

How The USA Tricked Europe Into Total Strategic Defeat | E. Bistoletti & P. Lottaz

The other day I was on Ezequiel Bistoletti's show Demoliendo Mitos de la Política (@demoliendomitosedelapolitica). He runs that channel in Spanish and published our conversation in that language, and here it is for you in English—or in your language if you watch this on one of our other channels. It's mainly an interview with me about what's going on with the new Trump administration and the War in Ukraine. One of my key arguments is that Europe got plaid so hard by its "ally" the USA that the Europeans still can't wrap their little NATO minds around it. And this is not just a "Trump phenomenon". No, the systematic undercutting of European interests by Washington has a very long tradition, the old continent just had no political leadership that could have prevented that.... And now "the weak suffer what they must".

#M2

For as much as the Europeans thought that their mortal enemy was Russia, they are now finding out that they are losing to the United States. They're losing to their ally. And yes, at the moment, they can still pretend that this is all because of Donald Trump, and this is all just because an evil man, an evil orange man, took over Washington. But the fact of the matter is, Biden already did the same. And even before him, Obama started pushing the Europeans into a war in Ukraine, over Ukraine, that they didn't want. Angela Merkel didn't want it. Hollande didn't want it. They wanted to stop the session. They wanted to stop the Bush campaign, the George Bush Jr. administration in 2008, from promising NATO membership to Ukraine. They didn't want that. But then they gave up, and George Bush Jr. promised NATO membership for Ukraine. And, well, things spiraled to where they are now. So this is not just a Donald Trump phenomenon. This is just a succession of administrations that pushed the Europeans around, and they let it happen.

#M2

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies. The other day, I was on Ezequiel Bistoletti's show, Demoliendo Mitos de la Política. He runs that channel in Spanish and published our conversation there. It's right here. On this channel, I'm now publishing that conversation where he interviews me on Trump and the new administration, the war in Ukraine, publishing this in English or in your language if you're watching this on one of our other channels. It's mainly an analysis of how I think currently the entire Trump administration is trying to run the show and what this means for world politics. Please enjoy.

#M3

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. Welcome back to Demolishing Political Myths. Today we have the honor and the pleasure of talking with our friend, Dr. Pascal Lottaz, who is a professor in Japan in his field, Neutrality Studies, and he also hosts the very, very interesting YouTube channel, Neutrality Studies. Dear Pascal, how are you there?

#M2

Hello, Ezequiel. I'm very good. Life is nice here, but it is currently a little bit cold in Japan.

#M3

Okay. It's cold here in Germany as well. The place that is not cold right now is Saudi Arabia, and that's the place where actually Marco Rubio, U.S. Secretary of State, and Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister, recently met in order to start discussing what appears to be the first step towards the final peace agreement in Ukraine. However, Ukraine was excluded from the negotiations, at least at this stage, and Europe as well, which made them criticize this meeting very much. They're really surprised and really angry about this. How do you interpret this first step towards what appears to be the negotiated peace at the end of the process?

#M2

Well, to me, this is first and foremost very good news, because finally having real negotiations and a real peace summit is a wonderful thing. I mean, some of us might remember that we had this sham or scam peace summit back in the summer of 2024 in my country, Switzerland, which I still feel ashamed of. Because it was obviously not about getting to peace. It was obviously about creating clout for putting even more pressure on Russia, which is just not the same. But now we actually have a U.S. administration and a Russian administration who want to find a solution. We don't know what the solution will look like. We don't know what the terms of the deal are going to be.

But we know that both of them are working toward that goal, which is hugely different from the summer of 2024, because then they were just working toward getting Russia to capitulate, right? Whereas now we are in a position where the idea is to find an end in one way or another, like in a way that the shooting can stop. This is a huge difference from before. Secondly, the United States choosing to directly reach out to Russia, over the head of Ukraine and over the head of Europe, is a very sensible thing to do. Because it is much, much faster and much easier to negotiate bilaterally than it is to do so in a multilateral forum of blah, blah, blah.

So this is the most straightforward way to get to the point where you understand what the parameters can be. And then the United States, at some point, will need to include at least Ukraine in one way or another because they also need the Ukrainian armed forces to stop doing what they're currently doing. I mean, when the Russian armed forces stop shooting, you also need the Ukrainians to stop shooting. Otherwise, it won't work. In order to get to that, the United States has quite a vast

array of options, ranging from carrots all the way to sticks, in order to threaten the Ukrainians or just promising them that a lot of good things will come out of it.

Preferably, it will be the carrots, but if necessary, it will definitely be the sticks. And then the only question is, who are the potential spoilers? The spoilers in this area could be the Europeans. Because if the UK and Brussels decide that they want to work against whatever kind of peace agreement might come out of this between the US and Moscow, then the obvious way to do that is by continuing to support the Ukrainians with their military means. And although the Europeans by now, obviously and to the naked eye, don't possess the means to win this war, they might possess enough means in order to spoil the peace.

So the question to the US and to Russia will be how to bring the Europeans and the Ukrainians on board, maybe not to make them happy enough to say yes, but to keep them under the threshold of trying to spoil the peace process. This is a natural thing to happen because in any kind of peace process, you often have individual actors, left-out actors, that, if push comes to shove, will act as spoilers, even if it is for no other reason than to not be completely marginalized. The Europeans are currently being marginalized like they've never been marginalized before.

I had a talk today with Arnaud Bertrand, and he pointed out very correctly that never in the last 1,000 years was the security configuration of the European continent decided completely and utterly outside of it and by outside powers. This time, none of the European powers, literally none, sits at the negotiating table in Saudi Arabia. And I understand that the Europeans are very angry at that, that the Brits and the Germans and the French are furious. But if you make yourself a poodle, then you must not be surprised if others treat you like a poodle. And that's what the Europeans did over the last at least 25 years. And the closer you get to current times, the more poodle-ish they became.

They became so much of a poodle that the German chancellor just stood next to the American president when Joe Biden announced, before the war broke out, that if Vladimir Putin attacks, then Nord Stream is over. He just stood there and took it as the American president threatened to sabotage, to destroy a German-Russian joint infrastructure project. And, well, the whole world watched. The whole world looked at it. And guess who looked at it and watched? It was the USA. The USA, first and foremost, learned a very important lesson, which is that by now the Europeans are so subordinated, so obedient, that you can blow up their infrastructure and they won't say anything. And they did. And they didn't say anything. The Europeans are still covering for the Americans, for the forces that blew this up.

They're still covering for it. And we know that because the Swedish investigation has finished. The Danish investigation has finished. You cannot tell me, you cannot sell the idea to me, that nobody in Europe knows what happened. By now, it is clear that for as much as the Europeans thought their mortal enemy was Russia, they are now finding out that they are losing to the United States. They're losing to their ally. And yes, at the moment, they can still pretend that this is all because of Donald Trump, and this is all just because an evil man, an evil orange man, took over Washington. But the

fact of the matter is, Biden already did the same. Even before him, Obama started pushing the Europeans into a war in Ukraine, over Ukraine, that they didn't want. Angela Merkel didn't want it. Hollande didn't want it.

They wanted to stop the Bush Jr., George Bush Jr. administration in 2008 from promising NATO membership to Ukraine. They didn't want that. But then they gave up, and George Bush Jr. promised NATO membership for Ukraine. And, well, things spiraled to where they are now. So this is not just the Donald Trump phenomenon. This is a succession of administrations that pushed the Europeans around, and they let it happen. And now you are at the endpoint of this entire charade, where the situation is becoming so evident that even the Europeans can't ignore it anymore. But it's now 20 years too late to do something constructive about it. And now you will need a lot of repair work instead of maintenance work done in order to get back to a situation in which Europe can again basically stand up for its own interests.

#M3

Yeah, I completely agree with you. And I believe that the Europeans not only became a poodle, but a deceitful poodle in the sense that they probably don't even deserve to be at the negotiating table, because the last time they were there, they actually made these fake agreements in Minsk, which, as you remember, Hollande and Merkel conceded were just to buy time and send more weapons to Ukraine, when Europe was actually the guarantor of these agreements. So, not only can they probably not participate against the US's will, but do they really deserve to be there after losing confidence by doing this? Well, that's another question for sure.

But Pascal, there have been some details about what the U.S. expects regarding the following steps, in the sense that Pete Hegseth explained in the Ramstein meeting when he said that, firstly, the U.S. would back down financially and militarily and leave all this burden on the back of Europe. And then they said, well, we would appreciate it if there were European troops as peacekeeping units there, but without the U.S. and outside of Article 5. How probable, how likely do you see a situation like this happening? Because this might be the U.S. plan, but Putin might think differently as well. So what do you think about this proposed project in order to go to peace under these terms?

#M2

Well, we have more ideas in this direction. One of the people who also spoke about this was the Russian ambassador to the United Nations. He made the point that if any kind of peacekeepers were involved in settling the conflict, it could only happen under the only legal framework there is under international law, which is the United Nations framework. This means it would have to be sanctioned by the Security Council, with the mandate being of a limited term—one year, a couple of years at most—and then it would have to be reauthorized by the Security Council.

And it also means it would have to be a very mixed peacekeeping force. It would have to be the UN Blue Helmets, right? And they would be made up of more than just Europeans. There would be other UN member states asked to participate. Think about states with a lot of peacekeeping experience, like India, right? Maybe Indonesia, we don't know, but it would be a truly international coalition and not just European boots on the ground, which from a Russian perspective would obviously be an adversarial boots-on-the-ground kind of mission, to which I think the Russians would have zero reason to believe that they would act in their best interest. So that's one thing.

The other thing is that what these comments indicate is that even if, for some reason, the UN wasn't involved, and even if Russia agreed to having a purely European agreement, a West European contingent on the ground, the Americans are by now well aware that they don't want to be used as a tripwire. These troops would not have Article 5 protection, these troops would not be NATO troops, these troops would be something different. We don't exactly know what it could be. Like maybe, you know, you could think of something like troops under the EU, the common security and defense policy, right? Contingent deployed, right? Theoretically. But if that was the case, they wouldn't be covered by Article 5.

So the U.S. says clearly, we're not going to come to your rescue when everything goes up in flames. And this, on the one hand, undermines NATO because there's a clear situation of European control and EU security to which we are officially saying NATO doesn't apply. On the other hand, it again puts all of this pressure on the Europeans to care about this themselves and pay for it themselves. This, to me, at the moment, is still a negotiation tactic because I don't think that the Trump administration believes that the Russians would say yes to something like that. And this is what they want, right? They want an agreement, so the Russians need to be okay with it.

And if the Russians are saying they want to go through the United Nations, then it will go through the UN if any kind of boots on the ground are going to be part of the deal at all. But I do also think that the Russians understand that it would be a ceasefire and then a separation of these conflict parties if that is the outcome. So from the Russian perspective, it would be an official recognition of these four oblasts as part of Russia. From the Ukrainian perspective, it might be something like they would not give up their claim on the four oblasts, but they would agree to withdraw to a certain perimeter. Whatever it's going to be, both sides are probably going to have a slightly different understanding.

And in order to make it work, you might need personnel on the ground. Now, peacekeepers, you can call them that, or just observers. I mean, remember how the outcome of the Minsk agreements was that you had OSCE observers on the ground who actually did a good job of independently observing whether or not projectiles were still fired. They couldn't do more. They couldn't make the parties stop firing the projectiles, but they were able to at least count them and monitor them. That's

already something. So a monitoring mission is also something that we might see as an outcome. But it is pretty clear, especially after the experiences with Minsk, that the Russians are going to want more. They want more than monitoring.

They want something verifiable that would force the other side to stop. And this is where the Russians actually need the Americans. They need the U.S. to put pressure on the Ukrainians to live up to whatever is being talked about in Riyadh and what might one day be agreed upon between them. So this is a very interesting example of how the former proxy force, or the power that wields the real power in the proxy war, might in the end actually de facto turn against its protégé and use force against the protégé. I mean, probably political force, in order to extract the concessions from the protégé that they want. Again, this is where the whole spoiler issue can come in.

But at the moment, the Ukrainians are still signaling very clearly that they're not happy with this and that they don't want this, and that Zelensky is not on board with what is happening. But once the pressure is on, there won't be a lot of other options for Zelensky or whoever is going to be the next president, because the Russians recently also said that what is needed is elections in Ukraine in order to have a proper political counterpart to then work with. So maybe what we're going to see as part of the agreement is going to be new elections in Ukraine in order to create the political background to then allow for a proper de-escalation with Ukraine to happen between Moscow and Kyiv.

#M3

Pascal, most analysts so far have mostly concentrated on the, let's call it, tiny picture with regard to the war in Ukraine, as they all concentrate on the possible dealing of land, of territory, of new elections, of natural resources as well, and many other things, as if this was a Ukrainian-Russian war. But as we all know, this is a war in Ukraine, which actually has much deeper roots. And one of the main things that lies behind this war is actually the Asian-European security structure, which has been modified.

At least that's what the U.S. and NATO tried when they started their expansion towards the east, and that's something that Russia naturally rejects. So there are certainly other things, such as the missile bases that NATO has in Poland or in Romania, the possible color revolutions in Georgia, or the canceling of elections in Romania, or the fake elections that we have in Moldova. You certainly remember that as well. Don't you think that Russia will try to negotiate these things as well, as they belong to this war, as the core causes of all this turmoil?

#M2

Yes, they might. On the other hand, this is something that I think is giving the Russians already quite a bit of confidence, because it seems as if the current administration itself wants to do something against it, irrespective of the Russians, right? The U.S. is right now—Donald Trump is

dismantling USAID. Donald Trump is dismantling the National Endowment for Democracy. The U.S. is right now in the process of defunding its own regime change apparatus. And that is quite surprising. If I were sitting in Russia, I would be surprised at that because this regime change industry has been delivering fantastic results for the U.S. from the perspective of the neoconservatives, right? It gives you a lot of leverage.

I mean, it went so far that it managed to enlist Ukraine as a willing sacrificial lamb and frontline soldier in this proxy war against Russia. It failed in Georgia, but we saw how much they tried with Georgia to get them to that point, again and again. And Georgia refused, and that was fine. It failed in Kazakhstan, it failed in Belarus, but it is working all over Central and Eastern Europe. So the fact that now this apparatus is apparently being dismantled, even if it's not intended as a trust-building mechanism from the U.S. toward the Russians, I would think that the Russians take this as a sign that something has seriously changed in Washington, something about the perception of where global geopolitics is going.

And that play goes hand in hand with what we've heard from Marco Rubio and others about the multipolar world. Multipolarity used to be the big, big no-no word that you were not allowed to mention in Washington under the Biden administration. There was no multipolarity. Multipolarity was treated like a conspiracy theory that only weirdos would talk about because obviously the world was one of the rules-based international order. Now, rules-based international order, to my knowledge, neither Trump, nor Rubio, nor others have ever used that word. It's, at least for now, completely gone. And it has been replaced by an admission that the world is multipolar and that Russia and China are great powers in their own right.

I mean, Marco Rubio said so himself. He said in an interview that this is the natural order of international relations and the unipolar moment was an exception. And now we're back to the normal state. What this means is that the U.S. recognizes, or at least his administration does, that the U.S. is only one of at least three great powers and other powers around it, and that they need to arrange themselves with each other. Donald Trump has said very clearly that what he doesn't want is more war. In his inauguration speech, for all of its flaws, he clearly said the success of his administration will be measured by the wars they end and by the wars that they never get the United States into.

So this is, in a sense, maybe not a pacifist view of the world, but it is an anti-belligose view of what a successful foreign policy means. This is not necessarily a nice or cuddly, cozy foreign policy because, at the same time, he, of course, says he wants the Panama Canal under U.S. control and wants to take over Greenland. So, I think Mr. Trump clearly thinks in terms of spheres of influence and wants the Americas carved out for the U.S., but he doesn't necessarily want to do so with war only, which separates this administration very strongly from the previous one or ones, which always emphasized that the U.S. is the most powerful country on earth.

There's nothing we can't do. I mean, Biden said so several times. There's nothing we can't do. So naturally, if push comes to shove, we just use our military, and then the problem will be solved. It seems that the Trump administration is much more hesitant to do that. They're not hesitant to threaten it. They do threaten intervention. They do threaten violence, which is not nice. But so far, they haven't tried to do that. Now, the question is, of course, whether the whole strategy in Ukraine is to wind down the conflict as soon as possible and leave in order to have all of your military assets available to point them toward China. That we don't know. And that is something that's very much possible. But so far, it hasn't happened yet. So the rhetoric is still one of overall trying to de-escalate.

Plus, Mr. Trump also said that he would like to have a trilateral meeting with Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi in order to reduce tensions and their trilateral arms spending. He was talking about cutting spending in half for all of them. This is a classical idea of global demilitarization and weapons and arms control. Arms control treaties and arms control initiatives have a poor track record of ever materializing, and if they materialize, of being sustained. We've seen how all of the arms control treaties of the 1980s and 1990s basically vanished in the 2010s and early 2020s. And if we go further back and look at the initiatives of the late 19th century to do arms control, the two Hague Conventions, the two Hague Conferences, first and foremost.

Both the 1899 and 1907 conferences were big conventions for disarmament, and the disarmament part failed horribly. So historically speaking, these ideas often either fizzle out or completely fade away. But the fact that we have talk about it coming from the United States, the largest arms producer and spender on military equipment, is an encouraging sign. Again, we don't know all of the background for that, and we don't know if it's meant seriously, but these are new tunes from Washington, which all feed into this new overall global outlook on how geopolitics is going to work from now on. Rules-based international order is out, and spheres of interest or spheres of influence are probably back.

#M3

And as you mentioned, Trump is dismantling some soft power institutions of the US, such as the USAID, and probably in the future, it will be the NED as well. However, he is also signaling some very hard political moves when he threatens to take over the Panama Canal or Greenland, or make Canada the 51st state, or change the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, and so on. Pepe Escobar mentioned that actually what they're trying to do is somehow a new version of the triangular diplomacy of Kissinger, which in this case would mean bringing back Russia somehow to better terms in order to go against China.

Something like they did in the past with Maoist China against the USSR. Couldn't this be the shift that we are seeing in the US, which, by the way, even if this was true, we should be celebrating that

we are de-escalating the world that was going towards a world war and probably a nuclear world war between the US and Russia, which is already something good for sure. But couldn't it be this movement that Trump is actually pushing forward behind this de-escalation in Ukraine?

#M2

Yes, it could be. It's absolutely possible. On the other hand, again, the Trump administration never set it as a goal, to my knowledge, to have a war with China. Accepting or agreeing on China as the main structural competitor, that is something that Trump and his team mentioned several times, but not necessarily to go there with a force of weapons. Right. There is nobody that I know of in that team or within the extended intellectual sphere of that team, any indication that they are thinking of breaking China apart or defeating China militarily. This was the Boltons of the previous administration.

This was the Pompeo approach and these kinds of types; they're out, or they weren't invited back in. So the current team of Trump tells me that he probably recognized the problem that he had with these kinds of China neocons versus the Russian neocons. While still, I think you have other people in the U.S., like John Mearsheimer, who keep saying the whole time that the only peer competitor is China for the U.S. and not Russia. And hence, the war with Russia just makes the U.S. even weaker vis-a-vis China. So an analysis like this is actually at the bottom of the grand strategy that the Trump administration is trying to build. That is very possible.

That doesn't indicate to me yet that he actually wants to, you know, try to use Taiwan the way that the Biden administration used Ukraine in order to have a proxy war with the other one. It could still go that way. It is still possible. But so far, I don't see the indicators for that. It is clear that in the United States, you have people who would like to go such a way, and you have, especially in the conservative circles, let's remember, for instance, the interview that Tucker Carlson did with Vladimir Putin, in which Tucker Carlson very much stipulated, wouldn't it be good if we, Russia and the U.S., were friends again in order to together face China?

Vladimir Putin stopped that in its tracks right there, and Carlson let it go. It is unlikely for me at this point that Russia will ever break with China the way that the Soviet Union previously did, just because of those experiences and also out of the experience that the United States is definitely not a reliable partner, as the Europeans are finding out right now. Not only can U.S. policy change radically after four years, as it did just now, it can also change within an administration. And, you know, the U.S. is a wild card in international relations. So, China and Russia are both much more stable in terms of their interests, in terms of their strategic environment, and in terms of their military capabilities.

So I do think that driving a wedge between Russia and China, even if that was the goal, is not going to work out. But I am still hopeful also because the other potential flashpoint, you know, that might be the next U.S. war, is not just China. China is even further away, but the immediate one could be

Iran, right? The U.S. still has a lot of issues with Iran and is currently having a peace summit, a European peace summit, in Riyadh, in the Middle East, in Saudi Arabia. And the Israelis are not disturbing that, right? Because, you know, all it would take for Israel to blow up this initiative of the Americans would be, you know, again, sending a missile into an Iranian embassy or consulate.

They could do that at any point. They've done that over the last three years the entire time. But right now, the Israelis are keeping calm, are keeping the region calm. And after the upheaval of December with what happened with Syria, the fact that West Asia is calm right now tells me that the U.S. made it pretty clear to Israel that they don't want this process to be disturbed. And if it stays like this, then maybe we have a chance that also in West Asia, whatever is going to come next might be something short of war. Although the U.S. made it clear that it will put maximum pressure on Iran, the Russians also made it clear that they are now in a semi-alliance with Iran.

They have a new treaty with them, and they are helping to arm Iran, which, on the other hand, means that the Russians are trying to work together with the Americans against a nuclear Iran. The Russians have no interest in Iran going nuclear, and who knows, maybe this is going to be part of the discussions, now that finally we have direct communication again. Whatever is going to come out of this, the Russians, for sure, want a global agreement, a security agreement that includes Europe. But I would expect that at least at the beginning of the negotiations, they will try to include West Asia, the Middle East as well, and try to keep that stable too.

#M3

Okay. Some analysts have an alternative line of interpretation in the sense that they say the U.S. is going to redirect its foreign hostile policy towards China instead of Russia, but they cannot carry out war right now, so they will rather have a trade war with China. At the same time, they are going to escalate in the Middle East, especially with regards to Iran, something that you just suggested. In fact, you have certainly read this document from 1996, "A Clean Break," which was developed for the first Netanyahu government by some Israeli and some American neocons at that time.

And they basically proposed to reshape the Middle East, and for that, Israel, with the support of the U.S., had to start wars all around against Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya, even Sudan was there. Well, naturally, the same situation in Palestine, and the last one was supposed to be Iran. So far, this is the only one that has not started a war directly against Israel and the U.S. So, could it be Trump's move to start a commercial trade war with China so far, but escalate in Iran? Which now, as you also said, is an ally of Russia as well and has even some S-400 anti-missile defense systems coming from Russia. So even some military systems are there. Could this be a path that we could see, we could expect from Trump's administration?

#M2

It could be. It is very, very difficult at the moment to make any sure predictions. The one thing that I believe to see, and again, that's just my personal opinion, is that Donald Trump, whenever possible, tries to avoid all-out military force. He did so in his first administration, but that doesn't mean that he rules out all types of force. He was the one who killed General Soleimani, the Iranian top general of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. That is, you know, as escalatory as it gets. But in a way, he calculated correctly in the sense that the Iranians didn't try to militarily retaliate the way that they could have. So he bullied them into submission. So this is horrible, right?

I don't support that. I don't say this is good. It's just that this is what happened. The Iranians later de-escalated by throwing a couple of missiles near a U.S. military base and called it quits, right? And the Americans said, oh, we're outraged. But of course, they weren't. I mean, they knew this meant the U.S. won this standoff. I could very much imagine that the U.S. will try something like this again, that they will try to do all of these standoffs with the Iranians, gambling on the Iranians standing down and gambling maybe on the Russians to calm them down and thereby achieving the desired results for Israel, right? And basically establish or cement Israeli hegemony over a good part of West Asia.

Although the reconfiguration with Syria makes that difficult because by now also Turkey is the other major player in that area, and now it's going to be the Israelis clashing with the Turkish sphere. Plus, the Turks also still have a lot of issues, as always, with the Kurds, and the Kurds are still being supported by the Americans. So the big next thing to look at for me is what the Americans are going to do with the Kurds, whom they have been supporting in order to get access to the oil fields of Syria and extract all that oil. Is Donald Trump going to leave that alone? Is he going to go away and just leave the Kurds to their fate and basically fight a war with Turkey in which they have little chance to win?

And if they leave, that might again give chances for Iran to interfere and work with some of the actors on the ground. So this story is far from done. I would believe that Donald Trump will try to look for some sort of grand bargain there as well. And part of that might be using force. With China too, part of what he wants to achieve might include the use of force, but not as dramatically as some other administrations have done by going to all-out war. And if you were speaking of, you said at the beginning, you know, we might have a trade war. Yes, yes, and probably trade war is going to be part of the game. But let's remember, trade war is not a real war. Trade war is nothing but trying to be mean to each other with your respective markets and whatever you can do in order to hamper the other's ability to develop. But the word war here is really misplaced.

We should use the word "trade conflict." Conflicts are normal. There has never been a time in world history when we had no conflicts. There will always be conflicts. The question is, do we manage the conflicts below the threshold of using physical force and starting to kill each other? Or does it go all the way up there? So my sense is that Trump will try to keep it below that threshold while still threatening, fuming, and scaring others into submission. So he's still a bully. He's just not the bully

who will try to use a knife to cut the other one. He will use his fists, but not a knife. That's a bit how I see it developing at the moment. I might be wrong. He might, in the end, use all-out military force against Iran or China or both of them. But if that happened, then, yeah, well, I would be surprised, let me put it that way. Okay, one last question, Pascal. So far, Trump has bullied...

#M3

the supposed allies of the U.S. And we have been talking until now about Russia, China, Iran, and the Middle East. Those are supposed to be the adversaries or the enemies of the U.S. What do you think is planned, or how do you think Trump interprets the relationship with the allies of the U.S.? Because so far, he's trying to strong-arm them with tariffs. And I'm talking about Mexico, Canada, and Europe as well. But let us be clear, in order to economically confront China, the U.S. actually needs Mexico and its cheap labor force. So what is going to happen there? Are we just seeing the initial negotiations, but in the end, will the U.S. try to build a bloc with Mexico, Canada, and probably the entire American continent in order to confront China? Or will it try to somehow antagonize them as well and then be alone in this confrontation against China?

#M2

Well, when it comes to North America, I think from what I'm seeing, I believe that Trump and the Trump administration think of it more in terms of domestic policy. I don't think that any of them have this image that they have to tie together Canada and Mexico in order to fight China. I just don't think that's the mindset. When it comes to its two immediate neighbors, and in an extended way to the whole of Latin America, I think what the Trump administration sees is how it impacts its domestic politics. And let's not forget, U.S. politics is first and foremost domestic. The Trump administration has to deliver.

They have to deliver for the people they promised to help out of their misery. Because, I mean, it's mind-boggling, but something close to 20 million Americans live close to or below the poverty line. It's really bad. And if you look at some of the cities, and Trump has spoken about that a lot, some of the cities look like slums. And the fentanyl problem makes all of this even worse. And this needs addressing. And that's what Donald Trump, in his whole campaign, did. And this is also how I see where his rhetoric with Mexico and Canada is going. What he wants is to, on the one hand, re-industrialize the Rust Belt.

He wants to de-rust the Rust Belt and get some manufacturing done in the U.S. again, because his gut feeling seems to be that if you manufacture locally, then that will have positive effects on the entire economy. Plus, he's a builder, right? And he thinks in terms of brick and mortar and getting stuff done, building things. On the other hand, he blames a lot of the ills on the outside world, right? On Mexico for the fentanyl, on China for the fentanyl, and on Latin America for immigration. But all of this blaming immigrants and immigration, he doesn't do that for the sake of ostracizing immigrants.

He does it for the sake of saying, I'm going to protect my local constituency, which is the Americans. So it's a local policy or approach that fuels this. In this sense, Trump is definitely not on board with the neoliberal consensus. Arguing that the US needs the cheap labor of Mexico is, of course, arguing from within the framework of neoliberalism, that since production costs over there are so much cheaper, the US needs these cheap production costs in order to benefit maximally from the outcome and maximize capitalist rent-seeking. It seems to me that Trump is actually willing to cut down on the profits if, in return, he's able to produce locally. So I don't think he's a neoliberal in that sense.

I don't think he's definitely not a socialist, definitely not social democratic, and definitely not thinking in terms of maximum benefits for everybody. But he does think in terms of bringing capacity back to the mainland to make things happen and build things. And if you do that, then you will necessarily have to incur costs. He will try to outsource these costs, and he said so clearly, right? In the perfect world for Donald Trump, he would put massive tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, and he would make Mexico and Canada pay for the difference in income and rent that the U.S. can find. Now, whether he will succeed with that is another story, but that's going to be the approach. He's bullying others into paying for the policies that he wants to see happening.

He's doing so in Ukraine right now, by the way, right? He's saying, like, Ukraine has to pay us back for 300 billion US dollars that we gave to them, although the 300 billion went straight from the US taxpayers into the pockets of the US weapons manufacturers, right? This 300 billion was directly spent in the US economy, but still, he manages to frame things as if that had been lost money on Ukraine, and now he wants it back, either from Ukraine or from Russia, or preferably from both. That's where his bullying comes in, right? And he's trying to do that with his immediate neighbors too. So, long story short, I see his American agenda as fueled by domestic considerations, whereas his European and Asian agenda is fueled by foreign policy considerations.

#M3

Mm-hmm. Pascal, it's been a pleasure. As you know, on this channel, we have the tradition of giving the final words to our guests. So whatever you want to say to close this very nice talk, the mic is yours.

#M2

I would like to close by saying that, for the first time in a couple of years, I am hopeful that we are moving toward de-escalation. That doesn't mean we will be in a peaceful future, but maybe in a future that tries to work towards some form of reconciliation overall. Not perfect peace, but at least not further steps toward war. To me, that would already be a step in the right direction.

#M3

Pascal, again, thank you very much, and I hope to see you soon. Bye-bye.

