

# US Hegemony Is OVER: The Global South Defies Washington

Today I'm talking again to Dr. Ezequiel Luis Bistoletti, a political scientist working for the University of Buenos Aires and an international lecturer based in Berlin. Ezequiel is also a fellow youtuber and the host of the Spanish-language channel Demoliendo Mitos de la Política - "Demolishing Political Myths." Links: Ezequiel's channel (Spanish): @demoliendomitosedelapolitica Neutrality Studies Goods Shop: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com>

## #M2

Even if Russia wins this, we will still have this ongoing world war in which the US is trying to maintain its decaying supremacy. And we've seen over the last weeks many, many signs that somehow show this process is speeding up a lot.

## #M3

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies, and today I'm talking again to Dr. Ezequiel Luis Bistoletti, a political scientist working for the University of Buenos Aires and an international lecturer based in Berlin. Ezequiel is also a fellow YouTuber and the host of the Spanish-language channel Demoliendo Mitos de la Política, Demolishing Political Myths. Ezequiel, welcome back. Nice to be here, Pascal. Great having you back, because we said we need to cover a couple of topics that are happening at the moment, and we will go into the great power conflagration that we're seeing in a moment. But I would like to start with you on South America, because I actually don't cover that enough on my channel. And since you are Argentinian and you must have followed the recent BRICS meeting in neighboring Brazil, I was wondering what your impression was of this BRICS meeting compared to last year in Kazan, and how you're seeing BRICS developing.

## #M2

Well, many people thought that Brazil was not as actively supporting BRICS as Russia and China. But I think Lula did a pretty good job with the Brazil summit, which actually fulfilled its expectations and basically continued the path towards independence, towards the construction of a new financial order, which is basically the main challenge that BRICS is facing now. And I think the concrete results of that summit can be seen in the, let's say, quarrel that began later between the US and Brazil, or more properly between Donald Trump and Lula. Let's just remember that Trump threatened to hit the BRICS very hard if they dared to defy the supremacy of the dollar. First, he

said that he would impose 10% tariffs on all members, and then, because of the Bolsonaro issue—Bolsonaro is the former president of Brazil who is facing criminal charges because of storming the parliament in Brasilia some years ago.

So he posted something about that—I mean, Trump—and Lula responded to that and said, these are actually Brazilian affairs, this is foreign interference. After that, Trump tried to bully Brazil with 50% tariffs, and Lula said very simply, okay, if you want to do that, we will just answer reciprocally; we will also establish 50% tariffs. And if you don't want to trade with us, no problem—we will trade with China, with India, with Russia, and with the rest of the world. Actually, the U.S. is more dependent on certain products from Brazil than the other way around—coffee, for instance. Brazil is the main producer of coffee worldwide. So I think that reaction has been the consequence of the summit in Brazil. And what I see is continuity in the BRICS path towards a new world order.

The problem, and what actually worries me, Pascal, is that we see the U.S. and the West don't seem to allow this to happen peacefully. Trump is becoming more and more powerful and clear regarding the clash between these two blocs and the fact that the U.S. is not going to allow the peaceful development of BRICS, which is expanding not only with more countries but also with the project of establishing a new financial order. It established the Development Bank some years ago, and so on. And Trump said very clearly, if we lose the supremacy of the dollar, then that would actually be like losing a big world war, and we are going to do everything we can against that. This is a clash that has already started, but it is escalating because of the U.S., and sooner or later that might lead to an open armed conflict.

## **#M3**

Yeah, I mean, we're seeing how the US foreign policy operates already when it comes to Russia and also Iran, right? Iran is maybe not a systemic rival, but it is one of the classic significant others, right? In one or the other theaters.

And how wars are now being fought as hybrid wars, in an on-and-off fashion, with Russia having a hot proxy or coalition war going on while still pretending to be an intermediary and an outside force for peace, and so on. But okay, that's part of the job—we've got to cut through these kinds of narratives and try to figure out how things really work. But when it comes to the BRICS, one of the things that still strikes me is that the United States, on the one hand, acts as if nothing in the world could break the structural power of the U.S.—to the point where Donald Trump, a couple of months ago, also said, you know, running a reserve currency for the world is very expensive, and other states need to compensate us for that because we're rendering such an important service. On the other hand, they're saying nothing must ever challenge that status of ours, while still imposing all of these sanctions and now also tariffs—because tariffs have basically become sanctions on the people you don't want to brand as enemies, right? Including the European Union, which recently just gave in, at least for now—von der Leyen just accepting, basically, the harshest of U.S. terms—whereas Brazil said, no, we're not taking this.

If you want to do this, then fine. We're going to live with it. Do you think that we are now seeing the new structural power of the states that actually have a spine and a way of dealing with the big bully to the north?

## **#M2**

Well, I think that U.S. power was, in the past, based on the economy—and by that I mean the productive economy—the military, and also, naturally, political and cultural influence. However, over the years, China and the BRICS have become the biggest economic bloc, so China is leading economically. Militarily, there is Russia, which has huge military power, so the U.S. is not number one in those areas anymore. One of the few things that still sustains U.S. supremacy is its financial power through the dollar. The last one is cultural power, for which we still don't see many counter-projects. But usually, that's always the last part of an order that changes, right? The cultural power, which is basically what Gramsci called hegemony.

But the U.S. is becoming more and more aware of the fact that the last resort of world power that they have is the U.S. dollar. Militarily, it cannot carry out several wars at the same time. Economically, it was surpassed by China a long time ago. Internally, nothing is working. Most of the things that Trump promised have not been fulfilled. The Epstein affair has affected him tremendously. The tariffs idea that he had—"I will put tariffs on everyone and that way I will restore the U.S. economy"—well, that was flawed from the very beginning. It wasn't a real plan to reindustrialize the U.S. For that, you need much more than tariffs. But even so, it hasn't worked at all, with the only exception of the European Union, which submitted to the U.S. and accepted these 15% tariffs, with a lot of promises of \$600 billion in investments and \$700 billion in energy.

But nobody knows if that could really be materialized. But that's the only success that the Trump government has had with its promises and policies so far. And well, in this regard, the emergence—very slowly, it must be said, but continuously as well—of a new financial order is the last step towards the end of U.S. supremacy. And the U.S. knows this, which is why they react so harshly. The big risk that I see here is that this does not evolve peacefully, but that we finally end up in a world confrontation. Actually, a world war—a global world war—is already happening, ongoing. We don't have a direct confrontation, as you said. And I believe that even after a Russian victory, I think that's not avoidable.

Some analysts say that Russia has already won the war in Ukraine, regardless of how this conflict ends—with a Russian victory, whether through political negotiation or the total military capitulation of Ukraine. Russia will probably take half of Ukraine, up to the Dnieper, and most likely Odessa as well. But what worries me now, Pascal, is that even if Russia wins this, we will still have this ongoing world war in which the U.S. is trying to maintain its decaying supremacy. And we've seen over the last weeks many, many signs that show this process is speeding up a lot. Let me just mention the 5% NATO spending on weapons earlier.

The European Union REARM project states that 800 billion euros will be spent on weapons as well. Germany has promised to do the same with a 500 billion dollar program for weapons. We have also seen statements emerging regarding Russia already committing sabotage acts in Germany. We want to have the biggest army in Europe, which immediately makes us think: how can a German chancellor say such a thing, considering Germany's history? Merz also said that Germany doesn't have to repeat the former mistakes of the past. What does he mean by that? Something like invading Russia? Then we have, on the other side, Trump threatening the BRICS. So we see an acceleration of signs that actually show us we are moving towards this direct confrontation.

### **#M3**

No, we are. It's just in a very short direction, given the tones that we are hearing from Germany. The explanation is that Germany—Chancellor Merz and his supporting team, and the others who buy into the German narrative—they have figured out that the "Hitler of 2025" sits in Moscow and in Gaza, right? I mean, Hitler is Hamas and Hitler is Putin, and therefore, full support for whoever fights them with the bloodiest methods is considered being on the right side of history. So I think we are currently seeing the latest iteration of Germany having again learned the wrong lesson from its own past.

And I must say, a good number of Germans actually understand that. Also, in the German social media space, you see how many people actually comprehend that this is an utterly misguided direction. But unfortunately, that's the one that the German political leadership—and it's not just the CDU, it's other parties as well, especially the Greens, and unfortunately the SPD too—are marching in. Now, let me maybe bring it back. I mean, let me ask you again about one thing that is dear to my heart because of the name of my channel.

South America—do you think that countries like Argentina, but also Brazil, and maybe let's take Chile, let's take Ecuador, and so on—do they understand these signs the way that we're talking about them, and will they try to maintain an arm's-length distance, like a form of neutrality? On the one hand, yes, Brazil is part of the BRICS, but I don't think BRICS sees itself as a counter to NATO or as a counter to the US. It sees itself as the non-West, and just like, "Let's continue while these idiots keep doing their stupid little spiel and see what we can come up with as an alternative." But when it comes to hard confrontation, do you think that South America will maintain neutrality again? Because in the Second World War, it did—Argentina maintained its neutrality almost until the very end.

### **#M2**

Well, in general terms, Latin America has a tradition of neutrality. In terms of military conflicts as well, Latin America has barely had, over the last 200 years, any major military conflicts among Latin American countries, with a few exceptions. That doesn't mean that there is no violence—there is internal violence and different problems. But in that context, there is a tradition of neutrality. Every

country has had different positions with regard to this over history. Argentina has almost always been very neutral in this regard, but now has a government of occupation with Milei in power, and this government is aligning Argentina not only with NATO, but also with Israel in the genocide in Gaza.

I think the discussion with regard to Latin America and the future world order, Pascal, is not so much about neutrality—which I think, in general terms, will be there because of this history and because of the geopolitical situation of Latin America—but rather about spheres of influence. To what extent does Latin America become an arena of struggle between the decaying power of the US and Europe, and to what extent does it become an ally of the BRICS, China, and Russia? I think it will be one of the main points of contention between these blocs, just as Africa is. China is winning in Africa through economic investment, but at the same time, we see military conflicts there. Russia is playing there as well.

Well, we see some—we will see in Latin, or we see already in Latin America—this conflict, but not through military terms. There are, naturally, attempts by the U.S., and several military generals from the U.S. have visited Argentina lately and have expressed how much they'd love to have a military base in Tierra del Fuego at the very south, which would be very important for them. Milei said that Argentina would agree to this, but I think that would be very, very difficult to implement because there has never been a foreign base in Argentina, and I think the entire society would repudiate that. So I don't think that militarily, Latin America—and the Southern Cone in particular—will be militarized in this sense.

But we will see within each country a huge—and we are seeing that now—a huge struggle for spheres of influence between the US and China. So far, the Chinese basically do what they do everywhere, which is invest money; they use their economic power. The US is basically using what it has always used over the last 50 years, which is the IMF and the World Bank to extort countries through external debt. Political influence and lobbying naturally play a part, but the mechanism that the US uses to try to control Latin America—in particular the Southern Cone, and especially Argentina—is basically foreign debt via the IMF, which is controlled by the US.

### **#M3**

This is quite interesting. To what extent do you... Because it's very specific terms—spheres of influence. It's different from spheres of interest. How do you think this will play out? Because, on the one hand, we've now learned—by now, it wasn't clear in the '90s and 2000s, but by now we thoroughly understand the NGO game, right? And how the United States operates in other countries, not only through its regular soft power—Hollywood movies and so on—but also through, let's say, medium power, by directly channeling funds into these NGOs, media, and institutions that then do the bidding of a certain group, a certain class of elites within the US. On the other hand, the US is very allergic to China actually trying anything even remotely similar, although the Chinese don't do it that way.

China, again, is about trade and about negotiating with the other side to get a beneficial deal that allows everyone to have a trade relationship. But in a sense, what we are now also witnessing is the United States demanding that other countries invest in the US, right? We've seen that with Europe now. We're also seeing it with Japan. This idea that you need to invest in the US in order for us to play ball with you. The flip side of that is that if you invest in the US, it means you transfer property rights from the US to foreign holders—Europeans, Japanese, and so on. I just wonder if there's a connection between these ideas of creating spheres of interest and influence abroad and binding others by having them hold stakes within the US economy. I don't know whether there's a proper question in there or not, but do you have any idea?

## **#M2**

Well, I can give you examples of concrete struggles in which the U.S. tries to intervene in Argentina. There were some statements from the, as of now, candidate for U.S. ambassador to Argentina, before actually being accepted by Argentina. This person—his surname is Lamelas; I think Peter is his first name, Peter Lamelas, but I might be wrong about the Peter part—basically said that he would go to all of the provinces of Argentina in order to stop any investment programs that those provinces have established with China. Since 1994, in Argentina, the constitution establishes that all natural resources actually belong to the provinces.

So lithium, gas, oil, and all the many natural resources that Argentina has—and that the region in general has—in the case of Argentina, they are directly negotiated by the provinces. And who is the main investor? Naturally, China. So what he said is, "I'm going to go to every governor of these provinces and I'm going to pressure them so that they basically stop these collaboration programs, these investment programs. We know we have a man of our own in the federal government, that is Milei, but I will go to the provinces and stop this." He also said that he would stop corruption in Argentina, as if that was the... The American ambassador. Exactly.

And basically, what he means by that is to keep using the judiciary power to prosecute the part of the political landscape that has a different political project with regards to the U.S. In Brazil, it was Lula—remember that Lula was brought to jail. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina has been sentenced as well; she is now under house arrest. But something similar happened to Correa in Ecuador. So that's what they mean. When they say, "We are going to fight corruption," basically they mean they are going to keep using the judiciary power to persecute all those political movements that want to have a different international alignment, or at least a neutral stance, with regards to U.S. influence.

He said that as well. He also said that he would work so that the former president, Cristina Fernández, would get the justice that she deserves. That's what he said in this process that was really biased against her. So these are the ways the U.S. intervenes very blatantly, very openly in the economy and in politics, persecuting all the political powers that are against, or at least do not

follow, U.S. orders—using the judiciary power, etc., etc. That's the way it works. And as I said, one of the main mechanisms to exert this power is basically the IMF and foreign debt.

### **#M3**

It's almost ironic how the more the United States has this idea of fighting China, the more its own internal setup and the way it works start to resemble China. Because the most natural thing to happen in China, especially six or seven years ago, before Xi Jinping was as entrenched as he is now, was that every year, twice, you would hear that some high-level official in China was purged for corruption and the Corruption Bureau took out another "tiger." And that was a sign that another internal power struggle was lost by one of Mr. Xi's internal enemies.

And now the United States is more and more using corruption charges in order to get rid of enemies internally and also within its extended sphere of influence. And we see that right now in Ukraine—how Mr. Zelensky, the second he feels that he's falling out of the graces of the United States, needs to crack down on his internal anti-corruption bureau, which we understand was established basically at the behest of the US. So, anti-corruption charges are now a more direct way of holding on to an empire that's slowly slipping through their fingers.

### **#M2**

In the past, Pascal, the US strategy was basically supporting the military and supporting military groups. That was until the '70s. But after that, there was a change. And this is actually related to the change that we had in the US in general terms. They used the CIA for this in the past, and they decided that that had a lot of bad press. So they started to create different organizations such as USAID, the NED, the NED. And they do exactly the same job, but not through military coups, which have a very bad name worldwide.

So in Latin America, you see this change from basically military coups to hybrid coups, which in most cases use not the military anymore, but the judges—the judiciary power. They start processes and put into jail all leaders who repudiate US supremacy in the region. That's the general change in the way they have acted since the '80s and '90s, when democracy was restored in Latin America and all sectors of society determined that they didn't want any more military coups, regardless of their own ideology.

### **#M3**

If we look at Spanish-speaking North America—so, Mexico—and the fact that AMLO is a left-wing leader and somebody who, at least in his speech acts—and he, of course, is not in power anymore, but his successor now is, what's her name? Sheinbaum. Sheinbaum. She's the left-wing leader, the heiress of AMLO, and it's still a left-wing government. They actually, in their speech acts and so on, define themselves as not under occupation by the United States, while, of course, having to play ball

to a very large extent, being a direct neighbor and actually already having been threatened with invasion due to the drug issues—the United States blaming everybody but itself for the drug problems in the country. What is your assessment of the Mexican situation or its part in this entire grand strategic American game?

## **#M2**

Well, Mexico is in a very special position because it is very, very close to the U.S. So the current government and the one before it have the strongest position they can have with regards to the U. S., but they naturally need the U.S. because, since—I think it was in '94 when NAFTA started—the Mexican economy has become very much intertwined with the U.S. economy through U.S. investment. For example, the car manufacturing of the U.S. is mostly in Mexico. So they can naturally establish some boundaries, but they have to negotiate; there is no other way around it. You can also see this not only in the car manufacturing sector, but also in the oil sector and in several other industrial sectors that are very important to Mexico. But at the same time, you can see this the other way around.

Trump wanted to establish tariffs on Mexico, but the main opponents of these tariffs were not just in Mexico—they were actually the U.S. businessmen who had moved car manufacturing to Mexico, up to 80%. The reason why this takes place is basically because an hour of qualified labor in car manufacturing in Mexico is around \$5, while in the U.S. it is around \$28. So even if Trump establishes tariffs, first, the American car companies will not accept this increase in their own labor costs. Second, there have been decades of moving all this capital, all these factories, all these machines, all this know-how that is also needed to manufacture cars, to Mexico—and in part also to Canada. This cannot be undone, even if they wanted to do so, and they do not want to do so.

I mean, the U.S. American car manufacturers—this cannot be undone by a few tariffs or in a matter of years. And we see this in the U.S. not only with regard to Mexico and Canada and the car sector, but we also had an example with the Samsung factory that was established in Arizona. As far as I know—though I might be wrong and there might have been changes—the last piece of news I read is that they couldn't get it to start production. This is a Samsung factory that was established in Phoenix and was supposed to start producing the latest chips—sorry, not cell phones, chips, semiconductors—in the U.S. They couldn't get it to start producing because they lacked a qualified labor force.

If you de-industrialize a country, that's something very easy to do. It doesn't happen overnight, but it happens very soon, very fast. If you want to re-industrialize a country, that's a process that takes years—not only because of the investments that are needed, and for that you need the support of the business classes, the dominant classes, but you also need a labor force that is abundant enough and qualified enough for that. Not to mention all the natural resources and a lot of other things that you need for that. And the U.S. has lost this. I don't see any sign of recovering it, especially if the strategy is basically just putting tariffs as the only countermeasure against this.



## #M3

And it's—I mean, we're seeing right now, and I'm kind of smiling, although it's not funny at all, you know, because it's actually very tragic. It upends and changes a lot of people's lives, and it impacts all of us adversely. But we are seeing how some of these strategies—the tariff strategy—has, you know, bitten its own tail. And the fact now that the U.S. promised—and we never know if they'll keep it; they probably won't—but for the moment, they promised only 15% tariffs on Japanese car imports. But the imports coming from Mexico, which are mainly U.S. cars made in Mexico, are still, up until now, under the 25% threat.

So actually, you have US car manufacturers who are now angry that, if nothing changes, you would have foreign Japanese cars being able to be sold at a lower price point, or with a lower tariff, than their own cars. In a sense, trying to undo this form of globalization that we had, or this form of vertical integration across nations, is a bit like unscrambling an egg. If you try, you might be able to separate something, but you won't get the whole thing back together anymore. Do you think there's a chance that this administration will move away from this? Or is this not just a symptom, but an underlying illness that is simply part of the decline of the US empire?

## #M2

I think the US economic decline is irreversible. This does not mean that the US will not, in the future, continue to be a big power. The thing is that there will be other powers around it, and this makes a huge difference. The thing that is worrisome to me is that we see more, as I said before, more and more signs of an attempt to have a military response to stop this process. We saw, two weeks ago here in Germany as well, there was this summit—this Land Euro Summit. This was a military summit in Wiesbaden.

Right there, Pascal, the Supreme Commander of NATO—that's the name of the post, Supreme Commander of NATO—a new guy called Alexander Vinkovich, said that there was going to be a simultaneous war between the U.S. and Russia plus China. So, simultaneous wars: the U.S. against Russia and China together. And he said that this would start in 2027. He said it just like that. That's in one and a half years. This was picked up by the Polish defense minister and then by their own prime minister, Donald Tusk. We had another general there talking about NATO's plans to take over Kaliningrad. So there are more and more signs in that direction.

And what I see on the other side is that, despite Putin's strategic patience, there are more and more sectors among intellectuals and among advisors to the government—such as Dmitri Trenin, who wrote something not long ago, and before that, Sergei Karaganov—who are talking about the necessity to reestablish nuclear deterrence. Deterrence is predicated on fear. That's the big power,

or the biggest power, of nuclear weapons today—not only the material power when you use them, and that's game over, because in the case of a nuclear Armageddon, self-destruction is guaranteed. It's power, it's political, it's strategic power, and it's based on fear.

They are so terrible that you don't want to do anything that will lead to the use of those nuclear weapons. And this fear has disappeared, they are saying—these advisors of Putin, such as Trenin, Karaganov, and some others who advise him on this subject. So what's the solution that they are proposing? And they fundamentally argue this very, very strongly—profoundly. They say we have to reestablish deterrence through the use of these special powers, these nuclear powers—not with a direct attack against Berlin or London or Paris, but by using, at the beginning, a tactical nuclear weapon against either the Baltics or Poland or some other middle power.

That is also very worrisome, because now we not only have these provocations from one side, but on the other side, we have an internal lobby with very strong arguments, asking for a stronger stance from Russia and to start responding to all these provocations, to which Putin so far has not responded. Putin is very, very cold in this regard—a very calculating person—and he thinks, "OK, we win this war and that's our vengeance." So he has not responded to the attacks against the satellite bases that are actually part of Russia's nuclear defensive system. That was one year ago. He has not responded to the attack on the nuclear triad.

Let's remember the spider web operation against the nuclear bombers. So what he is doing is saying, "OK, we do not respond to these provocations to which we could respond based on the Russian nuclear doctrine, but we win the war and we establish our interests." That's very good, because of that the Third World War hasn't started—at least not in an open way, but only in this covert, hybrid global world war that we are having. But we have sectors that are saying, "No, that's not good anymore. We have to start showing more strength, and for that, we need to use these nuclear weapons." And these are signs from both sides towards a direct confrontation. And that's very worrisome, Pascal.

### **#M3**

Yeah, you're absolutely right. You're absolutely right. I mean, nuclear deterrence is like, you know, physical—it's like simple deterrence, it's like lethal deterrence. But you cannot deter a suicide bomber by threatening them with, you know, with death, right? I mean, death is already what they've accepted. So if the fear of nuclear annihilation is gone, then nuclear deterrence is out the window. The problem with Karaganov and others who make these arguments is that, you know, such an escalation from the Russian side is exactly what certain sectors of the American neoconservative establishment are waiting for, because they want to go that route and they want to be able to muster enough local support in order to then one-up that escalation, which is so extremely frightening.

I mean, I... I think we are at the worst moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis, and we're in a structurally dangerous place. But one more question, or one more thought I would like to run by you, is that one thing I believe I have understood about the way the Russian leadership—and also the Chinese leadership—thinks is that the biggest difference is they don't think so much in election cycles, but much more in processes, in relatively long processes. So Vladimir Putin doesn't respond to things like the spider web operation immediately because he doesn't have to, since it doesn't alter the process.

It's still, as long as the process seems to be going in the direction—the general direction that is imagined—then it's fine. Only once the direction seems to change dramatically do you have to make short-term interventions. And I interpret 2022, the military response to Ukraine, as one of those moments when you need to make a drastic change in order to correct the direction again. The US and Europe function differently. How do you view the decision-making principles of the great powers?

## **#M2**

I agree with you regarding China and Russia. They have strategic thinking, whereas the US and Europe have completely lost that ability—not only that, but also the ability to exert diplomacy. It's completely lost. So they just react to day-to-day news. In the case of Russia, this is different. But what, for instance, Trenin, Karaganov, and some others are saying is that in the context of the strategic thinking or geostrategy of Russia, it is unavoidable to use nuclear weapons because a direct war is irreversible.

It's unavoidable. We have to use nuclear weapons before it further escalates, in order to avoid a bigger conflict. That's what they're saying. They're not saying we have to react based on emotions to any provocations, but they say a war is not avoidable, so we have to be tough right now and try to be as decisive as we can now so that we don't have to escalate this later. That's their argument. But in the case of Trenin, Pascal, the most important part to me is that, unlike Karaganov, who has always been considered a radical in his ideas, Trenin until recently was considered a moderate.

## **#M3**

A friend of the West. I mean, the guy has been trying to build bridges to America for 30 years.

## **#M2**

And he has a very similar biography to Putin's because he was in the Soviet military. Then he became a lieutenant in Russian military intelligence. Let's remember that Putin comes from the KGB—he was in military intelligence, I mean, in training. But then he got close to Yeltsin and was part of his administration, just like Putin. And then he was part of this attempted rapprochement of Russia—not the Soviet Union anymore, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—with the West. He was

invited to do research in Rome, at the NATO strategic school there. I forgot the exact name, but he was invited to do research there. Then he went back to Russia and was the director of the Carnegie Institute or Carnegie Foundation, which is basically the local East European chapter of the Carnegie Foundation of the US. And he was trying to build these bridges over the years.

Until, just like Putin, he got disappointed. And since 2013, he started to move from this attempt at rapprochement with the West to following Putin, who had already undergone this metamorphosis. And now Trenin is advising to have a tougher stance towards the West. This is exactly the same shift that we have seen in Putin's personal biography as well. So this is a general tendency that is based on facts, because Trenin fundamentally argues his points very, very strongly. And the consequence, or the final idea that he has, is basically that war is unavoidable. So we have to be tougher now and use tactical nuclear weapons. That's where we are. It's a very, very worrying situation, I believe.

### **#M3**

It is. It is. I mean, I'm most grateful, actually, that Russia and China are the ones who strategically constrain themselves. And even though they have thinkers like Karaganov, they also have leaders like Mr. Putin and others who actually, you know, seem to counterbalance and also mediate, to some extent, between their different views—their different internal interpretational approaches and political analyses. What I wonder is how we get out of this again, because, you know, nuking the planet is obviously not something that can be in anyone's interest, except for the lunatics who think that it is winnable.

There are unfortunately some, and I'm not actually speaking about Karaganov, because I think Karaganov knows exactly that all-out nuclear warfare is a death sentence for everyone. But so, in order not to go there, you need to do the low-yield one. It's still something that I want to disagree with, although I cannot formulate my objection to that right now. What do you see as a potential approach, especially by countries like ours—Argentina, Switzerland, let's say also Ecuador, Georgia—the periphery around the big ones? Is there anything that you see that would be within the realm of the thinkable, of the possible, how smaller states can influence, or also populations of smaller states like us can influence, this process away from the brink?

### **#M2**

I don't think small countries have enough power to change the world order in general terms, but what they are able to do—what they can do—is basically not contribute to making things worse. And that's naturally going towards the path of neutrality. If we think of that question from the other side, from the side of the big powers, I also have the problem that you were referring to, Pascal, that it becomes hard to think of possible solutions to this if you see the tendency and the velocity with which we're going towards that. I do believe that one of the ways in which this could be prevented is in the case of a U.S. internal collapse.

Just as it happened with the Soviet Union in its time, when you have different powers colliding, before there is a military clash, if one of the powers has an internal collapse, that power becomes less aggressive and tends to negotiate and renegotiate. The question is, how close is the US to having an internal collapse? And by that, I don't necessarily mean a civil war, but such strong internal conflicts that the leaders come to the conclusion that they are not in a position to carry out wars all around the world and try to maintain the US-based world order, but rather have to concentrate on internal politics because everything is falling apart. So that's one of the ways out of this. I don't like what I'm saying at all.

I don't wish any country to have internal problems, but that would be a way out of this. The other way out would probably be just thinking, sitting down, and negotiating. But for that, the US would have to accept that its supremacy is declining and that there will be new powers. That doesn't mean the US will disappear as a major power—it will still have a lot of power and a huge sphere of influence—but that's what they are not accepting. And if you consider the warmongering narrative of the neoconservative hawks in the US, that's unthinkable for them. It's either fight for US supremacy or die trying. And by fighting, I mean making other people fight for them. They never go to war themselves, nor do their children. That's clear, right?

### **#M3**

Yeah, it's the same in Germany at the moment. The people who scream the loudest, "We need to militarize and make sure that we have enough conscripts to send them to the front," are the ones who will oppose the most the idea that they themselves should fight, right? Whenever you tell them on Twitter, "Oh, why don't you go to the front lines in Ukraine?" they react very angrily, as in, "Oh, you're full of hate. You wish death on me. Oh, my God." It's like, you're the one who just said that we need to send the sons and daughters of everybody else to the front lines, but you do that out of the goodness of your heart. But OK, let's not go there. Ezequiel, for people who want to follow you, they can do so best on your YouTube channel in Spanish. Do you also have a place where you publish things in written form?

### **#M2**

No, I actually concentrate my work on my YouTube channel, Demolishing Political Myths. It's in Spanish, but you can use the automated English subtitles, and they work pretty well. So if anyone wants to follow it, language should not be a problem.

### **#M3**

I recommend it to everybody. Ezequiel is a wonderful political analyst, so go and check out his channel. The link will be in the description. Ezequiel Bistoletti, thank you very much for your time today. Thank you, Pascal.

