsibilities. I mean, that's the thesis. Well, we weren't the only one superpower, and today, the one of three, if you can say so, and increasingly the weaker of the three.

Bill Walton ([00:11:35](#)):

Well, the GDP of China was 1991, 3% of world GDP, and now they're about equal to ours. And well, Russia is not nearly as big in terms of economic power. You point out they've got every nuclear weapon they need to destroy the world 50 times over.

Brandon Weichert ([00:11:53](#)):

Well, they're a commodity superpower though. And in an increasingly divided world at war and a non, or a decreasing globalized world in which there are many powers, being a commodities producer is actually very, very beneficial from a strategic point of view.

Bill Walton ([00:12:13](#)):

And doesn't that fit right in with China?

Brandon Weichert ([00:12:16](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([00:12:16](#)):

I mean, we've driven China and Russia together in a way that's... Let me get rid of this. Sorry guys.

Brandon Weichert ([00:12:27](#)):

No problem.

Bill Walton ([00:12:28](#)):

China calling. They're always up there. Every time I mention the word...

Stephen Bryen ([00:12:33](#)):

[inaudible 00:12:32] calls [inaudible 00:12:34].

Bill Walton ([00:12:35](#)):

He wants me to knock it off. But they've talked about this unlimited partnership. I don't know what their exact word is, but they've met like 40 times in the last 10 years, Putin and Xi and that relationship, they seem to be very complimentary.

Stephen Bryen ([00:12:52](#)):

Well, it's a huge change. I mean, if you look at Russia and China in the 1980s, there was no love loss between them. And in fact, I was involved in working with the Chinese, believe it or not, dealing with the Russian missile threat to China. That's all gone away, at least for now. And China is extremely important to the Russians because the Russians really don't have a commercial industry or similar to the US or similar to China. They just don't have it. So for them to be able to build modern weapons, modern communications, and all these other things, they need the Chinese. And I think Putin is very smart to

work that out with the Chinese. You're right. I mean they're very tight now and it's extremely important. I think without China, the Russians couldn't fight the Ukraine war.

Brandon Weichert ([00:13:52](#)):

Yeah.

Stephen Bryen ([00:13:58](#)):

That's a big deal. I mean, think about it. We essentially forced the Russians into the arms of the Chinese through our policies, which was complete stupidity.

Bill Walton ([00:14:10](#)):

Joe Biden and his gang.

Stephen Bryen ([00:14:13](#)):

Well, it goes back to Obama,

Brandon Weichert ([00:14:15](#)):

Actually, if you can even trace it back in some cases to the Clinton years. Clinton was a big fan of enlargement of NATO, and a lot of the people who worked for Clinton translated down to the Obama years, and now they're in the Biden years, some of the older people. And certainly the ideas, this idea that NATO must always, it's almost like a religious belief. NATO must always expand. And it's like you can do that, but there's going to be a consequence. And the consequence is eventually Russia is going to say, this doesn't look like a peaceful organization. This looks like an organization that's aimed not at the containment of the Soviet Union, which is gone, but at the destruction and dissolution of the Russian state, which is no longer communist. And that's making them pivot to China because at least China is going to try to work with them and treat them like an equal partner to some degree.

Stephen Bryen ([00:15:14](#)):

Well, let's talk about this for a minute because it's an important subject. NATO supposedly was a defensive and is to some degree a defensive alliance. That's its core raison d'etre. The idea was an attack on one member would be an attack on all, and they would all come to the defense of the one attack. But it hasn't had that mission for a long time. It's been an aggressive alliance seeking opportunities, not only in Europe, but in the Middle East, for example, in Afghanistan and so on. So it is no longer credible defensive alliance. Plus it's been expanded.

([00:16:05](#)):

With very little consideration about what that means from a defense or even an offensive point of view, this expansion has been at high risk, not only because it angers the Russians, which it does, but because it's very hard to see how NATO could defend Poland or the Czech Republic or Estonia. I mean, these are not easy countries to defend, and NATO doesn't have today the core countries of NATO, the French, the Germans, the British, it doesn't have the wherewithal to do it. It doesn't have the army or armed forces. It doesn't have the air defenses. It doesn't have the air forces, it doesn't have the tanks. It doesn't have anything and sizeable enough, and the ability to actually logistically move it to the battlefield. So the notion of NATO fighting a war, which is what the Macron and all these clowns are essentially taunting the Russians with, is a very dangerous thing because it means that Europe could be enveloped in a war can't win.

Brandon Weichert ([00:17:21](#)):

Which would then pull us in and that's-

Stephen Bryen ([00:17:23](#)):

Well, but we can't win it either because we don't have the army to do it with and we don't have the ability to move it today.

Brandon Weichert ([00:17:30](#)):

Just remember... Sorry.

Bill Walton ([00:17:32](#)):

No, go ahead.

Brandon Weichert ([00:17:33](#)):

I was just going to say one last thing, Bill. Frederick the Great of Prussia in back in the day, he said, "He who tries to defend everything defends nothing." And that is where NATO is right now.

Bill Walton ([00:17:45](#)):

Well, and that's true for the United States. That's just the point about us being the policemen every single spot in the world. We no longer do that.

Stephen Bryen ([00:17:54](#)):

Well, and we haven't done very well. I mean, in the places we've inserted ourselves have not been exactly productive wins for the United States.

Bill Walton ([00:18:04](#)):

Yeah. Putting a mile. Run through your piece on what it would mean for the US to go to Europe with an expeditionary force and how maybe that worked in World War II, but certainly fast-forward 80 years, it doesn't work now. Talk about what that would mean logistically and why that's a pipe dream.

Stephen Bryen ([00:18:28](#)):

Well, I think it's a pipe dream because we can certainly airlift troops to Europe. I mean, that's within our capability. Beyond that, we can't defend them. That's to say today the Russians have developed a pretty sizable air defense capability. They have very good artillery capability. They have increasingly shown their capability with drones and drone warfare, none of which we're prepared. Our best tank, which our only tank, we put all our eggs in one tank. The Abrams is a disaster.

Bill Walton ([00:19:15](#)):

I've got to make that as a cartoon for this show, but I'll figure that out anyway. All our eggs in one tank, that's a good image. Okay.

Stephen Bryen ([00:19:21](#)):

I'm sorry about that.

Bill Walton ([00:19:23](#)):

No, that's good.

Stephen Bryen ([00:19:26](#)):

The Ukrainians say that they don't even want to put the Abrams in the field now because it's prey to Russian drones, especially the Lancet drone, which destroys them. It breaks down. It's too heavy and it gets stuck.

Brandon Weichert ([00:19:43](#)):

Also, Stephen, they're the older model we gave them. We didn't give them the most updated models. We gave them old stuff.

Stephen Bryen ([00:19:51](#)):

Well, it wasn't that old. I mean, it was a previous generation.

Bill Walton ([00:19:55](#)):

But Brandon, my-

Stephen Bryen ([00:19:57](#)):

[inaudible 00:19:57]. But let me tell you, the ones in Europe are mainly the older ones. So fighting a war with that tank is a very ill advised idea. And I think it's shown, I mean, look, we are learning a lot. We should be learning a lot, let's put it that way. And if we are, I'm not sure, but we should be learning a lot. And one thing we are learning is that these brilliant ideas of how to build a tank, how to build a narrative from Native defense system aren't so good. A lot of our attack missiles and the high margin so on are getting knocked out because they Russians jam.

Bill Walton ([00:20:43](#)):

So what do you think through when you're building a new piece of equipment? You ran a big defense company, it's now called Leonardo, and you built this stuff. I mean, you were involved and-

Stephen Bryen ([00:20:57](#)):

We said it was the best there was.

Bill Walton ([00:21:00](#)):

And what did you build? What were the products?

Stephen Bryen ([00:21:03](#)):

We built everything. Leonardo is a very integrated company. Everything from communications to tanks, to artillery, to submarine, I mean, it does all the stuff that a defense company in Europe would do. And in the United States, we had helicopters and who's the West one? We had autumn, all our making guns for ships. I mean, we had a whole lot of stuff. We had drones. I can't think of what we didn't have other than nuclear weapon.

Bill Walton ([00:21:34](#)):



That gives you a little subject matter exo nuclear weapons.

Stephen Bryen ([00:21:38](#)):

We didn't do that, at least as far as I know. We may have done it, but I don't know.

Bill Walton ([00:21:44](#)):

It was a skunk work somewhere off. They didn't tell you about when you were CEO. That happens all the time.

Stephen Bryen ([00:21:48](#)):

Well, if I were a European country, Italians or Dutch or anybody else, I'd be thinking seriously about having nuclear weapons because-

Brandon Weichert ([00:21:58](#)):

That was what I told the Polish government back in 2017. I used to liaise with them and I said, "You guys have got to build your own Nuclear deterrent because you cannot rely on NATO and you cannot rely on the Americans to have your back because we can't."

Stephen Bryen ([00:22:15](#)):

Well, there's always been a suspicion in Europe, and I think, well-founded that when push comes to shove, the United States wasn't going to risk its security in any existential way to defend a European country.

Brandon Weichert ([00:22:30](#)):

That was the point of NATO in the Cold War was they were trying to lock us in by creating NATO with Article 5. But now the Soviet threat is blessedly gone. The ideological threat of communism has died down except from within the United States.

Stephen Bryen ([00:22:51](#)):

[inaudible 00:22:50] field here, Brandon. The Point is that that the US actively discouraged any effort in Europe to build a nuclear parcel.

Brandon Weichert ([00:23:02](#)):

Yes. And in any of our ally.

Stephen Bryen ([00:23:04](#)):

We pressured the Germans very hard. We pressured the Italians. We didn't pressure the French was there to add them or the British because we liked them, but we really discouraged it otherwise. And the same thing in Korea, the same thing in Taiwan. The Taiwanese would've easily had a nuclear arsenal today if it wasn't for the United States. They were well along on developing a nuclear capability. So the world is changing, and you're talking about the US as the dominant actor and driving the process and leader of the free world and all this stuff. But at the end of the day, every country has to look out for its own security and relying on an outside party free of security is a terrible mistake. I remember when the Shah thought that the US was going to come to his defense and save him. Of course, the US did do absolute reverse. It was actually secretly working with the opposition.

[\(00:24:08\)](#):

So I mean, countries don't trust each other. I understand that. I think it makes sense. But ultimately, a national leader has to be concerned with his own nation's security first and foremost. Can't rely on outside parties for it. And that's the myth of NATO. And the true myth of NATO is that at the end of the day, who's going to defend Italy? The United States? Don't hold your breath. Or Germany? Maybe, but maybe not. So I think everybody there in Europe, just as everybody in Asia has to look at their own capabilities and make plans for the worst case.

[\(00:24:52\)](#):

Even the Israelis now are learning, just to change the page a little bit. The Israelis who were absolutely convinced the United States would protect them, found out that that may or may not be the case. It worked with the Iranian missile barrage, which was good, but it didn't work when their backs rub against the wall with the Gaza mess and where Biden went in the other direction. So at the end of the day, you're on your own.

Bill Walton [\(00:25:22\)](#):

Well, it seems to me like the neocons, and I'll put Bret Stephens at the head of that list. He now writes for the New York Times box themselves in intellectually and strategically the way they're thinking about this. I mean, we've been arguing the three of us for a peace deal actually we're arguing to shut this thing down before the tanks started rolling out of Russia. But they're now saying, and this is the policeman of the world thinking, "A peace deal with Moscow that leaves it in possession of vast areas of the Ukrainian territory is an imitation for a third invasion once Russia recapitalizes its forces." So they're saying it's impossible to negotiate now, or it's unthinkable to renegotiate now because we're simply prolonging the war for the next time Russia is going to come in. I don't think Putin is going to do that. But don't you put yourself-

Stephen Bryen [\(00:26:23\)](#):

It doesn't matter though, because-

Bill Walton [\(00:26:24\)](#):

It doesn't matter.

Stephen Bryen [\(00:26:25\)](#):

It doesn't matter because they could have negotiated before they could have negotiated in the first year of the war. In fact, it was a negotiation and Washington went out of its way to destroy it.

Bill Walton [\(00:26:37\)](#):

Don't forgets Mink Accords. We had the Minsk Accords that could have prevented the whole thing.

Stephen Bryen [\(00:26:41\)](#):

That was before the war. That was in 2014 and 2015. But as Mink Accords said, it was a fake.

Brandon Weichert [\(00:26:50\)](#):

Of course, you're right.

Stephen Bryen ([00:26:51](#)):

They were just trying to screw the Russians, which by the way, an interesting subject because maybe the Russians had... How many times were the Russians taken in by Western assurances that turned out to be bogus? And why were they taken in so many times? I mean, that's not a good news for Putin. I mean, he has to hide under the table on that one.

Brandon Weichert ([00:27:17](#)):

This is why he so viscerally opposed now to further interactions with the West is because he's been burned so many times, by the way.

Stephen Bryen ([00:27:25](#)):

Well, he doesn't trust at all, nor should he. But in any negotiation, you don't trust the other guy. You negotiate the best deal you can get, and you hope that it's because if it's not, you're going to have another fight sooner or later. I mean, that's the nature of the world. But the Minsk Accords would've given, look, Ukrainians didn't want it. They were pushed into it. The Europeans knew it was a fake, so they didn't care. It was a good deal from Ukraine's point of view, because they would've kept all their territory. It would've given some autonomy to Donbas. That's what the deal was, his hands. But other than that, they would've kept their territory and they weren't interested. I think that now there won't be a negotiation until there's a change in regime here.

Brandon Weichert ([00:28:26](#)):

I don't think there's going to be a negotiation.

Bill Walton ([00:28:28](#)):

That's what I wanted to bring up. There won't be a negotiation if things stay right where they are. But I think one of you... I think, Stephen, you wrote that the Ukrainian army is essentially disintegrating.

Stephen Bryen ([00:28:42](#)):

It is. It's a mess.

Bill Walton ([00:28:45](#)):

And that's going to put Zelenskyy in a place where he's one really now urging the-

Stephen Bryen ([00:28:50](#)):

Well, I think the dynamics are interesting. It seems to me, first of all, the Russian strategy to the extent that it can be figured out and it's not clear, is to destroy the Ukrainian army because that's what they want to do because that brings the war to an end. The Ukrainian army itself is in terrible condition, and they're losing men every day. They can't replace them. Simple as that. And when they do, we're seeing videos now of captured Ukrainian soldiers say, "Well, I was sitting in the gym the last week and they grabbed me, put a uniform on me and sent me to a chance called chance to fight. And I'm not trained. I don't know anything. So I didn't even know where the hell I was."

Bill Walton ([00:29:42](#)):

He was just doing Pilates.

Stephen Bryen ([00:29:44](#)):

That's right. But that's pretty pathetic. If there weren't a lot of western mercenaries/advisors/whoever they are helping them, the whole thing would be going tomorrow morning because they couldn't operate the weapons.

Brandon Weichert ([00:30:04](#)):

Well, and I just want to piggyback onto that and remind your audience that we are... I think now it's May 30th, I think this is the second week that Ukraine, which Blinken and Sullivan and Biden say is the hallmark of democracy, has a president who has overstayed his time in office. He is supposed to be out of office now, and Zelenskyy is, I think this is the second or third week now, he's-

Stephen Bryen ([00:30:33](#)):

Yeah. But we're also backing head of the Palestinian authority who hasn't been elected in 20 years because they were afraid that if they had an election, Hamas would win it.

Brandon Weichert ([00:30:45](#)):

That's right.

Stephen Bryen ([00:30:46](#)):

So let's get realistic here.

Brandon Weichert ([00:30:49](#)):

But my point is that the Ukrainian army is folding, and why would most Ukrainians at this point even want to keep fighting when their government has been so hijacked by this autocrat? Before the war, Ukraine was corrupt, but it was a democracy. They had elections, the presidents left.

Stephen Bryen ([00:31:11](#)):

It wasn't real. I disagree because first of all, the opposition was all in jail or was out of the country because they weren't allowed to participate in elections. So let's be honest here.

Bill Walton ([00:31:23](#)):

Well, we're working on that, Stephan.

Brandon Weichert ([00:31:27](#)):

It was a work in progress.

Bill Walton ([00:31:29](#)):

New York is going to get us there pretty quickly.

Brandon Weichert ([00:31:32](#)):

Yeah.

Stephen Bryen ([00:31:32](#)):

Look, this is a country that's closing down the Russian Orthodox churches. I mean, that's imprisoning its opponents, and it's not a democracy. I don't think it ever was. But that's not really an issue. I mean, we back countries that don't have democracy at all. Saudi Arabia is not a democracy, but it's a very important ally, or at least it used to be until Biden got in. So I don't think that's the key issue. The key issue is what happens next.

Brandon Weichert ([00:32:03](#)):

No, it's not the key issue. But I was just pointing out that the whole narrative around the war is so-

Stephen Bryen ([00:32:09](#)):

Well, I mean, but this is all propaganda. It's not surprising. I mean, they have nothing... How do you argue in favor of Ukraine? It's very difficult from a political point of view because it's not very defensible. I mean, ideologically speaking.

Brandon Weichert ([00:32:27](#)):

They had an argument Stephen, when the Russians first invaded, they were wrong. And I said this to Bill at the time, is that that's an argument they could have run with until they defended Kiev. The moment they defended Kiev was the moment they should have took Putin on the offer, met in Istanbul and gotten a deal. But the moment they said, "No, we're going to go for broke in Ukraine," that was when they should have basically lost all support because that's not a viable strategy, and you're just dragging the region war.

Stephen Bryen ([00:32:58](#)):

Well, I mean, you have a president here in the United States who lost Afghanistan, and he didn't want to lose Ukraine. I mean, let's be honest with you, it's political suicide. If he had, "well, we lost. Okay. Make a deal." But he couldn't do that. So it was a trap. So instead, we convinced our European friends and ourselves to pour hundreds of billions of dollars into covering up our mistake, to put it bluntly. But now the chickens are coming home to roost because we're facing the collapse of the Ukrainian army and maybe the collapse of the regime in Kiev. I think there could be a civil war in Ukraine actually, because I think it breaks down into these super nationalists, like the Azov Brigade types who want to keep fighting Russians no matter what, and the others who want to end a war and go home and live a normal life.

([00:34:15](#)):

So if what's left of the army splits, I don't know who survives the fight and how that impacts Kiev. It's a very politically, a complicated problem. And it's a complicated problem for the Russians because they have no interlocutor now, and they're not likely to have one at least in the foreseeable future, unless something really major changes. And that means that they have to keep moving and destroying and expanding because they have no other alternative.

Bill Walton ([00:34:45](#)):

So the Soviets, the Russians and the Chinese are now in a deep embrace working together on everything. I guess there's an implicit guarantee by China that if NATO or US does something in Ukraine, that China would be right there backing them. Which brings up the next thing on my mind, and we can talk about Israel, but I'd want to shift to keep it on China with does any of this create a momentum to cause China to do something about Taiwan?

Brandon Weichert ([00:35:21](#)):

Yes. I think you're seeing it now. China has a very small window to really fundamentally force a change in their backyard, geopolitically speaking. And I think you're seeing them testing now with the recent military, the punishment drills they did around Taiwan last week because of the inauguration of President William Lai, who is openly. I think that-

Bill Walton ([00:35:50](#)):

Is that where they encircled the island with their fleet?

Brandon Weichert ([00:35:54](#)):

Well, they did more than encircle. That was the big report. What people don't realize is that there was a concomitant very large movement of ground forces to the coast, the staging areas of China, which is a big move because most Intel guys that I know say that we're really watching China, we'll know if they're going in, if we start seeing large numbers of the troops at those rallying points like Dalian and elsewhere. And we know that all of their civilian... They have the world's largest civilian roll on, roll off ferry fleet. All of those RoRos as they're called, have been built to military specifications. So I get into debates all the time with the DOD, the Navy guys that I work with used to consult with. They used to say they don't have the amphibious landers in China. They don't have anywhere near enough.

([00:36:49](#)):

And I would say, "You got to hold off and you got to look at the hybrid war strategy that China embraces." So they actually have enough amphibious landers if you throw in their civilian RoRo fleet, which are built to military specification. And I think that right now, Xi Jinping is looking around and he's saying, "November comes along, I might have to deal with a much more brash American president. Right now though for the next six months, I have an open window. And by the way, the Americans have so squandered their strategic capabilities in Ukraine that now I have an open window to really do whatever I need to." Stephen mentioned earlier, what the Russians are showing is that they can actually jam the electromagnetic spectrum that most of our weapons systems rely on to operate.

([00:37:39](#)):

So even if it did come to a shooting war between the US and China, God help us, the Chinese now have indicators and ideas of how they can really screw up American weapons systems, not just fielded by Americans, but fielded by the Taiwanese, fielded by the Japanese and all of our allies. So this is a really... People say that if we lose Ukraine, we'll lose... People like Nikki Haley. They say, "Well, we're going to lose Ukraine then we'll definitely lose Taiwan." Well, I say, if you're looking at linkage, actually, the longer we wait, we go in Ukraine, the more we drain our supplies, the more weak we look and the more likely Xi is to do something quite significant soon to Taiwan.

Stephen Bryen ([00:38:23](#)):

Well, the offset is that if the Chinese move on Taiwan, the Chinese economy will collapse because all trade with China will end. Immediately we will demand it, and I think we'll get away with it, getting our allies in Europe to do the same thing. And the Chinese economy is a mess already.

Brandon Weichert ([00:38:45](#)):

Yes. But that's why they might do this attack now.

Stephen Bryen ([00:38:50](#)):

Well, of course, obviously if you're a Chinese leader, you have to figure this out for yourself. You want to take that risk because the risk of internal revolt is extremely high in China, and the financial system is hit shambles. There's a lot of unemployment. There are a lot of problems Chinese are trying to recover from, but this would be fatal, it seems to me. So he has to weigh that into the balance of whether it's worth it or whether it's just productive to continually intimidate Taiwan. By the way, the DPP, which is in power now, this is their third presidency of the island. It's a pro-independence party. It always has been founded on that premise. It's also a green party, which is interesting. It seems like green parties have become very bellicose in their outlook in the world these days. But I don't know what the Chinese will do Chinese, I have no idea. But I think it would be a casus belli as far as the United States is concerned, the Congress would demand it. And even if it's a token resistance, we will put up a resistance.

Brandon Weichert ([00:40:02](#)):

I would just like to posit though, we've seen some very strange movements by Xi Jinping. He's not like his three predecessors, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. They were very much like corporatists at heart. They didn't want to risk the economy. Xi Jinping has presided over some major declines in the Chinese economic model, largely because of his own decisions where he prioritizes military and strategic developments over economic stability.

Bill Walton ([00:40:39](#)):

Brandon, isn't he losing hearts and minds over that strike? Because the thing that the Chinese, I think have been with the Communist party for a long time because the Communist Party's delivered massive GDP growth, an increase in middle class wealth. And even though they didn't like it and the totalitarian regime, it delivered economically. And if the economy collapsed, I think you might see the Communist party collapse.

Brandon Weichert ([00:41:05](#)):

The dynastic cycle, and I've talked with our friend David Goldman about this a lot. The dynastic cycle, I think is still very much in play.

Bill Walton ([00:41:14](#)):

Explain the dynastic cycle.

Brandon Weichert ([00:41:16](#)):

So basically, you look at China, thousands of years of history, they've had dozens and dozens of dynasties, you could probably inject, you probably should inject the CCP as just another one of those dynasties. And basically dynasties start out very robust, creative, innovative, economic prosperity. A lot of growth happens, but then traditionally, some crisis will erupt that the elite running that dynasty can't manage. It's usually manifested in famine, rebellion in the outlying districts that works its way inward. And if the emperor and his internal clique can't manage the situation, they are overthrown either internally by one of their own people, advisors or they are pushed aside in an internal civil war. And I think that is very much at play. I think Xi Jinping could very well be the last CCP dictator of China. Now, it doesn't mean that democracy comes next. In fact, I don't think that's what that means. Something worse could come.

Bill Walton ([00:42:25](#)):

China has no history of democracy ever.

Brandon Weichert ([00:42:29](#)):

They flirted with the republic in 1911. It didn't go well.

Bill Walton ([00:42:32](#)):

They have a one year history.

Brandon Weichert ([00:42:35](#)):

Just like Iran, they flirted with democracy. The Soviets, the Russians, flirted with democracy a few times, it didn't go so well. So the likelihood that this will end in a democracy, but what could end this dynasty is Xi Jinping has convinced himself, I think that he needs to take military action, either an invasion and, or a blockade, but he needs to do something bold. The economy is collapsing.

Bill Walton ([00:43:03](#)):

But I agree with Stephen, though. It would be dumb. I mean, if his economic power is eroding-

Stephen Bryen ([00:43:11](#)):

There's no shortage of dumbness in various countries.

Bill Walton ([00:43:17](#)):

I mean, that's the key thing here.

([00:43:17](#)):

Look at our world leaders.

Brandon Weichert ([00:43:22](#)):

I would not say because it's dumb, a world leader wouldn't do it.

Stephen Bryen ([00:43:26](#)):

Look, his pattern has been to try and be a peacemaker. I mean, he would have to change his direction.

Brandon Weichert ([00:43:38](#)):

He's also spent a lot of time sanction proof in China over the last two years.

Bill Walton ([00:43:43](#)):

But wouldn't it be a smarter strategy to do what they did to Hong Kong, which is just gradually choke there, and then-

Stephen Bryen ([00:43:54](#)):

Look, I think the Chinese have been utterly stupid about Taiwan because there were lots of ways to come up with solutions that would've been reasonable.

Brandon Weichert ([00:44:05](#)):

But that's my point is that we've got a leadership in China right now under Xi that is radical for Chinese standards. And I agree there is a million different things they could have done.



Stephen Bryen ([00:44:17](#)):

But I don't think it's just him. I think it's been... There's still fighting the Chinese Civil War.

Brandon Weichert ([00:44:21](#)):

Yes, that's true.

Stephen Bryen ([00:44:23](#)):

And they still want to show they won even though they won.

Brandon Weichert ([00:44:28](#)):

That's right. I have a personal story with that. When I was at college, I was at the Paul University in Chicago. We had a fairly wealthy, I guess a princeling type who went to school with me. And he went on a rant one day with me about how basically it's no different than if Britain was supporting the South in the American Civil War. What would Lincoln have done? And he said-

Stephen Bryen ([00:44:57](#)):

They were.

Brandon Weichert ([00:45:01](#)):

And he goes, "But what did Lincoln do?" I said, "Yeah, but we didn't go to war with Britain." But the point is that there are many very well-educated, Elite Chinese who view, as you say, this is a a civil war scenario where how dare the Americans support the breakaway province? And there's this-

Stephen Bryen ([00:45:21](#)):

I didn't mean it that way, I meant it a different way. Taiwan is the remnant of the leadership of Taiwan is the remnant of those who escaped the mainland. Although the Kuomintang, which is the Nationalist Party in Taiwan-

Brandon Weichert ([00:45:38](#)):

Now pro-China.

Stephen Bryen ([00:45:40](#)):

... controls the legislature, but doesn't control the presidency of Taiwan and the Kuomintang has always been having a dream that somehow they will return to China and provide the next generation of leadership for China after the communists go away, which it's a nice dream.

Brandon Weichert ([00:46:00](#)):

My point here though is, I really think the window of crisis is the next six months. And I think Xi Jinping might be looking around saying, "I've got declining economic standards here. People are starting to blame me. I can only hold onto power for so long. Let's rally around the flag. Let's go for broke." Or there could be a scenario where the Taiwan thing is a faint, and the real target is Japan, the Senkaku's and he... Because everybody in China hates Japan. But my point is that I think there is a real crisis probably with Taiwan or somewhere else, brewing that's going to come to a head before the American presidential election. That is my-

Bill Walton ([00:46:47](#)):

Well, let's go someplace else where you guys don't agree, which is interesting, Israel and China's influence and what's going on there and who's behind this. And it may or may not be related to China, but we got just a little... I don't want to go longer than an hour, but I do want to get your thoughts about where this is going with Israel, Gaza, Hamas, that whole thing. Who wants to go first?

Stephen Bryen ([00:47:15](#)):

I'll start.

Brandon Weichert ([00:47:15](#)):

Yeah. Go ahead, Stephen.

Stephen Bryen ([00:47:17](#)):

Well, I think what we're watching now is the final stages of the war in Gaza. It looks to me like now the Israelis control the periphery and they're in the center of Rafah. So I think it's not going to take too much longer if the Israelis use maximum pressure. And I think Washington's effort to try and head it off has failed and failed it delayed it, for sure. The hostage thing also delayed it for sure. But I think at this point, the Israelis have given up on both. They've given up on Washington because they don't think Biden is their friend and they've given up on... Although very friendly with central command, and the military to military is very strong, but it's the political side that's not strong. And they've given up on the hostage thing because they think they've been conned by Hamas and by the CIA because they have been, because the CIA has screwed up.

([00:48:25](#)):

And I think they're very angry about that. Burns just particularly screwed up. And they're really miserable about it because they think that whatever terms they thought they had agreed on, that they got changed and they didn't tell the Israelis that just did it. And then the Israelis thought they had to deal and they didn't have a deal. So the whole thing stinks. But the bottom line is now, I think Netanyahu's made a decision that there's enough pausing and enough waiting and enough playing around. Let's just get it over with. Plus, I agree with them because I think they don't have much time. I think they have to get it over with as quickly as they can. This Hamas thing is a tragedy in and of itself, but there you are. That's my view of it.

Brandon Weichert ([00:49:12](#)):

Well, and I agree. I don't think Steve and I have any disagreement on Israel. I think I'm one of the few people on the right that there's this new wave, and we talked about this before on the right of young intellectuals who are very anti-Israel. I am not one of them. I think that my complaint with Netanyahu was I thought he was going too soft from the beginning. I thought if he had just ripped the band-aid off, all of these campus protests, all of the backlash, there wouldn't have been time for it to materialize because Israel would've just wiped out Hamas. But for political purposes and to keep the American elites happy, they tried to play nice. And that was a mistake.

([00:49:55](#)):

I think this actually links back to what we talked about with China and with Russia or the Ukraine war in the sense that now that official America has put, its stamp on some resistance to Israel. And Israel has basically given Biden the bird, rightly so, now it looks like Israel's going to defy the United States and do what it wants. And that actually makes America look weak because America has backed, I don't want to

say openly, but basically it's backed Hamas over its ally Israel. So we look horrible to the rest of the world, even when the rest of the world is saying, Israel's bad. But we look weak. We look weak again. Yet again under Biden, we look horrible. And I think that Netanyahu, what he's done is great. I think he needs to crush Hamas. And I think, by the way, despite what people say, I think the Israelis could very easily defeat Hamas as long as they don't follow the American counterterrorism playbook. If they start replicating what we did in Afghanistan and Iraq, they will surely lose like we did. But I don't think-

Stephen Bryen ([00:51:06](#)):

Well, they're not doing that now. I think they've learned that lesson. I think the other tension in this is that Israelis were always fearful of high casualties, their casualties also. So whenever there was an excuse to go slower, it was a welcome excuse in that sense. But I think that's been passed by now. I mean, everything looks to me like the Israelis are intent on finishing it.

Brandon Weichert ([00:51:36](#)):

And my only concern in terms of Israel, and they're now in the Philadelphia corridor, they control that which is that region bordering Egypt. My only concern is that they're going to have to have a lot of discipline to not antagonize the Egyptians. And there was this border shooting, and my understanding is the Egyptian guard fired first at the Israelis and the Israelis-

Stephen Bryen ([00:52:01](#)):

And the Israelis killed them.

Brandon Weichert ([00:52:04](#)):

Yeah, rightly so. But the issue now is they need to keep the Arabs on side. And despite what publicly the Arab leadership is saying, I think it's very important to note that I think the Abraham Accords are still there. And I think if we can get the right president in Washington after November, I think we can finalize them. Saudi Arabia apparently has removed all references to an independent Palestinian state in their school textbooks. This was a story I posted recently on Twitter. So for all of the hemming and hawing publicly from Arab leaders about the horrors of what's going on in Palestine, behind the scenes, I think the Arab leadership in all these countries is quietly like, "Please get rid of Hamas, Israel."

Stephen Bryen ([00:52:52](#)):

One of the question here is strategic one, the big kahuna in all this is Iran. The Biden administration going, Iran is making tragic mistakes, even to the point of telling the Europeans not to complain to about Iranian the nuclear program or anything else. It's very strange. I mean, it's almost inexplicable.

Brandon Weichert ([00:53:24](#)):

I have an explanation. I think that Joe Biden, like Obama and Jimmy Carter think they can get a deal with Islamists, and they think they can work with the Islamists a lot better, and that the Islamists somehow represent the majority opinion in the region. I think it's purposeful. I don't-

Bill Walton ([00:53:38](#)):

Well, in addition to that, aren't there some overtly pro-Iranian people and the White House. I mean, they're riddled with people. We talk about Chinese infiltration, the Iranian infiltration is [inaudible 00:53:54].

Brandon Weichert ([00:53:54](#)):

We talked previously about Bob Malley. I just read a New York Post report this morning saying that they, the FBI now knows for a fact that Bob Malley was sharing classified intelligence with the Iranians. Bob Malley was the Biden administration's White House lead Iran guy. And he's sharing classified information with Iranian intelligence through intermediaries. But the point is, this was part of a plan. The Obama administration started the normalization of ties with the JCPOA, the nuclear deal in 2015. And Biden was going to follow it through no matter what. And Iran is empowered because of it.

Bill Walton ([00:54:37](#)):

Well, it seems like everywhere we've talked about, the overall result is the United States has become weaker and weaker, both in reality and other country's perception of what we can do. And we've succeeded, I think, in Obama's dream of marginalizing United States being just another country. And we're not only not the policemen of the world, we're not the moral force in the world. I don't know what we are right now. It's-

Stephen Bryen ([00:55:07](#)):

Very confused. And I'm concerned that the next step that the White House made up is actually sending troops to Ukraine, or it could be a real risk there.

Bill Walton ([00:55:21](#)):

Yeah. That's the reason I hit the alarm bell yesterday to get you guys on to talk. As I mentioned, the saber's out of the scabbard, I think.

Stephen Bryen ([00:55:29](#)):

Yeah. I agree with you. I think this is the most risky period so far right now. And I don't hear enough voices saying, "Hey, what Blinken was saying yesterday. Well, maybe he has to be admonished. He has to be told that this is highly dangerous. You don't do these things." Because the war in Europe would not only devastate Europe, it would devastate us. And it would be extremely painful and wasteful and would not achieve anything good. There's no goal in this. You can't save Ukraine. Ukraine's going to die on its own. I think it can't be saved. Military guys will tell you that if they're honest.

([00:56:27](#)):

I listened to a briefing yesterday of Austrian giving a briefing on the situation. He had a very good analysis military guy. It's on YouTube, you can find it. And he gives a very honest assessment. And it's very grim. Very grim. You can't turn that around. That's impossible. So I think we've reached this inflection point, and it's very risky that Biden may try to send troops, that Blinken may commit something here that we should not commit. We should not do more than what we're doing. And in fact, we ought to amend the deal.

Bill Walton ([00:57:04](#)):

Well, are the president's war power such that he could send troops without getting to [inaudible 00:57:09]?

Stephen Bryen ([00:57:08](#)):

Yeah, sure.

Brandon Weichert ([00:57:10](#)):

He's got at least 60 days to do some big moves.

Bill Walton ([00:57:12](#)):

We're way beyond congressional oversight and approval.

Brandon Weichert ([00:57:16](#)):

Listen, Congress, both parties are waving the Ukrainian flag. So they're going to go along with whatever... This is all like, it's Winston Churchill cosplaying. It's-

Stephen Bryen ([00:57:27](#)):

It would be helpful to have some of our military leaders, the retired ones, to speak out and say, "Don't do this. It's a suicide mission."

Brandon Weichert ([00:57:41](#)):

There are a couple. Daniel Davis is-

Stephen Bryen ([00:57:44](#)):

But we need more because otherwise we're going to end up in the wrong place.

Brandon Weichert ([00:57:51](#)):

We're going to end up losing a major war. Yeah, that's where we're heading.

Stephen Bryen ([00:57:56](#)):

Not only that, but we're going to lose a lot of lives.

Bill Walton ([00:57:58](#)):

We'll lose our society and our economy. Globalization's real. We're interconnected in a way that people can't even begin to comprehend. And something goes down somewhere in the world, it comes back to us. It's grim.

Brandon Weichert ([00:58:15](#)):

Can I just make one final point here? I know we want to wrap up, but I just want to make a point. We were talking at the beginning about the neoconservative, neoliberal cabal running Washington behind the scenes. They believed fully that they had to fight everywhere all the time to preserve America's unipolar standing our hegemony in the world. But in fact, the quest for hegemony as we're seeing now, has led to the absolute destruction of America's post-Cold War primacy. And if we are not careful, in the next six months, we will not only lose that primacy... I mean, it's already lost... but we'll lose it even more. But we may become the declining Ottoman Empire or Austro-Hungarian Empire on our way out, because we've overcommitted, overextended all in the name of holding onto everything. And you're seeing that play out in Ukraine.

Stephen Bryen ([00:59:13](#)):

That was Obama's policy.

Brandon Weichert ([00:59:14](#)):

That was, and then we have Obama's sidekick running everything who's taking... I was told, by the way, Secret Service friend of mine, apparently Obama has weekly phone calls for three hours with Biden. Now what president, even from the same party, has weekly phone calls with the former president, it's not heard of. So we're seeing a lot of coordination.

Bill Walton ([00:59:38](#)):

He's taking instructions.

Brandon Weichert ([00:59:43](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([00:59:43](#)):

This is realizing vision, if you want to call that ugly thing a vision. Well, guys, we've succeeded in making... My wife's not going to want to talk to me tonight after this conversation, but it's all real and we've got to deal with it. And I hope we'll get you back in some time real soon as these things evolve. It sounds like everything is in a state of irresolution at this point.

Stephen Bryen ([01:00:08](#)):

We're on the cusp.

Bill Walton ([01:00:10](#)):

Yeah. Okay. So anyway, Stephen Bryen, amazing thinker, writes on Substack under the Title Weapons and Strategy, and Brandon Weichert does the Weichert Report. And we've seen the galleys, a terrific book coming out on just, we've been talking about Ukraine as a disaster.

Stephen Bryen ([01:00:35](#)):

An important book. Very important.

Bill Walton ([01:00:37](#)):

Okay. All right. So thanks guys and thanks everybody for joining in this conversation. I think you'll learn things here you won't learn a lot of other places. So share what you've learned with other people. We've got some very important concerns and things that people ought to be talking about. And essentially stopping the Biden administration from not only wrecking the economy, but wrecking our place in the world. So on that happy note, thanks for joining and you can find us in all the major podcast platforms. Subscribe and we'll be talking with you soon.