

British Ex-Diplomat Detained for Peace Efforts, Reaching out to Russia | Ian Proud

Former British diplomat to Moscow, Ian Proud, was detained at Heathrow Airport for the apparent offense of traveling to the Valdai Discussion Club to talk to Russia's intelligentsia. Ian and Pascal discuss civil liberties, sanctions, foreign influence rules and what they see as Europe's narrowing space for dissent. Proud shares impressions from Moscow, warns about nuclear escalation and argues that abandoning diplomacy endangers European security. Their conversation closes with an appeal for dialogue, public engagement and a negotiated end to the war. Ian's Links: The Peacemonger on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@IanProud> The Peacemonger on Substack: <https://thepeacemonger.substack.com/> Ian Proud's website: <https://www.prouddiplomat.com/> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Ian Proud returns from Russia 00:52 Detained at Heathrow: Ian's account 02:51 Questioning, seized devices and family impact 13:58 Challenging detention and foreign influence rules 20:09 Sanctions, dissent and civil liberties 28:22 What Ian learned at Valdai 34:17 Nuclear escalation and the need for diplomacy 42:48 The human cost of war and a call for peace

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today for an update with our friend and colleague Ian Proud, who actually just got arrested in the UK on his return from Russia, as I hear. Ian, welcome back.

#Ian Proud

Pascal, it's always nice to see you.

#Pascal

And just for everybody to know, Ian is the host of the wonderful channel, The Peacemonger, up and growing on YouTube, because Ian does all of these wonderful, not just podcasts, but also commentaries. And he has very, very good guests. So The Peacemonger is highly recommended from Neutrality Studies. Ian also has a Substack to the same name where he publishes a lot of things online. And Ian, you've been most recently, most recently, well, to Russia, and on your return, you were arrested. What happened to you? When did it happen? And what were you told about the whole story?

#Ian Proud

So the important background context is that I was a British diplomat who served in Russia from 2014 to 2019. I had top-secret security clearance, obviously, throughout my diplomatic service career. I authorised lots of sanctions against Russia and so on. But as you know, since I left the diplomatic service, I've been critical of Western foreign policy towards Russia and in the Ukraine war, which I think has been a complete failure. I'm still committed to my obligations under the Official Secrets Act. But because of my past service, I took advice from the former ambassador to Moscow about visiting Russia. I was invited to this Valdai conference, a prestigious event, actually, exclusive academic event. It's an academic sort of grouping event. And he said, "It's a great event, you should go."

This is Sir Tony Brenton, the former ambassador to Moscow. I wrote to the Foreign Office, you know, to explain my reasons for going, to explain that I, you know, would abide by my requirements under the Official Secrets Act. They'd replied in a very proper way. And yet when I get to Heathrow, I'm still arrested. Three hours, having notified the government, having consulted the previous ambassador to Moscow, all of my equipment is taken. I'm searched, I'm DNA-swabbed, I'm photographed, I'm fingerprinted, I'm interrogated. The whole thing kind of takes three hours. And so I've had to basically—this laptop I'm talking to you on today, I've had to buy it because they took my laptop, and this mobile camera with an SD card. I've got all these great videos I've filmed, like with Sergei Karaganov and other people. They've taken that.

I can't upload all of this content I produced in Russia. They took my phone. So the phone I've been WhatsApping you on the past two days, I've had to buy that. I mean, it's just crazy. It's just, you know, I knew the risks of going, and I explored those risks. I told the government about that to ensure no misunderstanding, and yet they've arrested me under a counterterrorism act.

#Pascal

It's a terrorism act. You were arrested on suspicion of terrorism. But are you charged with anything?

#Ian Proud

No, I'm not charged with anything. This is the odd thing. This is the Kafkaesque nature of the law. It's the Counterterrorism and Border Security Act of 2019, in which they don't have to suspect you of anything, but they can detain you, and you're not under arrest, but you do not have the right to remain silent. Can you think about that for a moment? So you're not suspected of anything, you're not under arrest, but you do not have the right to remain silent. But you have the duty to allow them to search you, to search your property. You have the duty to give them your PIN codes for your phone and your laptop. And if you don't give them PIN codes and passcodes to your laptop, you'll be arrested, because not giving them those details is a crime. So they can immediately access all of your information, and if you don't let them, you'll be arrested. I mean, it's just absolutely crazy.

#Pascal

In the democratic free West, in London, like this happened to you at Heathrow. Are you read that information, or do you need to know that beforehand in order not to commit the crime of saying, "I don't want to give you my PIN code?"

#Ian Proud

No, they read it in long and boring detail, to be honest, because they sit there with these forms. I don't know if you've met many police officers. There's a very long and bureaucratic way in which they speak in these situations. I've never been arrested before. Let's be clear about that. Everything's explained, and then you're given a piece of paper with it all on it, you know, for your records and stuff. It's just, it's just madness. You're thinking, what the hell is happening here? It's just like total cognitive dissonance. And of course, the thing is that, I mean, this is not the most stressful thing I've ever experienced in my work life. You know, I've had far more stressful experiences than this. But the hard thing is, like, then they say, well, do you need anybody letting you know?

And this is, like, in the middle of the night. I mean, the police officer has to phone my wife in the middle of the night to say that I've been detained at the airport. And it's just... she was already anxious about me being in Moscow. You know, my kids are kind of worried about when I'm going to get home. And you think, well, I could be here for six hours. They can keep me for six hours. In the end, it's only three. Is that, you know, the kind of anxiety caused to my wife by this? For me, I mean, I don't care if they want to harass me, that's fine, but it's that ripple effect and that vulnerability in terms of getting to the people you most care about which was really, really kind of disturbing, actually.

#Pascal

No, I can only imagine how disturbing that must be, especially because it is your own government doing that—the one government that you served for so long and actually consulted with. And did they give you then any details of, like, why they're doing that to you? I mean, what's the occasion? Are they suspecting that you're doing espionage for the Russians?

#Ian Proud

Well, no, they don't have to suspect you of anything. I mean, clearly...

#Pascal

There must be a reason, no?

#Ian Proud

No, there wasn't a reason. Well, I think the reason was that somebody in MI5 and MI6 has told them to scoop me up. Because it was clear that, you know, a police officer, you know, when they arrest somebody, that police officer has done some investigation into the case, some preliminary investigation, right? So they know who the person is. They briefly know their background. They know what the cause is that they want to arrest them for, what the potential crime is. The police officer making the arrest will have some knowledge about it.

I worked for the police before I joined the Foreign Office, by the way. They'll have some knowledge of the suspect, right? These people arresting me were clueless about my background. They knew nothing about me. Absolutely nothing. I said, "Well, did you realize I authorized half the UK sanctions against Russia after the war started?" And their jaws dropped. He said, "Wow, that's amazing." You know, they're telling all this stuff, and the interrogation bit, which actually didn't take very long, was over quickly because they realized, "Why the hell are we interviewing this bloke?"

#Pascal

It was bizarre.

#Ian Proud

And yet they still took my stuff. They knew nothing about me. That's the bizarre thing about it. It's not like they'd been looking into what I'd been saying and stuff. No, it's a total fishing trip. And somebody in MI5 or MI6 has told them to do this.

#Pascal

Somebody said, "Let's use the police. Let's give them an order to go and interrogate this guy under this act, which allows us to basically intimidate anyone at any point in time for six hours." And not giving the police any kind of background information doesn't matter because the point, the exercise, was probably the point of it, right? Just inconveniencing you.

#Ian Proud

It's pure intimidation. Pure intimidation. I mean, I'm extremely cautious about anything to do with state secrets, to do with espionage and stuff. I lived in that world for 24 years. I'm very, very cautious. That's why I was in two minds about going. I thought maybe I shouldn't go. That's why I consulted Sir Tony Brenton, and that's why I wrote to the Foreign Office, because I'm extremely cautious about not doing anything that would breach my legal commitments under the Official Secrets Act and so on. But because they don't like what I say—Western foreign policy is a complete disaster—they want to intimidate me. And the best way to intimidate me is not me, but to cause

anxiety and stress to my family. You know, that's how they're trying to intimidate me. My son has said he wants me never to go to Russia again. And, you know, I love my children more than anybody in the world. So that puts a limitation on what I can do. Job done for the British government, right? Yeah.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. Yeah, I mean, there you go with the freedom in the free West. But tell me, is there still something coming up for you, like in the next days, that—I mean, you should get your documents and devices back, right? And anything else that's brewing?

#Ian Proud

No, I should get my stuff back. They say I've got within seven days. Thankfully, me and, I think, you know, Professor Richard Sakwa—he was actually—we were leaving the plane together. He wasn't detained. He was detained once last year. But we're both fortunate to know a lawyer who's offered to kind of help in this regard. But, you know, my biggest concern—because, I mean, my laptop and my phone are a write-off when I get them back. They'll be so full of bugs and all sorts of viruses, there'll be no point using them anyway. But it's my camera. I bought this brand new, inspired by your fancy kit when we were in Tbilisi together back in June. I got one of these.

It's a different system for me, but I got this nice camera system, a DJI Osmo. I've got an SD card with all of these videos I filmed that I need for my channel, right? Yeah, yeah. My camera, which I love, is a fantastic bit of kit. And this card, these are the things I need to get back because that's my living. And these interviews are really interesting. I interviewed Rein Müllerson. He was an advisor to Gorbachev and one of Estonia's first deputy foreign ministers, and then briefly foreign minister after the Soviet Union. A fascinating guy. You know, and Sergey Karaganov, and a brief clip with Miranda, who was there, you know. So, yeah, it's just that I want it back. But I mean, that's the next step.

#Pascal

I'm so sorry to hear that all of this is happening to you. Richard Sakwa, yeah, he was arrested last year. He also had this three-hour period where they questioned him. Was it under the same act?

#Ian Proud

Exactly the same, yeah. And he had the same—having his laptop and phone taken for about a week—and exactly the same situation. Total fishing trip. Total attempt at intimidation. And, you know, Richard basically has got to the point in his seventies now that he's still spiteful as ever, but he just doesn't care. He's just sober.

#Pascal

He's one of the most unassuming, brave people I've ever met. Because if you see him, you would think, yeah, perfect university professor, maybe a little bit timid. And then he's the opposite. And he goes like, "No, no, they don't intimidate me. No, no, they cannot do that with me." I mean, he's got guts of steel, guts of steel.

#Ian Proud

He definitely has a backbone, but as you say, he really does. But as you say, he's the nicest, gentlest person you could ever hope to meet. I mean, it's just like, he was the first person I reached out to after I left the diplomatic service in 2023, and I went to Canterbury for lunch with him. And we've been close ever since. I mean, I'm quite a sort of conservative, not in the political sense, but in terms of cautiousness in what I say. But even he kind of is sometimes more caveated than me.

#Pascal

But so we are at the point where now in the UK, you've got people sitting in places of power that want to intimidate the voices that basically speak out against all the things that are going wrong here. And, you know, the UK is not the only one. What happened to you on a more extreme level happened two years ago in January 2025 to Ali Abunimah in Switzerland. Ali Abunimah, the founder of the Electronic Intifada, you know, very outspoken about the Gaza genocide. And when he was in Switzerland, he was grabbed by the special police forces, put in a van, incarcerated for two days. And then on Monday, he was expelled from Switzerland. And Swiss courts have now found, one and a half years later, that all of that was illegal. And it's a clear case of abuse of power. That case is still hanging in the Swiss courts.

But the person who ordered this, Miss Della Valle, who was the chief of the federal police force at the time, she, well, she breached all of the protocol in order to order these, well, the foot soldiers, the police, to actually go and apprehend him. Although there was no—there were really like two agencies [that] said, "We can't do that because he didn't break any laws." And we know that now because there is a legal case against this. In the case of Switzerland, you can then ask for, you know, judicial review and everything of this process. And you can reverse—not reverse what happened—but you can, like, try to figure out who did what at which point. In the UK, do you have these options available to say, like, "Hey, guys, I really want to know what happened in the background here, and I think my civil liberties were breached"?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, there are various options. There's a judicial review, there's a freedom of information request. Steve Jermy, I think you know Steve, he's very kindly been looking into the options for me as well. He's just, like, pursued class action on the ECHR and things like that. So there are various things to

do, but right now I'm still coming from the shock and stress of it. But yeah, and I'm also talking to this lawyer that I mentioned to you that also helped Richard. So over the next few days, I'm going to be considering my options in terms of what steps I can take against the British government for this. But I kind of think it'd be better to do this in concert with other people who've experienced the same thing.

Because in parallel, you know, before I went to... Well, I was in Valdai. I had a video from Valdai with me and Richard. We were just sat in the garden with my fancy camera, filming it and explaining that the government has now introduced this new foreign influence registration scheme. They want to label anybody who goes to the Valdai Club, which really is an academic discussion of academics from all over the world. I mean, it's like... It's not like some sort of Bolshevik revolution-planning thing. It's a bunch of middle-aged academics from China, India, South America, you know, whatever. They want to kind of have this foreign influence registration scheme so that if you do stuff they don't like, you don't have to.

And they say it doesn't mean you're suspected of anything, like it makes it better. But you have to register as a potential foreign agent, and if you don't register, not registering can make you liable to criminal prosecution. So there's that. There's that strand through to: am I going to get the letter to register as a foreign agent? Have we notified the government of going? Have we notified the government of my commitments under the Official Secrets Act that I never intend to breach, you know, for as long as I live, just by going to an academic conference? One academic conference, first time in Russia in seven years. Does that make me a foreign agent?

Or actually, Pascal, the real question is, what does it say about a former diplomat going to Russia to talk about diplomacy? It's that that they want to cancel. The idea that somebody who's prominently known as having been in the diplomatic sphere, you know, throughout a long career, can go to Russia completely shatters this notion that actually we should have no diplomacy with Russia. We should not talk with Russia. And me going, a former British diplomat, senior British diplomat, going to Russia is absolutely anathema and detestable to people in Brussels and in London who hate the idea of diplomacy, who only want to have a war, a war that they never want to end until, ultimately, the way things are going, we risk a massive nuclear escalation.

#Pascal

It's a typical instance in which the hawks within a government start cracking down on their own doves, right? Because what you have usually in this kind of environment is that the doves on both sides start to cooperate because they want to wind things down and make sure you don't get war. And the hawks actually start cooperating because what they want is war and escalation. So they start fighting against their own doves. And this is one of the cases. I mean, literally, they arrested the guy calling himself the Peacemonger, who stands up for peace and dialogue and negotiations. Well, I mean, it doesn't get any more kind of hawkish than that. And it's, of course, part and parcel then of the escalation of this, of the internal rhetoric. And just for everybody to know, you know,

Ian's video that he made with Richard Sakwa, literally, it's called—I mean, the title you chose is, "Should We Be Arrested Because We Joined the Valdai Meeting in Russia?" Yeah.

#Ian Proud

It's almost like an invitation, in a way.

#Pascal

Well, I mean, the thing is, it's not that we don't know that these risks exist. It's that the risk itself existing is one thing, but it then happening to you is another, right? So somebody thought it was a good idea to actually kind of make an example out of you by intimidating you. Maybe not even an example, but just intimidation.

#Ian Proud

Yeah, well, the thing is, there's another more sinister element to it as well, Pascal. When I wrote to Sir Tony Brenton, you know, the former ambassador, he's actually a really, really good guy. My email to him actually says the things I'm worried about. And one of the things I'm worried about, and I quote—I'll bring it up, if you don't mind me briefly looking away from the camera a moment. It's obviously fascinating. Just a moment. Sorry for this slight kind of weirdness.

#Pascal

Go ahead.

#Ian Proud

Okay. I say... yeah. Yeah.

#Pascal

So in the email you wrote to the former British ambassador to Moscow...

#Ian Proud

The Russians aren't paying me to do this, but would pay for my flights and accommodation. The question is whether it's too much of a risk, i.e. a risk of getting picked up at Heathrow, interrogated for three hours, and being designated a foreign agent. I wrote this on the 16th of September. Before going to Sir Tony Brenton, the former ambassador, I actually wrote this. I'm almost going to predict my future by setting out the risk. And he replied saying, "No, you should go. It's an excellent event." But he says, "Just let the Foreign Office know to ensure that these risks don't manifest."

#Pascal

And, you know, it's not necessarily the Foreign Office that ordered the police to pick you up. It could be somebody else. It could be in the Prime Minister's office. It could be somebody actually higher up in some of the police forces. You know, just somebody who knows you, disagrees with you, and then got wind that you're doing that and then say, like, isn't this a good opportunity?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, crazy, crazy, crazy.

#Pascal

Yeah. This, again, this reminds me very much of Ali Abunimah. This also reminds me of the way in which all over Europe at the moment, we see new legislation being introduced in order to do stuff like that. I mean, for as bad as this is, at least it's based upon legislation. We also have these other cases that the sort of democracies above all of us, which is called EU sanctions. It happened to Jacques Baud. It happened to Nathalie Jamp. It happened to Hussein Dogrou. These people who do nothing illegal.

There are no illegal acts that they commit, but then they're punished severely, harshly, terribly, and actually for them it keeps continuing, right, for years and years. No bank accounts, no free travel. Nathalie Jamp cannot go back to Switzerland because she was in Africa when it happened, and now she's forbidden to fly over EU territory. And no illegal acts were committed. So it's kind of part and parcel of this authoritarian turn that then uses legal means and extra-legal means in order to intimidate and also, you know, punish people for, again, acts that are not illegal. What you did was not illegal. And still you're being, well, de facto punished and pressured.

#Ian Proud

Yeah, exactly right. It's just that they're kind of legislating against, you know, free speech. I mean, Jacques Baud was sanctioned for basically offering an opinion on the war in Ukraine. And actually, I think one of the big questions it raises is: what indeed is legislation? You know, you say at least we have legislation in the UK, but what is legislation? At least it goes through Parliament.

#Pascal

At least you have parliamentarians stamping it.

#Ian Proud

You do, but then what is democracy? It would be my question, because I recall the MEGOBARI Act, you know, against Georgia last year was passed by the House of Congress in the space of, I think it was like, 17 minutes. And how many people are there in the House of Congress? And they all agree. I mean, how effective are parliamentarians at actually really understanding the issues and taking positions as it relates to foreign policy, not domestic policy? And my view is that most of them aren't driven by any detailed scrutiny of the law. They're driven by the latest soundbite about, actually, we have to sanction Georgia, we have to sanction Russia, and so on, and they rubber-stamp.

So for as much as we accuse other nations of basically having rubber-stamp parliaments, I think we are the ultimate in rubber-stamp parliaments in passing through legislation which actually is not in any way legally robust. And that's probably a whole separate conversation. I can have a conversation with you about the sanctions legislation. But, I mean, you look at the kind of EU sanctions. As you know, I know a lot about that from my past career in the diplomatic service. I mean, EU sanctions are not even legislation. I mean, they're written up, but they emerge out of Council decisions that have to be renewed by consensus. I mean, they're not even legislative.

So they are essentially kind of political. And Jacques Baud's sanctioning was a quid pro quo because a French minister, you know, wanted to get a French person done, and they needed a quid pro quo to have somebody else done. And I mean, John Laughland's a good person to talk about this. So he said, "Well, what about that Jacques Baud? He's been saying stuff that we don't like." So a bunch of politicians are saying—they're sort of chewing the cud about which persons they should sanction, you know—and then Jacques is just, like, collateral damage. And yet he's still sanctioned. So what even is legislation? The whole thing is completely sort of anti-democratic and illegal, in my view.

#Pascal

Yeah, the difference I want to make is that the process that you went through is something that the UK Parliament actually said, "We want that on the books," right? Which doesn't make it better. It doesn't make it better. It's just a different process from the one where unelected bureaucrats, executives, actually decide that this is based upon our competences, and we are now using this in order to go around the basic rights and the constitutions, actually, of most EU states. Most constitutions do exactly that.

They protect the individual from overreach from the top, right? That's one of the main purposes of a constitution. And these sanctions, they reach around this and then grab people on the bottom, and then you have no remedy, no effective remedy against it. The question of legality then is always whether you can do something to remedy the situation. In your case, again, you can think about using the legal avenues available within that act, right, to have a legal review of the case. The sanctioned people cannot properly do that even. Yeah.

#Ian Proud

I think what this points up to, and it's something I speak about quite a lot, is that actually—and you've really helped to clarify it in my mind—that actually the realm of foreign policy, rather than domestic policy, as it relates to constitutional issues, represents a grey area. Because in the realm of domestic policy, health policy, social policy, and all these kinds of things, the constitutional requirements of the state to protect the individual are much more clear-cut. When it comes to the realm of foreign policy, they're not clear-cut at all, because we're talking about foreign state actors. And even if you're a citizen, then you could fall into that grey area because you seem to be under the sway of a foreign state actor. And therefore, I'm not saying in legal terms, but in policy terms and political terms, in terms of how the system then views you and sees you as not being worthy of the normal constitutional protections that would be available to other people.

#Pascal

Precisely. This is really fundamental to understand that, you know, when we talk about national policy, we have the protections of our own constitutions, right? Because they do precisely that. But what's now happening is that you start having executive decisions based on foreign policy. So it's foreign policy tools, sanctions are foreign policy tools, that are now being deployed against people on the inside. And something very similar is happening to you through the legislative route to say, like, we have foreign threats, and these foreign threats need us to intervene.

And even if the foreign threats are inside the country, the Constitution doesn't apply because the Constitution only applies when it's about internal matters. But this is an external matter. Therefore, we can go around it, grab them, and put them away. And that is a straight path to really the darkest kind of authoritarian tendencies that we've seen in Europe. I mean, it's straight there because basically it empowers the executive to go around all legal safeguards for the individuals.

#Ian Proud

Exactly right. And we're seeing it in real time. A diplomat in good standing, who's gone through the appropriate procedures, who's notified the government, can still be grabbed off the jetway by five police officers, having been to a conference of middle-aged academics. It's bizarre. It's so bad.

#Pascal

This is all the stuff we never wanted to see again in Europe. And this is just building up. This is just the beginning. I don't see them stopping this.

#Ian Proud

I see absolutely no signs of change, I'm afraid to say. I'm very depressed, actually, about the future, particularly having been in Moscow. I think people are underestimating the risks of nuclear escalation. I really do. I'm not saying that for sensationalist reasons. I think you know me well

enough to know that I'm not a sensationalist. I'm a diplomat. I always aim for the centre lane when I can.

#Pascal

You literally call yourself the peacemonger. You are not a sensationalist, no.

#Ian Proud

But I'm genuinely worried about our future in Europe, the way things are going. The complete reluctance to engage in dialogue to see a failing war—and it is a failing war—in Ukraine end. I mean, nobody's winning. Absolutely nobody's winning except defense companies, some elite politicians, Zelensky's cronies and stuff. I mean, nobody's winning from this. We're all losing out from this senseless war. But we refuse to engage in diplomacy, and it's just utterly crazy.

#Pascal

What else did you learn from the visit to Valdai? I mean, again, the whole intelligentsia was there, and not just the Russian one. I mean, there were a lot of internationals. I mean, Richard was there. We had a Swiss colleague there, Roger Köppel. We had a Japanese there. And I mean, in the end, when Vladimir Putin took all of these questions, he took them from across the board, actually, from representatives from different countries, including also Japan, Switzerland, the UK. I mean, it was Richard. Richard took one for the UK. What did that teach you?

#Ian Proud

Well, you get a number of impressions, but on that sort of latter part of the question, I mean, you know, Sergei Lavrov also came during the event and, you know, he took questions from journalists, including BBC journalist Steve Rosenberg, and then Putin took questions from all these international kind of academics from all over the world, as you said. Can you imagine the British Prime Minister taking questions from a Russian journalist or a Russian academic? I mean, it will never happen.

#Pascal

But that's it. I mean, Jean-Claude and others make that point time and time again. During the Cold War, we were not afraid. You could buy Pravda at any newsstand in London and in Switzerland too. And we were not afraid of that information environment. And now it has completely inverted. The Russians are not afraid of the information environment from the West. They let the BBC in. They let this stuff be broadcast. It is the Europeans who shut down RT, Sputnik, and so on, and who would never, ever let a journalist, a Russian journalist, ask such questions, or academics, Russian academics, come to the West. What happened, Ian?

#Ian Proud

So, I mean, what happened is we decided that we had to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia, and therefore any dialogue with Russia was weakness and was to be completely dismissed and reduced to the minimum extent possible. And one of the reasons for that is because I think, you know, during the Cold War, there was an understanding. There was a standoff. It was a kind of bipolar world. And, you know, the Soviet Union and the West were—there was containment on both sides. There was deterrence. There was an understanding of deterrence. I think what's happening now is that there is no understanding of deterrence. We just want to defeat Russia. It's a totally different environment to back then. Back then, both sides understood the risk of mutually assured destruction, and that that was the deterrence.

But between, you know, on either side of the Iron Curtain, some sort of normality could continue to exist. There could be some limited cultural and educational exchanges. You know, for example, you could buy Pravda, you could see the Bolshoi Ballet if you wanted to. You know, sporting activities happened; the Soviet Union would compete in sports events. There's a kind of economic, social, and cultural thin layer of normality there. That no longer exists because there is no understanding of deterrence. The West—what I mean, Europe now and the United Kingdom—ultimately sees itself at war with Russia and wants to defeat Russia. And that's what is different now to the situation that pertained during the Cold War.

But the impression I got from the Russian side, having been there for about five days, was the Russians want to see some sort of end to this situation. They want some restoration of normality, even if that normality is just deterrence, but some restoration of relations so that we're not on the kind of continued escalator towards nuclear war. And it's, you know, Putin is, you know, there. I mean, he's got his red lines. We've got our red lines. But, I mean, he is, it seems to me, open to some sort of serious diplomatic effort to bring things to a close. But the West isn't. I'm not saying that I'm taking sides with Russia over the West, but at every step, and I've spoken about this extensively, as you know, they have refused diplomacy. They're in a war mindset, not a diplomacy mindset.

And I see no sign. The only thing for me is, I see no sign that the Western elites will move from a war mindset to a diplomacy mindset. And that's difficult because it's not just that the UK has its own challenge to get the journalists, the think tankers, the officials, the elected parliamentarians, the ministers, the prime minister, all to move in tandem. You need to do that 27, 28 times across the continent, get all of the systems across the continent to move. And there is no evidence that anybody wants to do that. And that's why we're kind of stuck on a war footing. And it's sad because I think, you know, love Putin or hate Putin, Putin is a system. If there is a move towards diplomacy, Putin, I believe, would move the system towards diplomacy. But I see no signs that the West wants to do that.

#Pascal

No, no. The mindset seems to be very much determined and made up, and it's made up across the political spectrum, actually. I mean, not that everybody is on board, but I made this argument a week ago when the Swiss referendum for more neutrality actually failed, 30-70%, that that more or less represents the split of 30% in Europe who would be in favor of rekindling the foreign policy of the continent to 70% who are on board with what's happening. They might not be on board with everything, but in general, and that's just enough support in order to keep the continent going.

And that has to do with this war mentality, with a mass formation, as Matthias Desmet would put it. And the question is how to get us out of that without a war. Because the risk, not just of nuclear war, but of an enlargement of the Ukraine war and a spillover into NATO territory, is now getting higher and higher because the Europeans are saying this is coming, and the Russians are now saying, like, well, three years ago, we still thought this is crazy talk, but now we believe you. Did you hear such voices who said, like, well, the Europeans want war, therefore we must also prepare for that war?

#Ian Proud

Well, I had a good chat with Sergei Karaganov there. He's a fascinating guy who actually is very well disposed to the West. It seems crazy to say it on the basis of what I'm about to say, Pascal. He's not somebody who doesn't like the West. He's had good contacts with the London School of Economics before. I'd say he was an anglophile before. He's actually a really, really nice chap when you talk to him. But he believes, because war is a two-person game, that the West is utterly committed to destroying Russia. And unfortunately, the signals given by the West suggest to him and to other people, including possibly me, that he might be right, that the West is committed utterly to destroying Russia.

And so therefore, his view is that Russia's nuclear doctrine is that, for example, all this kind of stuff about Sikorski saying, well, we'll just take Kaliningrad, we'll just steal it from them if they keep pushing Ukraine. Well, Kaliningrad is sovereign territory of the Russian Federation. His view is, in those circumstances, there would have to be a nuclear strike on Europe, and probably Germany, because that is the biggest player on the continent. And the reason—and it's a very kind of intellectual, kind of structured reason for him arguing that—A, if you take out Germany, I mean, and he's talking about a salvo, you know, with like 12 75-kiloton nuclear devices in it.

I mean, if you think each of those devices is more than 10 times bigger than the device dropped on Hiroshima, think about that for a moment. He says if Germany is out of the equation, nobody else in Europe is going to fight. That leaves the French, who won't fight. That leaves Britain with its 250 nuclear weapons, thinking about whether it wants to be obliterated or it wants to kind of actually sue for peace. And the strategic calculation on the Russian side is that the Americans won't do reciprocal nuclear strikes on Russia, you know, to save Europe. I mean, that is the calculation. You just obliterate Germany.

And then, okay, you start again to sort of build a new future for Europe. And people in the West don't want to have diplomacy, I think. Well, you know, and he was serious. I mean, I tell you, and he said, "We don't want to do this." And he got quite emotional. He said, "We don't want to do this." He said, "You know, Russians love kids. I mean, they love kids. I mean, it's one of the things that a lot of people don't understand about Russians." He said, "We don't do this. Heaven forbid," he said, "like hundreds of thousands of children would die." He said, "We don't want to do this. But, you know, if you push us like this, it may just be something that we have to do."

#Pascal

And, you know, that's the sick thing. This rhetoric then of Karaganov validates the war hawks on the other side, who then say, "Look what they're saying. Look, they want to nuke us. Therefore, we were right all along. The Russians are barbaric retards over there, and the only thing we can do is to gear up, militarize, and make sure that we deter the Russians." It's a sin.

#Ian Proud

Yeah. Well, I mean, Karaganov is many things, but he's not barbaric.

#Pascal

He's actually very nice.

#Ian Proud

No, no, no, I know that. But I mean, this talks to the circularity of the debate. Yes. You know, whenever, you know, like, you can only understand, you know, if you're in the West, you can only make sense of the war in Ukraine if you think about it from the vantage point of the 24th of February 2022. That's the only vantage point that you need to know. If you're in Russia, you think about the Ukraine war from the vantage point of the collapse of the Soviet Union. And that's the timeframe that you think about. So then it becomes a bit like, sort of, you know, which came first, the chicken and egg? Well, the Russians threatened to nuke us. Well, you expanded NATO. We said you shouldn't. So the whole thing gets very circular.

And from the Russian point of view, they absolutely don't want to nuke us. The point from their perspective is that if they consider that this continued encroachment on their territory goes to such an extent that their national sovereignty is directly threatened, then they will nuke us. They don't want to nuke us. I mean, that's just ridiculous. And I hope that nuclear war will never, ever be used in human history, quite frankly, after what happened in Japan at the end of World War II. But anyway, it points to the circularity of the discussion, just like the chicken and the egg. But it also actually talks to the need to actually sit down around the table and talk.

#Pascal

Yeah. I mean, your work, my work, the work of many others actually in the social media space is actually to kind of tell the West, look, it looks different from Moscow. That's how they look at it. And these are also facts. You cannot talk away eight years of war in the Donbas. You cannot just ignore that. You cannot just ignore the experience of the Minsk agreements. You cannot. If you do that, then you're completely misconstruing why the Russians are fighting. But it creates this other circularity because we are then accused of Russian talking points, right? Not that they are wrong or lies. They're just accused of talking points because to be a good citizen, you need to be on board with your own narrative. And if you're not, then you become an enemy of the state and they detain you at the airport. So again, the circularity bites itself, and it's just ticking away toward that horrible point that you just described in your speech before.

#Ian Proud

Yeah, and the thing is, you know, that I think, you know, we talk about talking points, but I always try—I mean, I'm sure that my judgment and my analysis isn't perfect. Nobody's is. But I always try to be intellectually honest, and I always try to challenge my assumptions all the time. I like to kind of root my observations and analysis in evidence where I can. And, you know, when you see the mainstream media, it just—you might as well be reading a children's comic. I mean, all of the stuff, all of the narratives appear to be made up. Russia is on its knees. The economy is collapsing. The people are going to turn against Putin. I mean, I've been hearing this since 2014, when I arrived in Moscow to work at the British Embassy. But, you know, I've got to tell you now, I was shocked coming into the city in Moscow, literally one and a half kilometers from my old embassy building, my old stomping ground when I was there.

I mean, it really developed. I mean, it was pretty nice, you know, when I worked there seven years ago, but it really developed. Like, driving through, because we were two hours out of Moscow through different towns, you know, there are cars on the road. Yes, some petrol stations were closed. They didn't have fuel. I mean, that's clear, the kind of strikes that have happened. But this appeared to be a country that actually lots of brand-new motorways and road systems have been built. New residential blocks have gone up all over the place. This did not look like a country that was on its knees, not just in the Moscow bubble, but out in the region as well, because we were, like, a long way, two hours' drive from Moscow. You know, this does not look or feel like a country on its knees, quite the opposite.

#Pascal

No, I was in Russia in June, in Pskov, like 600, 700, I want to say, kilometers, yeah, around that to the west. And Pskov is a beautiful little city at the border to Estonia. It's absolutely charming, and it's

doing well, and people there are... I mean, cars are running, petrol stations are there. I mean, we were in several of them. I mean, it's running. So it's like we need to get out of these fantasies, and the sooner the better. But the urgency is really starting to kind of feel and weigh heavy, isn't it?

#Ian Proud

Yeah, it really is. I think it's getting critical now. And I think, you know, ultimately, it all comes back to the epicenter, which is the Ukraine war. I mean, so many people are suffering in this, you know, and I mean ordinary Ukrainian people and ordinary Russian people who are on the borders with Ukraine as well. They're suffering from this. They face a winter with no heating and light because that's the horrible nature of war. All these kinds of strategic bombardments happen, and it's terrible and so on, but that is the war. You know, it's going to be a horrible winter for Ukraine. They will keep asking for more money because they keep spending their money quicker than they plan to spend their money. Europe will continue to struggle to provide that money.

More people will die. Nothing fruitful will have been achieved. More social unrest will be sown across Europe: in France with its school kids, in Germany with its people who don't want to be conscripted. You know, political fragmentation will continue. And for what? That we want to just continue this war on Ukraine because you want to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia, which is frankly impossible. This is the top of the ninth, as I might say, in an American kind of baseball game. We really are in the last innings. You know, we have to accept that we failed in Ukraine and that we have failed Ukraine. And I think one of the reasons that the hawks keep going is that actually, when this ends, they will have failed and they will be seen to have failed.

They will be failures. And, you know, all this repression is just for them. It's just a way to defer the point of terminal failure, when they have to realize that they totally screwed up European security. They have no future. The government will have to take a cold, hard look at the way it sort of runs the country and focus on things ordinary people care about: domestic concerns, hospitals, schools, roads, public safety, and all those things. These are the things ordinary citizens care about. And the war is just taking more and more liberty from ordinary citizens, making ordinary citizens feel less enfranchised than they did before the war. And it's just this drift to authoritarianism and catastrophe, I'm afraid.

#Pascal

Yeah. And instead of fixing things at home, it's much easier to start looking for enemies from within to blame for all of the things that went wrong. Hence, they start picking up people at the airport. And Ian, I promised you to let you go so you could say bye to your kids before they go to school. Thank you very much for that. Again, everybody, Ian, if you want to find him, go to The Peacemonger. It will be linked below. Click on that. Subscribe to him. A subscription really helps.

Also, a subscription to Substack really helps. There, we get your email addresses, which is quite valuable, actually, to stay in touch if things should get even worse. So why don't you go and subscribe to both? And Ian, last thing to say, anything to add where people should go?

#Ian Proud

No, just my YouTube and Substack. And yeah, just thanks so much for kind of listening in. I mean, we need more people talking about the need for peace because, trust me, our governments won't do it for us.

#Pascal

Go out, talk to your friends, talk to your colleagues, set up little circles, something—whatever it is that's in your power. Talk about peace and the need for reconciliation. Every little drop of water has an impact. Ian Proud from The Peacemonger, thank you so much for your time today.

#Ian Proud

Thanks, Pascal.