

# The Great Simplification

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Chuck Watson (00:00):

Let's be really, really clear and honest with ourselves here, we are at war with Russia under international law. There's been no declarations of it, but by providing targeting, by having our military personnel providing specific intelligence, Russia has every right already under international law. Leaving aside the issue of whether the invasion is right or wrong, none of that matters, the simple point is we are combatants in this conflict.

Nate Hagens (00:32):

Today I'm welcoming back to the program my colleague, Chuck Watson. Chuck's been on the show five or six times highlighting geopolitics, war, particulars about nuclear weapons and the risk homeostasis that we've all taken for granted these last decades on the nuclear situation, and particularly what's been happening in Ukraine in often prescient detail over the last couple years.

(00:59):

Why did I ask Chuck to come back on? Because we are slowly moving from a proxy war to potentially an open war, and most of us are kind of asleep. Things have kind of slowed down in Ukraine. Not to Ukrainians, they haven't. We've lost 400, 500,000 Ukrainian humans in this war.

(01:24):

But recently, France, Poland, and others are making noise about directly involving their troops, their equipment moving into the arena, which would potentially trigger Article 5, Russia would retaliate, and then we are quite potentially off to the escalatory races as Chuck has talked about before.

(01:53):

So as much as I'm an energy, systems, finance, ecology analyst, I think geopolitics of this sort is the mother of all risks, and I feel a fiduciary to share what's going on to the followers and hopefully decision-makers among you.

(02:11):

Why should we listen to Chuck Watson? Chuck worked on the technical aspects of international relations and foreign policy for over 30 years, starting on detached duty from the U.S. Air Force to the State Department and National Security Council in the Middle East under Robert McFarland and Donald Rumsfeld.

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(02:34):

Then in the 1990s and 2000s, designing foreign aid projects around the world, coordinating the use of declassified Soviet and American Cold War spy data, and more recently climate change studies and other natural hazard models, all at the intersection of military aid, intelligence worlds, economics, technology and foreign policy. He's one of the few people that I trust on this topic, and I think this is a really important topic. Please welcome Chuck Watson.

(03:20):

Good morning, Chuck.

Chuck Watson (03:22):

Good morning, Nate. It's a wonderful spring day with all the pollen coating everything, so if I seem reddish or yellowish, it's from the pollen.

Nate Hagens (03:33):

I have very sticky hands right now, which you wouldn't know because they're off-screen, because I just had to squish a bunch of grapes to feed them to my ducks because the full grapes are too big for their mouth, but they love grapes.

Chuck Watson (03:45):

Oh, neat.

Nate Hagens (03:47):

With that aside, the ducks and the spring are beautiful, but we are in a world of unseen, unfelt peril, which those of my viewers that have seen your four or five conversations with me are aware of. Things behind the scenes are seemingly getting urgent, and I wanted to touch base with you and bring us up to speed on what's going on and what's relevant.

(04:17):

So just as a little bit of way of backdrop leading up to the present moment, Western leaders have always said this war is about Russian aggression, and the NATO efforts are defending the international order, democracy, and the people of Ukraine. Is this really the case? And what is this war ultimately really about from your systems historical analyst perspective?

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Chuck Watson (04:49):

Yeah. Nate, that's a great question, because if you're going to craft solutions to a problem, you've got to start with what's the underlying basis.

(04:58):

And when you get right down to it, this is like a lot of great geopolitical crises over human history. When you get down to it, it's about resources, it's about revenge, it's about history. And part of it is in order to get support, and it's a lot about domestic politics, there's an attempt to make this about this wonderful crusade of democracy and whatever, and also to make it a coherent narrative across Europe and the US.

(05:35):

But Europe, the US and even within Europe, there are a lot of very distinctive reasons why this conflict has gone forward. And most of them really don't have that much to do with Ukraine. Ukraine ultimately is a civil war. Again, you don't have to go back to the rise of the amphibians like Vladimir Putin does in his three-hour discussions of history. But it is important to realize that Ukraine, the very name Ukraine, means borderlands in old Slavonic. And in Russian, modern Russian, Ukraina means outskirts.

(06:13):

And the reason it has that name is it is a borderland. It's between the Slavic [world](#), Europe. Even within the Slavic world it's kind of a boundary area, and the various parts of it have been controlled by Poland, by Hungary, Romania, Russia over the centuries.

(06:32):

So you've got different cultures, different histories. So you look at Eastern Ukraine as more Russian affiliated. Northwestern Ukraine is more Polish, Southwestern is more Romanian or Hungarian.

(06:48):

And so when you look at how we got where we are, to skip over a lot of that history, it boils down to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The boundaries of the old Soviet Republic were used but it really threw together a bunch of people who historically are different and haven't lived together, they have different cultures, different languages, different attachments.

(07:10):

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And they could have lived and wanted to live together peacefully, they were trying to build a federal republic, but quite frankly, the US and West decided, particularly the US and Great Britain decided that this was a great opportunity to further weaken and disrupt Russia. And so they took some existing tensions which would've been worked out domestically, politically if Ukrainians had been left alone, we interfered, caused it to disintegrate into a civil war.

(07:40):

So where we are now is to the underlying reasons why. Again, resources. And a lot of that boils down to China. And one of the things that I think we should mention at some point is this RAND report that came out in February is pretty fascinating because it's obsessed with China. You listen to US leadership, there's this obsession with the rise of China.

(08:03):

And of course China is an economic powerhouse at the moment, but what they don't have are resources. What Russia has are resources, tremendous natural resources. We've discussed that before. The oil, the mineral resources are an incredible fraction. Food. You look at wheat production and all the things we've discussed in other podcasts.

(08:26):

So from the US standpoint, it's about controlling those resources partly for profit, partly for our corporations, but a lot of it is a game of keep away because we don't want China to have access to those resources.

(08:41):

You look at some of the other players, France. You look at the French president now is making some very provocative statements, and that's a lot about revenge because Russia has been helping various African countries that were former French colonies to gain more independence from France. Partly that's a diplomatic move on the part of Russia, it's also helping China out.

(09:06):

It's helping to further compartmentalize, in a way, the world economy and get it away from US domination. And so that's helping China. That's one reason why China supports Russia so much, is that not just Russian resources, but Russia is creating a world where China has more interference-free access to African resources. You look at Eastern Europe, that's just pure revenge and history.

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(09:38):

We like to talk about something called periodization when we do these kind of analyses. When do you start history? And in the Middle East that's a huge thing because you start with the formation of Israel. Do you go back to biblical times? Same thing in Eastern Europe is okay, who first killed whose family is what this boils down to. Particularly with Poland, because Poland and Russia have a long history of conflict.

(10:03):

Poland and Ukraine, the Polish people in large part, particularly in Southern Poland, they hate the Ukrainians only slightly less than they hate the Russians. The Volhynian massacre during World War II is still a very bitter memory on the part of the Poles.

(10:20):

And then you look at the UK has a long history, the Great Game. Britain feels like a lot of its fall in the late 1800s and problems was as a result of Russia and that competition and of course the Crimean War, and we have the Charge of the Light Brigade. There's a long history of war between Russia and the UK.

(10:44):

And Germany has history as well. And of course the recent with World War II, there's still amongst the German military a certain bitterness over that. They feel like they should have won and defeated Russia, or the Soviet Union at the time, but they still see it as Russia, and there's a very complex psychology there.

(11:05):

And finally, what's particularly fascinating to me in one way is this what you would call the values argument, the Western post-Christian values versus the more traditional Eastern European and particularly Russian values is expressed through the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Christianity.

(11:28):

So US domestic politics splits out kind of the same way that Russia is the convenient enemy. We don't have a lot of economic connections. We can do sanctions against Russia. It doesn't really hurt the US, it's catastrophic for Europe, but it doesn't really hurt the US that much. China we can't do. If we did serious sanctions against China it would wreck the US economy.

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So again, you get down to why is there war with Russia? It's the usual stuff, it's resources, the high-sounding democracy, and those sorts of things are just a cover.

Nate Hagens (12:07):

Had we aired this interview, what you just said, two years ago, most people wouldn't have believed it, but you have continually kind of had prescience on what's going on. Let's hope you don't have too much prescience with your articulation of nuclear missiles, or at least your worry about that.

(12:29):

But I think it's starting to be seen that this narrative of this is about defending the Ukrainian people and democracy is becoming a little unbelievable, given that I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have lost their lives by the extension of this conflict, which apparently was attempted to be...peace treaty made almost two years ago, and the British government apparently scuttled it.

(13:03):

But for me, I like to follow the news and I like to think I'm an analytical, clever person that can disseminate signal to noise. But this particular issue, NATO, Russia in Ukraine had really opened my eyes, and thanks to you and half a dozen other people that showed me that what's happening isn't what we're hearing in the media. And so I've learned that, and I think people that have listened to your prior conversations have also paid attention to that.

(13:43):

Let me drill down on one thing you said so that I can understand it. How is France versus China and access to resources in Africa, mechanically what do you mean by that? Can you give a tangible example of how what Russia is doing impacts France economically or in a material or resource way?

Chuck Watson (14:11):

Yeah, this gets into a whole, we may have to channel Putin and go back in history here at least somewhat, because if you look at France's relationship with Africa, France had a lot of extractive colonies in Africa. After World War II it was forced to give up a lot of those colonies, but when it did, it did so under extremely favorable trade concessions.

(14:39):

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And some people call it neocolonialism. There's a fair amount of resentment about it in Africa, and that France in particular has been quite aggressive in maintaining military forces in Africa. Of course there was the famous, the conflicts over Algeria, and that's a bit of history that folks that are interested should explore. But if you look particularly Central Africa, the Francophone areas of Africa. They have a long history with France in the sense of France dominating their internal politics, manipulating the internal politics through economic levers to try to keep leaders in place who would maintain that extractive colonial relationship. So the specific example, of course would be uranium and as we know France is very dependent on its nuclear energy for electricity and where does that uranium come from? Well, there's not a lot of it in France. It comes from Africa. There could be alternative supplies in Europe and where are those supplies located? Oh, let me think. They're in Russia and Ukraine. So you can see where this becomes a real problem for France in that within France, there's a number of revolutionary movements that are coming to a fore that are trying to get a more equitable basis of their trade relationships with Europe and with France.

(16:06):

And so more equitable means your profit margins drop and you don't have direct control over central resources. So that was one of the points I just mentioned, resources and control are so critical and with France in particular has developed a very toxic relationship with Russia. Because Russia through some of its proxy... I say proxy, some of the corporate paramilitaries like Wagner Group, there's the Z Force group is another one there's some others. That they have been assisting, providing security assistance and training to a lot of these groups in Africa and recently a number of countries have thrown France out and have changed their economic and trade relationships. It's been a cascade across Central Africa. So France obviously resents that a lot, they have been pumping both material but also it's no longer really in Ukraine a proxy war. We're now in a secret open war between some parties in Europe, the US and Russia and a good example of that is France. There have been French foreign legion forces within Ukraine helping with the SCALP missile targeting and providing assistance.

(17:27):

Well, Russia eventually got tired of that and hit one of their big staging areas and killed a number of French foreign legionnaires a few weeks ago. It hasn't gotten a lot of coverage in the West. That may have been the proximate trigger for Macron's recent comments and the spiral of escalation in that France was using Ukraine to

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extract revenge against Russia for Russian diplomatic and security help for these former French colonies, which cuts off their potential access to resources.

Nate Hagens (17:59):

So getting back to the two wars, there's the kinetic war and then there's the propaganda media war. We're now getting as usual conflicting messages about the progress of this war. Russia's weak, Ukraine needs only a little more help to win so we send them more missiles and F-16s and funding versus Russia is now about to attack NATO and blitzkrieg all the way through Europe. Can you give an update how things stand according to your analysis and information? Who's winning? Who's losing? What's the situation?

Chuck Watson (18:43):

Well, first off let's be really clear. The big losers in this situation are the people of Ukraine, the civilians caught in the middle of this. Most of them, the ones in the west probably would prefer to be under Russia, the ones in the east... And by the way that was not true 15 years ago. 15 years ago I think if you had... And you look at the polling, and the majority of people in Ukraine wanted to be an independent country but not forced to choose between Russia and the West. They wanted economic ties with Russia, cultural ties, because to give you an idea, Nate, of how crazy this is. The current head of the Ukrainian military, his parents live in Moscow, his brother I think lives in St. Petersburg or whatever, his family is Russian. They now hate each other, this is a battle of brothers. This is more akin to the US Civil War than it is World War II where you have Germany invading other countries.

Nate Hagens (19:49):

Do we have an estimate of how many Ukrainian civilians and military humans have died since the beginning?

Chuck Watson (20:00):

The numbers are all over the place. My estimate is that in terms of dead and permanently disabled it's probably on the order of 500 to 700,000 and you can cross check this with... if you look at satellite imagery you can see acres and acres of fresh cemeteries. If you monitor the various social media within Ukraine private chat groups, you can't discuss this publicly because the Ukrainian special forces will hunt you down if you talk about this openly. But if you get access through friends of relatives it's



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catastrophic, there's tremendous casualties. And by the way you don't see that on the Russian side. You're not seeing any indications that...certainly there's casualties, it's probably in the tens of thousands, not in the hundreds of thousands. So there's a huge asymmetry and that gets to your question about how's the war going. Ukraine-

Nate Hagens (21:25):

And by the way, I wouldn't have known that. Based on what I read in the media I wouldn't believe what you just said.

Chuck Watson (21:33):

Well, it's interesting because look at BBC for instance and the BBC English service reports radically different numbers than the BBC Russian service does. And the reason is any Russian speaker would look at BBC Russian and look at the numbers and go, "Yeah, that's about right." 50,000, something like that. You look at BBC English and they're saying hundreds of thousands of Russian casualties, but no Russian would believe that or no Russian speaker would believe that because there's no secondary signs of it. You would see it, you would see the reports of families, you would see... Again, if you're an analyst like me that has access to high resolution satellite data you would be looking and going where's the cemeteries? It's just not there, and so that's where this gets to a point, Nate, that I think is so critical. The problem is I say stuff like that and as you know, in the early days and I withdrew from public speaking about this to a large extent, because you were immediately trashed as being some Putin fanboy or Russian agent or something and I had people asking me how much the KGB was paying me, which of course bust out laughing because KGB is internal security in Russia now. I correct them and say it's the SVR, that's their foreign intelligence service and then they get even more angry because you know so much about Russia you must be a Russian. Anyone who knows anything about Russia must be a Russian agent seems to be the logic of the day, but that's a real problem-

Nate Hagens (23:05):

Well, to point it out you were a Russian expert when you worked for the US government back in the day and I'll just say for the record. I know that you would rather not do these conversations, and we discussed yesterday about how urgent things are and you felt a fiduciary to share this information because all we can do is what we can do. We're just a couple of humans that care about the future of complex life and that's why we're trying to share this information with other and hopefully

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rational minds can integrate this and result in better decisions. But sorry to interrupt, keep going.

Chuck Watson (23:45):

No, no, I think Nate that's a great point. It's probably worth spending a few seconds here to discuss that. Because a lot of people that are speaking out on this... I say a lot, there's some and I don't want to name names but they are Russophiles. I mean they like Putin, they like... And I don't want to say authoritarian, it's a little you get into political arguments over things. But I study, I was being trained as what we used to jokingly call ourselves demonologists to study the Soviet Union and yeah, there's aspects of Russian culture and the language is fascinating and that's an aspect of it. But I'm an American, I love this country, I love my civilization and I don't want it to go up in a bright flash of 3000 degree light. And so it's like most cultures, understanding a culture, understanding a world leader doesn't mean you agree with them. It just means that you're trying to see whether or not their arguments are valid and demonizing the other as you well know is a long human technique to try to gain support for conflict.

(25:03):

Because inherently you'd walk the streets of Moscow, you talk to people, guess what? Their concerns are no different from the average American and you go in Ukraine the same way. And to get back to your question about who's losing, again the people of Ukraine and you ask about casualties because they're caught in the middle. It was a civil conflict that could have been resolved peacefully, because of outside interference it turned into a civil war which evolved into a proxy war briefly but now it's a secret war in the essence. Yeah, Ukrainians are largely the ones fighting it and by the way on that point I do need to sneak in here. The majority of the casualties and the majority of the forces fighting in Ukraine on the Russian side are, "Ukrainian." They're the militias of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic, which are now part of Russia. But it's those militias that originally formed in 2014 to resist the attempt to de-Russophy Eastern Ukraine. They're the main ones fighting, so essentially you could argue they're fighting for their own liberation.

Nate Hagens (26:27):

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Wait a minute. So a substantial or even a meaningful percentage of Russia's forces engaged in this war are from the Eastern oblast Ukrainian regions themselves fighting against what were not so long ago their own countrymen?

Chuck Watson (26:45):

Exactly, yeah. That's one of the dirty little secrets of this conflict, you go back to 2014. Now what you'll hear is well, these Ukrainian ultra-nationalists who by the way are largely from Western Ukraine and are actually largely of either Banderist or Polish affiliate but that's a different argument. If you look at the way it shaked out and the way that the revolution in 2014 started, it was indigenous and Ukrainian nationalists will say it was Russians that were infiltrated from Russia it wasn't real, "Ukrainians." Well, then what are you going to say about the current head of their military? His family lives in Russia.

Nate Hagens (27:31):

I want to continue on this question of who's winning and who's losing and what's the current situation, but I wanted to briefly recap a story. You know I was just in India, I was in a town called Auroville which is an international community to begin with. But I met people there from Russia, people from all over the place and it's in times like that there's this fellowship of humans that realize that our governments are crazy and there's power dynamics. But they just like music and good food and community and the same things like you were saying everywhere. But what was interesting is of the three Russians I met in India, two of them when I first met them they were staying at my little hostel. They introduced themselves and said they were from Germany. I said, "Oh, it sounds like you have a Russian or Ukrainian accent." "Well, yeah, I'm living in Germany now." They were afraid knowing that I was American to introduce themselves as Russians and after a day or two we became fast friends. I went biking with this woman Olga often, I learned a lot about their culture.

(28:52):

They're the same as people in Wisconsin and Minnesota at that level was my take anyways.

Chuck Watson (29:00):

That's absolutely right, and in fact that was kind of the point in why when we start our discussions we'll end up talking about the pollen or the cats or something like that.

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Nate Hagens (29:12):

Yeah.

Chuck Watson (29:13):

And that's how most discussions between two human beings, whether they're Chinese or Russian or German or whatever.

Nate Hagens (29:24):

And this is what... Well, we would normally talk about dogs in your case it would be cats. But this is what ultimately gives me hope is deep down there is a brotherhood of the common human being. There's the scaffolding of the war and the power and all that that is imposed, especially in an era where we've come accustomed to a huge amount of energy surplus and that may be flattening or declining. So that energizes our in-group, out-group dynamics and that's what's going on right now. But it does give me hope. There are Ukrainian people who follow and comment on my podcast and I have to copy-paste and put it into Google Translate to see what they're saying. But there is an awakening of humanity of the stakes of our times that does continue to give me hope despite all these bottlenecks ahead of us. Sorry for that. Although it's important, I think, please get back to the current situation. I guess there are three things, right? There's the proxy war, you just referred to it as an open secret war, and then there's an open not secret war, but an open public war. Are we headed there? What's the situation?

Chuck Watson (30:51):

Well, you look at Macron's comments recently, and it is hard to say what's going on and how much real support there is for this. But Poland has been negotiating with Ukraine for the last 18 months basically about moving their own forces into, and apparently there are already significant Polish forces in the former Polish areas that are currently part of Ukraine. There's a lot of fear on the part of Ukraine that if they let Poland in, Poland's never going to leave. The Poles have said, "Yeah, once we're there, we're not leaving because it's our land, it's our people." I suspect that a lot of this is either laying the groundwork or testing the waters. If it happens, first off, it's important to realize that even though Poland has significant military forces on their own, neither Poland or France have the ability to stand up against Russia alone or combined with Ukraine.

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(32:09):

Again, you don't get this impression here in the West, but Russia probably has still 75% of their combat potential in reserve. People here go, "Oh, they're having to buy artillery shells from North Korea." They're being very smart. The domestic production is being stockpiled and the stuff they're getting from North Korea and other sources are what they're using operationally, which is they're building their combat potential on the assumption they're going to have to face off against NATO in some way. That's a scary thing, but it's also important to realize, because what Poland and France, in particular, and probably the UK as well, they are afraid that the U.S. is pivoting away from Ukraine.

(33:08):

You look at Victoria Nuland leaving, and unfortunately I can't remember his name just off the top of my head, but the guy who was appointed to replace her, he's very much a China hawk, so he feels the real conflict is with China and this whole thing with Ukraine's just a distraction. Whereas Nuland, because of her Eastern European connections and for a lot of reasons was very aggressive in saying that, "No, it's about Ukraine." So her leaving is an interesting sign. Even look at Lindsey Graham in the last day or so has been saying things that seems like he's positioning himself to abandon Ukraine.

Nate Hagens (33:50):

What? He's the guy that was saying a dead Russian is a good Russian or crazy stuff like that?

Chuck Watson (33:57):

Oh, I've got a video of him singing a Nazi era song with a bunch of band terrorists in Ukraine a few years ago. I doubt he knew that's what he was singing. But the guy, he's clearly flipping now, he's saying, "Well, we can't give"... I saw a video clip this morning, I guess he made these comments yesterday, he was saying that, "Oh yeah, Ukraine, we can't be giving them money. It's a loan and we need to make sure they can pay it back and they need"-

Nate Hagens (34:29):

How the hell are they going to pay it back?

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Chuck Watson (34:31):

Well, and that's the whole point, because by saying that, he's essentially saying, "We can't give them more money." Because everybody knows that there's no way that's ever going to happen. So that's laying the groundwork to go, "Gosh, we'd like to help but we have..." He was talking about our \$34 trillion of debt and how we can't be giving money to Europe or to Ukraine. So he's changing, and if you look-

Nate Hagens (34:55):

So that's a major shift.

Chuck Watson (34:56):

That's a huge shift. Again, Nuland leaving, and I apologize, I can't remember the gentleman's name, but he's a well-known China emphasis. All the signs are the U.S. is getting ready to abandon the Ukraine. Well, actually abandon's not the word. What the U.S. wants to do is turn it over to Europe, and particularly to France and Poland and the UK. Germany, it's a little bit of a different story. But the problem is the French military only has artillery reserves for three days of combat with Russia, and then they're out of ammo. You look at Poland, Poland would be the front lines, and so the Poles are going, "Well, wait a minute. If war starts with Russia, then we are on the front lines and we're screwed."

(36:00):

So I think where this is headed is Macron's comments and the Polish comments, if they start something, it's not with the objective of taking on Russia. It is with the objective of trying to draw the U.S. in, which raises an absolutely vital point, the NATO Treaty. There's a widespread misunderstanding in this country. The NATO Treaty is simplified, and even political leaders have said, "Well, it means an attack on one is an attack on all." That's actually-

Nate Hagens (36:35):

You're talking about Article 5.

Chuck Watson (36:37):

Article 5. That's not what it says. If you read the gory details and the actual legal basis for it, it's a lot more complex than that. So for instance, if France went into Ukraine, then that's them unilaterally without NATO authorization or consensus

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because it's a consensus organization, if they go in, and of course, Hungary would never approve a NATO action in Ukraine. So let's say that France goes in, well, Russia would be not just within its rights, but tactically and strategically, it would make a lot of sense for them to start striking French manufacturing sites in France, start attacking French bases that were providing logistical support, perfectly legal, and not just legal, that's the norm under international law.

(37:34):

Well, then France would start screaming, "NATO Article 5." Well, no, because in that case, it would not be an unprovoked attack on France, and again, the Article 5 specifically says that the parties will consult. It doesn't say they will intervene. So the U.S. would not be violating the treaty by saying, "Yeah, we looked at this, you started it. It's not our problem."

Nate Hagens (38:04):

So let me understand this. So Ukraine is doing much worse than the public stories have been, which means that the NATO efforts in Ukraine are doing worse than we've been seeing in the media. France and Poland, and maybe some others, want to aggressively get involved because by doing that, they kind of force the U.S. to get more involved at a time when it seems like U.S. is pulling back its unanimous support, and we have a big election coming up, and there's Taiwan and other issues. Is that going to work? Are they going to pull the U.S. in? It seems to me that if we get to the point where Russia is attacking physical infrastructure in the country of France, are we off to the races then with escalatory back and forth things that end in Archduke Ferdinands times a thousand?

Chuck Watson (39:15):

Yeah, that's interesting. Again, yeah, there's a difference. In fact, let's be really, really clear and honest with ourselves here. We are at war with Russia under international law. There's been no declarations of it, but by providing targeting, by having our military personnel providing specific intelligence, Russia has every right already under international law, leaving aside the issue of whether the invasion is right or wrong, none of that matters. The simple point is we are combatants in this conflict. Russia has every right to shoot down our intelligence aircraft. They have every right, they could actually start bombing our port facilities because we are providing logistical support.

Nate Hagens (40:02):

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Our port facilities in the domestic United States?

Chuck Watson (40:05):

Yes, under international law. Again, just not making value judgements about anything. The reason they're not, of course, is they're deterred because we have nuclear weapons and our leadership is bonkers and would immediately go berserk if that happened. So there's a practical reason why they're not doing it. Legally, they would be fully justified. So when you start to talk about a French intervention, I would expect that they would not strike directly in France unless they had to, because they can probably kill off any French forces that are sent into Ukraine. Putin has demonstrated, and the Russian leadership, we shouldn't speak all about Putin because yes, it's very centralized, but it's a complex leadership structure.

(40:50):

That's one of my pet peeves about the way it's reported here in the West is if you talk about the U.S., you talk about Biden, but then immediately people talk about the Republicans and the Democrats and our convoluted political structures. Well, Russia's political structures are somewhat simpler, but he's still under tremendous pressure from nationalists, and it's not as simple as Putin decides and it happens. So let's be really fair about that. But Putin and the Russian leadership are being pretty measured, and their strategic patience in this has been our saving grace so far, because legally they could strike at German, Polish, French, U.S. facilities, particularly British facilities.

(41:38):

Now, real quick, before I forget because I think this is an important point that I think with France, they're talking big, I think to make Germany look bad, to improve their leverage. When this falls apart, France will be able to say, "We wanted to save Ukraine and couldn't." Poland, I think, wants to grab those northwest areas. They're walking a fine line between how they do that without creating a wider conflict with Russia. So it's a very complex, nuanced situation. The problem is, and the scary thing, and to get to I think our key wrap up point here, is how dangerous it is. Because through this whole conflict, the rhetoric of Western leaders has gotten so far ahead of our actual potential in the conflict.

(42:40):

So Macron talking like, "Yes, we're going to intervene in France." Nobody seriously thinks that a French full effort military intervention in Ukraine would be successful. It



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would end up slaughtering a bunch of French military people. It could potentially bring havoc on France. Yeah, it would hurt Russia, but Russia could survive it. Same with the Polish interventions or Baltic interventions. Yeah, Russia could sweep through the Baltics if they wanted to. It's just the problem is these leaders are talking big to try to position themselves for when Ukraine collapses. At what point does your rhetoric paint you into a corner?

(43:22):

That's my fear with the Biden administration, and that's a little bit less with the departure of Nuland. I think there's talk about how do we get out of this. I think one way we get out of this is with the Biden administration politically, they've got a great opportunity to say, "Oh, we wanted to help Ukraine, but the Republicans blocked it and it's all their fault." France, I think, is playing that same game to an extent. Yes, they're angry about Africa, they're scared about their resources. Are they so delusional to believe that an intervention would be successful? I hope not.

Nate Hagens (44:04):

So we are in an open secret war right now, we being NATO and the West against Russia, which has evolved over time from a proxy war. Like you said, let's set aside how it started and all that history.

Chuck Watson (44:22):

But I think we have to start with civil war, proxy war, secret War.

Nate Hagens (44:28):

If we go to open war that is not secret, does that have any hope of resolving in a way that doesn't have bright flashes?

Chuck Watson (44:43):

I doubt it. Because we're already very close. Where we are now, there are pathways and it'll be presented as Russia winning, but it's really not in a lot of ways. It's Russia achieving some of its objectives, but those objectives and the stability that would ensue with a partitioned Ukraine. The partitioning Ukraine is the only way this is going to end peacefully, because if the conflict continues, neither side can lose. Well, actually, I should rephrase that. Russia cannot lose this because it's existential for them. The US could allow Ukraine to go, because again, RAND in their seemingly

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random, pardon the pun, worldview last year was saying, "Well, Ukraine's not really a strategic interest of the US." And they're absolutely right. It's not.

Nate Hagens (45:46):

So just to clarify, if we go to an open war, it's no longer secret, with or without the US involvement, it's two separate questions, part A and part B, what happens then, likely?

Chuck Watson (46:04):

Yeah, that's a real problem. If it ends up open war, I don't see politically how it stays confined in Europe, depending on the administration. And that's why the next six months are so critical and dangerous because I don't see a Trump administration intervening if let's say France and Poland get into a shooting war with Russia and then try to invoke the NATO treaty. I don't see the US under Trump doing that.

Nate Hagens (46:46):

But isn't it likely based on the tea leaves that such an intervention by France and Poland would happen before the US election, or not necessarily?

Chuck Watson (46:56):

Yeah, I think it has to because Ukraine may not exist at the end of this year. I know that's increasingly becoming aware to the US public, but I think that by the end of this year, it'll be de facto partition. And again, I would not be surprised to see a Polish intervention in Western Ukraine, but they will studiously avoid attacking Russia. They'll basically move in, take those areas, and Russia had no intention of going into those areas anyway. That's another myth, by the way. Russia doesn't want all of Ukraine. They only want the traditional Russian areas of Ukraine. That's been very clear from those statements.

Nate Hagens (47:40):

So again, just to be clear, if we go to an open war with or without the US, you don't think that it will then be confined to Europe, and then intentional or not, there are just multiple avenues of runaway escalation of response, counter response, bigger response, nuclear weapons. So we're on that runway if this gets to an open war?

Chuck Watson (48:09):

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That's what it feels like. I find it difficult to figure a way that the US could lose a conventional war in Europe without going nuclear. And again, the conventional correlation of forces, there's a famous quote from Omar Bradley that, "Amateurs study tactics and professionals study logistics." The logistics of a war with Russia over Europe just don't work for us.

Nate Hagens (48:41):

There was some Princess Bride quote to that effect.

Chuck Watson (48:47):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (48:51):

So the implication, Chuck, then, the strong implication, the message that you're sending here is we have to avoid the open secret war turning into an open war.

Chuck Watson (49:06):

Yes, absolutely. And again, there's no-

Nate Hagens (49:09):

How do we do that? Is there a reasonable path forward to that?

Chuck Watson (49:15):

I think the way you do that, first off, there's political concerns because again, just like with France, in fact, more so than with France, the Biden administration doesn't want to get stuck with the accusation they lost Ukraine and they have an opportunity. Republicans are blocking future aid. It would be very easy for the Biden administration to do what they're doing and say, "We've got to disengage from Ukraine. It's not really our strategic interest yet. It's bad that Russia won, but it's the Republicans' fault." But at the same time, they need to tell the Europeans, "Look, we're not going to fall for it. If you intervene in Ukraine without NATO consensus, you're on your own and we will not save you if you do that, even if you try to invoke Article 5, because Article 5 does not apply if you initiate the conflict."

(50:15):

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And you could do it. Then the French, Germany actually would go along with this, Poland would probably be fine with doing something like only Polish forces moving into the traditional Polish areas. You probably get Romania and Hungary moving into their traditional areas like Transcarpathia. Russia would then take the rest of Ukraine. We'd have a new Iron Curtain, but it would be a very stable situation.

Nate Hagens (50:48):

It would be a stable situation with respect to nuclear weapons and a nuclear escalation, but it would be an acceleration of The Great Simplification for the European continent economically.

Chuck Watson (51:04):

Would it?

Nate Hagens (51:04):

Right?

Chuck Watson (51:05):

Would it? That's the interesting question because already, tremendous amounts of resources from Russia are still making it to Europe. It's just now there's a middleman and it costs a lot more. So you look at during the Soviet era, where did Druzhba, the big pipeline, what's the word in Russian? That's friendship. So how long would it be before... First off, the indirect Russian flows are already in progress. You look at stabilizing food markets and resources, those resources, given the way commodities work, and I don't need to be preaching to Mr. Economics and Resources, Nate, but perfectly well, that if those resources are flowing into the rest of the world, that's going to help stabilize the markets. And how long is it going to be before a lot of those barriers in the form of sanctions start being... Look at how many sanctions are waived already to keep it from collapsing?

(52:13):

And again, if China's the big threat, it would behoove the US to allow the situation with Europe to stabilize between Europe and Russia just to keep China out. So I think if they're willing to set the emotion aside, I think that there's a lot to be said for that. I was raised in a Cold War, anti-communist environment, but it was also made very clear that you can do deals with them if you're careful, again, Reagan, "Trust, but

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verify." We could return to that world and that would help stabilize Europe and the simplification's coming either way, but it would certainly make a soft landing much more likely than a catastrophic collapse and a hard luck landing that we're all afraid of.

Nate Hagens (53:05):

Thank you for a sobering update on this situation. Are there any closing words for our listeners that are worried and aware and paying attention to this situation?

Chuck Watson (53:18):

I think the big thing is just be aware of the biases in the media and the reporting and try to see beyond and see what the underlying motives are. Again, we started this by saying it's not really about democracy or even a Russian invasion. It's about resource control. It's about history. It's about revenge. As we often joke about being fire apes, apes that learn to use fire, I think that kind of blends into it that there are these other... And our domestic political concerns, and again, try to see past that to the fact that... There's that famous 80s song by Sting, "The Russians are people too, and they love their kids, and we all do, and it's our leadership." And our leadership, sad to say, you can argue that sometimes they act just as irresponsibly as those of countries that we claim that we're enemies with.

Nate Hagens (54:24):

Sobering stuff. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and perspective. I am hopeful that we navigate a way out of this without going to open war, because we also have a lot of other challenges to face as a culture, as a species.

Chuck Watson (54:41):

We do. And again, there is a way out. There's been a way out of this conflict ever since 2014. Everybody knows what it is politically. We just have to take that path, and it's a political fight and political face-saving, which again, sadly is the human condition. But as so many of your guests have said, that's what we're down to. It's rarely about technical decisions. It's usually about human emotion.

Nate Hagens (55:18):

Well, one of these conversations between you and I, I would like to talk about, not war, not Russia, not NATO, but governance systems and what is possible in the future

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given not only the geopolitics, but climate, energy depletion, finance, all the other risks that we face, what sort of governance systems might be feasible in coming decades, because I know you're very interested in that topic and have a lot to say.

Chuck Watson (55:51):

Yep. And that's part of our problem, that's why our podcast ends up being so long is because we have lots to say and you have great questions and perspective, and it's interesting stuff, even if it is scary.

Nate Hagens (56:05):

This one was supposed to be 20 minutes, so we went over a bit. But thank you for your continued sharing and trying to make this situation resolve.

Chuck Watson (56:14):

Thanks, Nate. Take care.

Nate Hagens (56:16):

If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform and visit [thegreatsimplification.com](http://thegreatsimplification.com) for more information on future releases. This show is hosted by Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and curated by Leslie Batt-Lutz and Lizzy Sirianni.