

Revealed: The Insane Imperial Racism of US Proxy Warfare | Rob Urie

„Fighting to the last Ukrainian“ — the US and European core strategy on the Ukrainian battlefield — was always predicated on their abhorrence for both, Russian AND Ukrainian lives. Using the men and women of one former Soviet Republic to eradicate as many as possible of another, is a neocon dream come true. The glee with which a recent New York Times articles speaks about the „ingenious ways“ in which the US has enabled Ukrainians to kill Russians, and how their own losses on the battlefield are due to Ukrainian incompetence (rather than Russian military abilities) shows how insanely racist the entire proxy war narrative is constructed. These attitudes are not new at all, and are a core-driver of US proxy warfare. Today I’m talking to Rob Urie, an artist and political economist. His book Zen Economics is published by CounterPunch Books and he regularly publishes on the Counter Punch online magazine as well as on his own Substack. Links: Rob's book "Zen Economics": <https://www.counterpunch.org/product/zen-economics/> Rob's Substack: <https://substack.com/@roburie>

#M3

These proxy wars are grotesque. If it is an American war, then Americans need to fight it. If it's not worth having Americans fight it, then it's not worth doing. And so, as an American and a longtime anti-war activist, when I heard the Americans saying, "This is wonderful, we can get all these Ukrainians to die for us, and we don't have to send Americans to die over there," that reminds me of ethnic and racial attitudes that emerged from the Second World War that are untenable.

#M2

Hello everybody, this is Pascal from Neutrality Studies, and today I'm talking to Rob Urie, who's an artist and political economist. His book, Zen Economics, is published by CounterPunch Books, and he regularly publishes on the CounterPunch online magazine as well as on his own Substack. Rob wrote a very good appraisal of the New York Times article that recently threw Ukraine under the bus with its hagiography of those wise U.S. generals and its condemnation of Ukrainian insubordination when it comes to orders from Washington. So I thought we should really discuss that since it's quite a significant change in the narrative, I believe. Rob, welcome.

#M3

Thank you, Pascal. I'm glad to be on your show, so thank you for having me.

#M2

Thanks for taking the time. Oh, sorry, maybe just before we start, I was really curious about your book, Zen Economics. Can you tell me a little bit about how you bring Zen and economics together?

#M3

Sure, I'd be glad to. So this is a project that I've been working on for about 30 years, and I was finally able to take the time to write it. My background is in both economics and philosophy. I've studied the philosophy of science, the history of science, and spent quite a bit of time with scientific methods. I also worked for 25 years in finance and was a career quant, which is a skill set, not a specific job, and so it's applied to different jobs. I had some insight into how statistics work and the practical application of statistics, which is quite different from the way that statistics are usually explained. What I did was take continental philosophy, really from the late 19th and early 20th century, and apply it to the Western economics that I was taught. I use it to take apart the premises of Western economics, which a number of other philosophers of economics have done.

But I believe that I've done it in a fairly unique way. I give a number of concrete examples of how economics works and then what the intellectual challenges to the premises of the statistics are. Essentially, there's an infinite regress process behind all the statistics, just like there is in mathematics, where you don't have concrete foundations to the premises. They're movable, and they really depend on what people's interests are that are brought to the statistics. It's a long-winded way of saying that there are deep philosophical premises embedded in the way that we understand the world in the West, particularly in the United States, and that once these are taken apart, people are able to see the world in a different way and the way that the world is explained in a different way than they have been seeing it.

#M2

I have always been fascinated by the trick that modern, let's call it, academic economics managed to pull. It's basically the only subject in the humanities, the only behavioral science that managed to distance itself and pretend that it is physics. I find that quite interesting because a lot of the foundations are actually very dogmatic. Let's say the assumption that economic agents have perfect foresight. It's kind of ludicrous, but it is axiomatic. And so you look at these kinds of premises.

#M3

Absolutely, and the axiomatic nature of modern academic economics is really a large part of the problem. When I was in grad school, I was told that there are these things called stylized facts, which are just agreements. There's an implied agreement amongst economists to not ask too many questions about this set of facts that they are working from. And not only are the facts dubious on their face, I've gone back through the academic papers to the 1970s and the neoliberal revolution that started in the 1970s. Methodology is used really as a cover for fairly thin foundations. Once the

premises of modern academic economics are explained to ordinary humans, people who haven't been through the educational process, they seem ludicrous because, and I'm sorry to say this, they are.

There are premises about what it means to be human that are highly questionable. There's the individual versus society framing that gives a particular political perspective to Western economics, which Western economists absolutely deny. They say that they're empiricists—many do. But there are concrete philosophical foundations that are hidden by modern economics. Once the method, on the one hand, is approached and the content, on the other hand, is approached, neither makes sense. And the two together are an ideological project, if you will, and it's one of the major findings of Zen economics.

#M2

This is something that maybe also leads us into the discussion that I want to have today, which is about ideology and ingrained ideology. Economics is a wonderful example because students take these classes at thousands of universities, not just in the US, but in Europe as well, and in Japan and so on. They take these Economics 101, Micro 101, Macro 101 classes, and they're never told that what they're actually being taught is not economics in general. It's just one school of thought within the history of economic thinking. It is neoliberal, neoclassical economic theory. They're not even taught that this is what it is. I'm just worried about how many instances in scholastic learning we've got these moments when actually what we teach is ideology and not a holistic approach to the entire subject, which feeds into these ideological views that we find in newspapers time and again. Do you share that assessment too?

#M3

I really do. And the older I get and the more time that I spend reading philosophy and economics and whatnot, the more convinced I am that it's inculcation and indoctrination into ideology. The precepts of neoclassical economics are straightforward capitalist ideology. You mentioned physics earlier. The physics comes from the late 19th, early 20th century when physics models were adopted by largely American economists. They took the content that they had, which was much vaguer than might have been believed, and crammed it into these physics models, and then took the resulting product and created a theory, a method out of that.

But at its base, it's a capitalist ideology. And what I mean by that is that it's a premise of how societies are organized and how people act in the world that has very specific ideological roots. For instance, Marxism and Marxism-Leninism have a social view, whereas neoclassical economics has an individual view. The 40 years of efforts to create what are called microfoundations for neoclassical economics haven't worked. There are good reasons for that, because that's not how societies work.

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I'm laughing just because this microfoundations view builds its entire premise upon the idea that if we can reduce everything to the tiny interactions, the way everybody interacts, we can build macroeconomic models that are going to accurately predict the future. And then everybody goes, like, why did it not work the way that it is supposed to? It's like, well, because that's not how people work. They don't have perfect foresight, and there are a lot of other things they don't have. So if you build something on that kind of foundation, it's just weird that we do that. And this is still accepted dogma today, I would say, in most econ classes in the West.

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Absolutely. It is. And it really hinders the West's ability to move forward because the people who are advising those in power are educated at elite schools. I've met a number of economists from these elite schools. I went to a state school for my graduate degree in economics. But I've met a lot of people from the elite schools, and they're ideologues for the most part. That's a generalization. If you look at something like the Harvard Economics Department, it's a massive department. They've got, I believe, hundreds of people working there. So you've got a lot of different views of the world. But the people who run the Ivy League economics departments are neoclassical and many times neoliberal. They have very narrow focuses, and they're really not that interested in asking questions because they get to advise political leaders without the questions. If they ask the questions, then they're fairly well exiled from both the economics profession and from being in positions of advising political leaders.

#M2

Now, we tend to discard the role of ideology because we, of course, always assume that we ourselves are free of ideology, right? We see the world objectively as it actually is. And now what we find, especially in big publications like The New York Times and Forbes, is a lot of political issues. I mean, I would cite The Economist as a typical example of one of these neoclassical ideological school of thought outlets that then frames the world as such. But if we go to The New York Times, there's a constant framing, an ideological framing applied to everything. And the job of analysts, especially if you work in the finance profession, is to take that apart and discern between fact and fiction, right? And how stuff really works. Now, what do you think are, apart from the economics, the biggest ideological fictions that we are currently being fed with in mainstream discourse or media?

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That's a really interesting question. My take, from having a practical view of government and how government works, is that wars are the biggest areas of misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation coming from state sources. America came out of the Second World War with the fear

that the Great Depression was going to return and decided to place a lot of the make-work programs that came out of the New Deal into the military-industrial complex. Unfortunately, this has led to, as Eisenhower put it, the growth of the military-industrial complex.

But really, what we're seeing in the United States right now, and I would suggest that this is spreading into Europe like a virus, is this dependence or voluntary dependence being created in excess of what has already been established to focus Western economies on military production. And so we have a concrete basis, a material basis from which the interests of the military-industrial complex and, say, private equity funds that own a lot of the military-industrial complex are propagating. I'm old enough to have been a politically aware child during the Vietnam War and remember The New York Times from back in the day, where if The New York Times didn't say it, you really couldn't say it with conviction in public.

And so it was a kind of public filter that limited what could be said inside the United States in bourgeois society, at any rate. The New York Times, in my view, has carried on this tradition. The article that you cited from Adam Entous in the New York Times is one of two pieces he wrote on the Ukraine war that appear to me to be specifically designed to ease the transition for Americans from what we have been told by the Biden administration about an unprovoked war that was completely inexplicable outside of an insane Russian leader who wants to take over the world, which feeds into a narrative that's present in the United States.

And a lot of people react to it psychologically rather than intellectually. The New York Times has been involved in this process of reporting on wars and the military in ways that support the state narrative, and the Times has been doing this for a number of years. The Entous articles break into two parts. Adam Entous wrote the first part about the post-Maidan move of the CIA into Ukraine to the point where there are now 20 CIA facilities right up to Russia's border, which would appear to be an incitement to most people who know the history of the CIA.

And the current piece that I just wrote about takes the war from its theoretical start, from the framing of the second piece. I apologize for being so obscure there, but the author is using obscurity and a whole lot of information to, I believe, hide some of the intent of the piece. The current piece seems to me, well, its basic arguments are that, one, the United States has been much more directly involved in the day-to-day management of the war in Ukraine than has been previously known, particularly in the United States, where we get just the worst information. I believe that people outside of the United States don't understand how serious this has gotten.

So what Adam Entous is doing is he's arguing that the U.S. military was much more involved in the day-to-day operations of the war and the European partners of the United States, while not addressing NATO enlargement, without addressing the 2013-2014 coup that essentially installed U.S. puppets in the Ukrainian government. And the follow-up that Adam Entous did report in his first piece about the CIA coming in in 2016, I would argue that the CIA was already there in 2013, 2014. But taking his framing, the CIA came in in 2016 to create a Ukrainian military, which didn't really

exist. And the backfilling of that story that I've been able to uncover is that it was the coordination between MI6 and the CIA with Ukrainian fascists that goes back to the end of the Second World War.

There's this long relationship, particularly between the Brits and the Ukrainian fascists. And this was brought to bear in the Maidan coup, revolution, whatever you choose to call it. There's a very interesting guy from Canada, Professor Katchanovski, who's written about one of the seminal events of the Maidan coup. And that was the shooting by what turned out to be Ukrainian fascists of Ukrainian protesters, which was blamed on the Yanukovych government. Yanukovych was ousted as a result by the CIA and the Americans, and a new government was put into power in Ukraine.

Part of Adam Entous' project is to place the United States in decision-making positions in and around Ukraine, in Wiesbaden, Germany, and other American sites in Europe, without having to address the genesis of the conflict. And so it's very localized reporting with, I believe, this larger purpose of facilitating the move of Americans from what we were told to what will be the story that comes out once the war has ended, if it ever does end. Part of what I found interesting about the Entous pieces is, first of all, how convoluted the writing is. They're very large pieces, and it's very hard to thread together central theses because of the way that the details are placed.

And so my conclusion would be that this is partly to obscure the larger issues at stake. Entous' sources are quite interesting. In the current piece, he cites at the top of the piece, 300 interviews with military personnel, which is fine and good. At the bottom of the piece, he cites, forgive me here, the American Enterprise Institute, which is a business-friendly American think tank that writes right-wing legislation to be handed to right-wingers in the United States to be passed. It's a political organization with strong right-wing ties. And the other is, forgive me here.

I want to get it right. Institute for the Study of War, which was founded by Robert Kagan's sister-in-law, a premier American neocon. And I don't mean to make a guilt-by-association claim here, but she is an enthusiastic proponent of Robert Kagan's ideology. She's a dyed-in-the-wool neocon, and she's proud of it. So there's no point in hiding that. These are the two central sources that Entous cites at the bottom of the piece, which, frankly, I was quite surprised by. And in the first piece, he cites internet research.

#M2

Yeah. And as so often, there are also all of these unnamed sources and officials who cannot be named in order to protect their identity, right? And their ability to speak. So, I mean, the interesting thing is, of course, that these two articles, one from 2024 and then one just almost exactly a year later, 25 March, were published in the New York Times. In my own report on this, I emphasize that the New York Times is, of course, regarded as the paper of record, and such an overwhelming, huge article actually deconstructs a couple of constant narratives. For instance, the narrative that the United States is not involved in the war, right? The U.S. is not part of this war.

The article actually undoes that. And that's not to say that its author or the New York Times is doing us a favor. I mean, it's trying to, I think, as you said, narratively shift into something new to be proud of. Be proud from having not been involved but done everything for Ukraine to help them win, to being proud of having known all along that it would be difficult and having been involved all along and having been at the forefront of the defense. But that this is happening now is, of course, interesting, right? Now that any one of us who has access to sources other than The New York Times is aware that the war is lost. This thing is gone. The question is how badly will it be lost at this point, but not if it is gone.

It was going through my mind that, you know, I criticized the New York Times a lot. And I'm especially outraged by the way in which this article glorifies the U.S. having basically run the show and, you know, how the Ukrainians didn't do enough dying. They didn't die enough. They were not willing enough to actually execute these ridiculous plans, and therefore it didn't work. I'm quite disgusted by that point. But on the other hand, it was going through my mind. I mean, could he have written this article in a different way and gotten it published? What if he actually wanted to undermine the current narrative and this is just the furthest you could go within the propaganda network, right, in order to shine a little bit of light? Because actually, the article does shine some light, doesn't it?

#M3

It does. I would frame it a little bit differently, Pascal, from what's happened in the U.S. in recent decades. And that is that the way the denouement from these foreign policy catastrophes that the U.S. regularly has usually involves re-explaining what actually happened, the genesis of horrors, and then what happened afterwards that took it in a direction that the United States may or may not have wanted or expected. And so what I see the article as, and I agree with your point that had he written a different article, a more revealing article, the New York Times probably wouldn't have published it, I think almost certainly. But in my view, that makes him a tool—a tool of the propaganda system—because the New York Times holds a very special place in the U.S. propaganda ecosystem, and it has for a long time.

#M3

What I object to related to your comments about the piece is that Intus is using these local narratives, so he interviewed 300 military people. This leaves two major issues out of consideration for me. The first is that by interviewing people rather than reporting facts, he hasn't assigned or correlated facts with what the people are saying. This is part of a trend in the United States where what is reported is what people say. Therefore, if you look at what's been said about the war in Ukraine, it explains why nobody in the United States knows anything about the truth of what's actually happened there. The other point is that given the special place in the U.S. propaganda

ecosystem that the New York Times represents, just being a functionary there isn't good enough. For instance, Chris Hedges, who's a popular commentator on the internet in the United States and used to have shows on RT and whatnot, has... I forget where I was going with that.

#M2

I mean, he constantly tries to tell what happened on the ground, right? I mean, he actually went to Iraq and so on, and he tells the story of what kind of things happened on the ground, and then he interviews people about it, and he gives both. But, yeah, as you said, just interviewing people and telling their stories doesn't do justice to reporting.

#M3

Right. And so I did recover what I was going to say, which is along the lines of what you're saying here, which is that Chris resigned from The New York Times rather than do their bidding. He understood his role, and he couldn't do it anymore. I've met Chris, and he's a nice guy, very interesting guy, but he did have integrity. And so this is what I would say about Intus. First of all, I don't grant Intus good intentions here. When I look at his sources, Robert Kagan's sister-in-law and the American Enterprise Institute, I disagree. As an independent writer, I would greatly qualify those sources.

And I frankly don't believe that they're very strong sources for an article as involved as these articles are on the Ukraine war. They're not specialists in foreign policy. They're not specialists in the Ukraine war. And they're not citizen reporters who have learned enough to say something that's interesting and plausible about the wars. And so I'm sympathetic to Intus and to The New York Times. But they need to be held to account for their role in this propaganda system. The United States is currently involved in one grotesque slaughter in Ukraine, which has to end. It must be ended. This is a moral imperative. I apologize for expressing opinion here, but it's a moral imperative.

The war never should have started, and it needs to be ended. It could be ended fairly quickly, but the narrative in the United States, partially thanks to The New York Times, is so convoluted that we cannot straighten this out. The Trump administration doesn't appear to know anything that's true about the war. Hopefully, they can get past themselves to resolve it, because it could be resolved fairly quickly. I see The New York Times piece once again as facilitating the political move from the narrative that the war was unprovoked and that Russia is an unrepentant imperialist intent on invading Europe to the facts of the war that include 30 years of NATO enlargement and active U.S. participation in the Maidan Revolution, if you care to call it that.

I would call it a coup, given the acts of the National Endowment for Democracy, which is a cutout of the CIA in Ukraine. And so I see both pieces as an effort to settle the post-war narratives in ways that admit the minimum amount that can be admitted for the accounts to be plausible, while obscuring the longer-term causes and the greater consequences of the war behind what appears to

be, particularly from the latest piece, 11th-grade history writing. This is quite in line with what I read in high school: low-quality historical reporting that's reporting what this general said versus what that general said, rather than putting the facts to the test of whether they correspond with what actually happened.

#M2

I agree with you. And when I said maybe entities had more subversive objectives, I don't think that was the case. It was just going through my mind. It's like, what is the level of the sayable, or what's outside of the narrative, the corridor within which entities like The New York Times and other propaganda newspapers operate, right? What is being, what is sayable, and also, you know, what the editors will sign off on and what they would say, like, no, no, no, this cannot be published because that must happen, right? Or rewrites, major rewrites must happen in such pieces because the editors would think, like, no, no, no, that's a bridge too far. We do not want to rub anyone the wrong way. We don't want to lose any sources.

We don't want to. In general, we would look ridiculous if we wrote that, right? So, because the piece itself establishes to me the level to which the United States was running the show, not only since 2022, but since way before. And, you know, militarily, how far that went. I didn't actually—I had a hunch about it, but I never had any kind of, you know, anything that I could point to and tell anyone who tells me, "But, you know, Pascal, it's only the Russians and not the Americans, you know, and it's the Russians and the Ukrainians fighting, right? The Americans are not involved." And now we have this piece, and we can show, like, no, these decisions and the targets were chosen in Wiesbaden, in Germany, by the general staff, the US general staff, right?

And then transmitted, and the Ukrainians executed, right? This is an astounding level of detail, especially because the whole U.S. narrative at the beginning was that we are not involved. I mean, we are not a party to the war. We are supportive, but we are not a party to it. And secondly, right now, even right now, the mainstream narrative is that the United States is a third party, right, trying to help, to mediate, which is built upon the earlier narrative. Although we know now, and I appreciate that Washington is talking to Moscow, they are the main actors, right? They are the top-level warfighting entities. Ukraine is just the implementation partner. So that's what the article actually admits in detail.

#M3

I agree with that, Val. I believe that both pieces are revelatory. It was good information to be put into the public realm that the CIA moved in in 2016 and organized the Ukrainian fascists into a Ukrainian army and meanwhile built out 20 facilities right up to Russia's border with which to attack Russia, because these are definite provocations. Absent the demonization, the Cold War

demonization of the Soviet Union, which I lived through, and then the recent Second Cold War demonization of Russia and Vladimir Putin, the way that Americans are hearing these points is tilted towards the Cold War understanding of the US-Russia, US-Soviet Union relationship here.

And I think this is tremendously dangerous. Friends that I have, American Democrats, they don't know any true facts about the war in Ukraine. They're not interested in true facts. And I don't mean that my facts are true facts. I mean that in the public realm, there are a set of facts about NATO expansion, the George Washington University, what did Gorbachev hear, archive. There are good sources for people who care to educate themselves, but Americans are so propagandized right now. It's truly frightening, Pascal. I was born in America. I've lived here all my life. And the amount of disinformation and misinformation that's been cast about really colors the way that interest pieces would be read.

And so if you and I read them with the background that I've considered NATO expansion, I've paid close attention to the development of the war and whatnot. That isn't what Americans have done. And so the way that I'm reading into these pieces is backfilled with information about how the war started and how it's been prosecuted. And the ordinary New York Times readers aren't going to read it that way. And it pains me to say this because I speak with these people. This is my class, my friends, and whatnot. But they take the Cold War view, and they color everything in Cold War terms.

And so my take is that, yes, these articles are admitting basic facts, basic facts for possibly you and me who need to see this out in the open. But they don't interrupt the psychology that has been created in the United States that supports these wars pretty much without equivocation. The tide is turning slowly. And so I'm not saying the articles have no value, and I give them credit in that sense. The problem that I have is with how much disinformation has been handed to the American people so far that the filter is going to be, well, this is interesting military history. Let's keep this war going. And because it's not anti-war, it's very pro-war. It's pro-war.

#M2

It's very much, you know, also heroic and patriotic. And if just more support had been given and if just the things had been correctly executed, it's very much war-supporting, right? And it paints a beautiful picture of the generals, right, who with all their heart tried to help if only the Ukrainians had done it right.

#M3

So that's a good synopsis. And the question back would be, I mean, where does this leave the Ukrainians and the Russians? Because the estimates I've heard are between a million and a million and a half Ukrainians who have been slaughtered so far. And the Russians have wasted blood and treasure in a war that easily could have been prevented before it started. The Minsk Accords could have been adhered to. The Istanbul Agreement could have not been stopped. There are so many

times along the way when this could have gone in a different direction. And there would have been a million Ukrainians still alive if this war had been stopped by the Istanbul Agreement. And so it's true.

This makes me sad because, like I said, I'm American. I was born in America. But this is inexcusable behavior. It needs to end. The United States needs to end these wars. And so I believe that had there been a more robust exposé of what's going on here that included the NATO enlargement and at least questions around the coup, who was there and who wasn't. Jeff Sachs, he spoke with people who were there as part of the National Endowment for Democracy. He swears that it was a coup. I agree with it. The intercepted phone call from Victoria Nuland has the United States putting a coup government in place in Ukraine. And so there's all this information.

There are these different paths that these conflicts include, what's happening in Israel and America's wars here, of course. And it pains me that we can't get to some truth and reconciliation moment of realizing what America has done and turning the United States in a different direction. What's really sad about this is that the leadership of the United States is counting on military production to be the economic engine of the United States going forward, along with AI. So there are some really weak bets here for a declining empire. The panic is setting in, and Intus' piece just seems like lightweight talk, a problem for admitting partial truths without getting to the major truths that these wars are unjust and need to be stopped.

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I completely agree. And the thing to me is, you know, in the Cold War and in the early '90s still, in order to deconstruct the political processes in the Soviet Union and to understand how decision-making happened, what people had to resort to, because the archives were not open, was the study of the propaganda, right? That the regime, the Pravdas, and so on publicized. And you do that by knowing that these outlets are doing this propaganda with the okay from the top, and they say the sayable and so on. And then you try to reason backward, right? And in a sense, we are at this point now in the West, right? We have to reason backward in order to understand where the political process actually is factoring in, you know, the other things that can be known by, you know, reporters on the ground that actually post stuff on Telegram and so on and listening to the other side, right? But we have to piece it together. The thing to me, we used a very important sentence, and that's blood and treasure.

And blood and treasure is a very American way of understanding what the costs of war are. But to me, it's like, isn't the Ukraine war and some of the other wars, but especially the Ukraine war, the epitome, like the pinnacle, of the U.S. having learned how to use treasure inside its own economy to fuel its own economy and not paying any blood, zero drops of American blood, in order to fight an entire war? I mean, in terms of military rationale, it's actually done in a very evil way, very brilliantly, that you do that. And this is still being camouflaged at the moment with this kind of framing of what the war was about.

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Absolutely. One of the first pieces that I wrote after the start of the war suggested that the United States start a military draft right away and put Americans into the fight. My goal wasn't to inflict American troops on Ukraine and against Russia. It was to make the point that these proxy wars are grotesque and that if it is an American war, then Americans need to fight it. If it's not worth having Americans fight it, then it's not worth doing. As an American and a longtime anti-war activist, when I heard Americans saying, "This is wonderful, we can get all these Ukrainians to die for us, and we don't have to send Americans to die over there," it reminded me of ethnic and racial attitudes that emerged from the Second World War that are untenable.

The idea that, in my view, a Ukrainian life is worth an American life, is worth a Chinese life, is worth a Russian life. I've got this universalist sense of this, but this isn't the American way. And hearing the American politicians crow about how we've gotten this great deal out of a million people dying, I'm frankly at a loss to understand where that psychology, that worldview, comes from. But it's prevalent in the United States, and I believe that it's important for people outside of the United States to understand how far down the rabbit hole the U.S. has really gone here with these wars and with the efforts at legitimating them that make the United States a pariah on the international scene.

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It would be especially important for all of the US allies to understand what they are in the eyes of Washington. They are expendable tools, right? And they're not going to be defended. They're going to be used to fight Washington's wars, and they're going to be bled dry. So this is the important lesson here to me, which is not to say that you need to flip against them and fight the United States, not at all. It's just like, do not be a tool, right? You will suffer like the Ukrainians. And by the way, I had another talk with the great historian David Gibbs. He said, like, you know, the blueprint for Ukraine is Afghanistan in the '80s, right? The provoked Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I mean, that's where a lot of this is coming from, and the tactics of it are coming from. And this proxy war fighting is most detrimental, actually, to the abused proxy. So I wonder how to get that story into the mainstream and that realization that being an ally is very, very dangerous, actually.

#M3

As Henry Kissinger said in a now well-known quote, being America's enemy is dangerous, but being America's friend is fatal. And the man knew; he was part of the process of making it fatal. Part of what I have a real challenge with is the inside-outside view from the U.S. Because I'm inside the U.S., I hear the propaganda, and I speak with people to get a sense of what they know and don't know about the wars and whatnot. Then I look at what's going on in Germany and France, Europe essentially, which seems fairly catastrophic. I did an interview at the start of the war where I predicted this in the United States. So it's not just Ukraine here. I believe that France and Germany

have really been set up and have unfortunate political leadership that facilitated being set up, but this is an international crisis.

And one of the problems with starting these types of wars is that there's no way to see what direction they're going to take once they're underway. And so, for instance, if Donald Trump can't actually stop this war in Ukraine, then it's going to continue. And to what effect? There's no good purpose for the United States continuing it. There's no good purpose for European so-called partners and NATO participating with the United States in continuing it. It's something that needs to be ended. But the United States creates these perpetual motion wars where nobody will take the political hit for ending them.

And so they just continue going. And I watched this from Richard Nixon with the Vietnam War to today, where with a more straightforward political system and a more straightforward view of the world, you just speak with competing powers, as Vladimir Putin does fairly well, and work it out. And it's going to be painful for everybody, but the American political leadership does not like pain, and they do not want to take a hit for stopping, ending these wars, because then, and this gets to the Entous piece as well, the pictures start flooding out of how destroyed Ukraine is.

The news starts coming out about Ukraine, how horrific the violence has been, how much has been destroyed, and it changes the sense of the wars. And so there's this incentive for the politicians to just keep it going. My sense with the Ukraine war, as I wrote in peace, is that the Trump administration wants a war in West Asia and that they are consolidating military forces and supplies and materiel and whatnot in order to push that forward. But both of these efforts need to be ended quite quickly for the sake of the world. And they're in the process of taking on a life beyond which the United States cannot control them.

#M2

Yeah, I agree again completely. It's just the question of how do you end that? Because it seems to me, after all of this discussion, that politicians like Donald Trump and Joe Biden and others are really just part of an entire system that by now is really, really good at producing war. And, you know, the British former comedian and now commentator, what's his name? Black long hair—I know who you mean—Russell Brand. He said once about a year ago—I can't find it anymore, but he said it and he coined this—he said these people are just the fleas, the flea on the fur of the back of the dog of war. The flea on the fur of the back of the dog of war.

Because the entire thing is a system, right? And you have the military-industrial-congressional-think-tank-media complex. You have the lobbying groups. You have the monetary schemes, right, that go around and that produce these incentive structures. You have the New York Times and others who cover all of this. And then you have the politicians who sit there basically not because they're brilliant

but because they managed to climb and they were pushed into these positions. And the system has figured out how to use all of this MIC-produced stuff that then feeds again into economic Keynesianism and booms, which then keeps itself alive.

So in a sense, if you want to end the warmongering, what you need to change is not the outside. Of course, what you need to change is the system on the inside. And I wonder if Donald Trump actually, even without understanding all of this on a level, started to comprehend that the inside is the problem. Because one thing he did was to dismantle the USAID. And there are other institutions that would need to be dismantled or regulated. Let's say also lobbying would need to be fundamentally restructured in order to change these incentive structures. What other institutions inside the US do you think would need to be changed in order to dismantle the dog of war?

#M3

Rule by capital needs to be dismantled, and that's a heavy lift, no doubt about it. So one of my thoughts would be, I'm not averse to seeing the stock market go down quite a bit. Like I said earlier, I work in finance, and fair value for the stock market is about half of the current value. The stock market has been in a bubble for the last essentially 30 years, or serial bubbles, bubbles and crashes. And this is Fed policy, Federal Reserve in the United States. But what this does is the richest 1% of the American population owns over half of the stock market, and the richest 10% of the American population, which is a lot of people, owns 90%. And so one of the arguments that I've made over the years with my background in economics is that financial capitalism is a redistribution mechanism.

So banks are given the ability to create money out of thin air, the balance of an agreement to repay a loan against the creation of the money, and the money is distributed into the financial system. And this goes to the oligarchs, the 1% that owns the stock market. For instance, Federal Reserve policy in the United States is set up to be explained as in the broad interest of the people of the United States when it's in the interest of a few oligarchs and really not much more. It really is bizarre that there's this much focus on a stock market that creates the image that the rich and the poor have similar lots, have lots that are tied together when they actually aren't. So disempowering the control by money in the United States would be one possible route.

And I believe it's an important one because as long as a few dozen people have all the money, they're going to control Western political economy. And this is how it's worked out, as a matter of fact. So Donald Trump likely won't be allowed to run again, and he doesn't have to win another election. He already has Miriam Adelson's \$150 million. I believe that she's given him close to over half a billion dollars combined in two campaigns. So he can say, you know, take your genocide, and we're just not going to do it. We're going to have a negotiated settlement. Just reading the news earlier, Steve Witkoff just partially blew up the Iran negotiations by going back to no nuclear program. So the back and forth with resolving the Israel-Iran-West Asia issue is being pointlessly complicated, and it appears to be rendered unfeasible.

It's been rendered unfeasible. Hopefully, that's wrong. It's just a momentary disruption in otherwise successful negotiations that benefit both parties. But the way that it looks right now, it's hard to see how, from the American political perspective, politicians are going to be incentivized to change direction. Donald Trump came in promising to end the wars, and he sold himself as a peace candidate. Unfortunately, I predicted that he would see himself this way, but that once he got into office, the complications would be brought and handed to him.

One such complication that I mentioned earlier, Pascal, because I think that it's really important, is that the United States, after deindustrializing through NAFTA in the 1970s, and then further deindustrializing when China was admitted to the World Trade Organization in the year 2000, has artificial intelligence as economic engines. The United States has a truly tragic tech industry that has dedicated its efforts to surveilling the people of the United States and the world for political purposes, or at least availing their technologies of surveillance to people with political purposes. And so the unwind from the United States inside the United States is really complicated, as you said earlier.

But I think somehow redistributing, reorienting the economy so that power is shifted down from a few oligarchs to the people would remove the incentive that American politicians currently have to launch these wars. If oligarchs are disempowered, then Miriam Adelson isn't going to be giving Donald Trump \$150 million or \$600 million. The other oligarchs aren't going to be funding these campaigns. And then the politicians aren't going to be so interested in what they have to say. So I would suggest a material basis to rethinking Western political economy. And my other suggestion has been to establish not a competing government in waiting, but a group of politicians, anti-war politicians. My perspective is the left, Marxist-Leninist, but it should be a very broad-based coalition, no dogmatism here, that is willing to take a different direction, but have them familiar with the subject matter.

I think Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate, would be a wonderful person for this, but have them ready so that when the crisis that I believe is coming hits, a combination of the world dissolving in unexpected ways and the economy not responding to Mr. Trump's programs the way that he is suggesting that the response will be, I believe that there will be an opening for an alternative to the existing worldview that could be brought to power and that would have, in contrast to Donald Trump's view of making a few oligarchs rich, a broad populist, Marxist-Leninist, however you want to say it, perspective that is looking after all of us. That is setting as its goal a flattening of economic power so that the politics can be brought down, flattened, so that these wars can be ended and so that oligarchs no longer run the West.

#M2

I would very much welcome that, and we'll continue thinking about it and observing it, because I do think that the US system is currently at an inflection point. I hope it's not a civil war. There are some commentators, especially on the conservative side, who predict a civil war. I hope it's not that,

because it's absolutely horrible, of course. But some form of systemic change is probably around the corner. Rob, for people who want to find your writing, they should go to CounterPunch and to your Substack. Any other place where people should find you?

#M3

I occasionally write for Naked Capitalism, which is an economics and politics website. I'm going to work on distributing my writing more broadly. At the CounterPunch site, I have about 280 articles that I've written over the years that have been published there. For those who are interested in the development of Western political thinking over the last 15 years or so, that's a good resource. I also write fairly reliably at Substack, and new readers are welcome. That is roburie.substack.com.

#M2

Everybody, you'll find that also in the link in the description below. Rob Urie, thank you very much for your time today.

#M3

Hey, thank you, Pascal.