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And as we resume, we're going to shift gears a little bit. We've, in broad strokes, reviewed what the world will look like in the last seven years before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. As noted, it doesn't quite look like that yet.

So what we are watching for are movements, trends, and developments that could bring those things about. Clearly, the invasion of Ukraine by Mr. Putin and the Russian forces is something fresh and new. There hasn't been an invasion on this scale since World War II.

It's certainly something to keep our eye on. I want to direct your attention. I don't consider myself smart enough to make original analysis of world events, but I feel like I'm able to identify what I think is a good analysis and share it with you.

And there is somebody who I think has a really good understanding, plenty of background on this. And it is something I'll share with you here in just a moment. But first of all, I want to point out some reporting that was done a couple of days ago.

The headline here, this is in The Guardian if you want to look it up, it's called, It's Not Rational. Putin's Bizarre Speech Wrecks His Once Pragmatic Image. Looking dead-eyed into the camera on Friday, this is last Friday, Vladimir Putin gave one of the most bizarre speeches of his 22 years as Russia's leader, a directive that managed to sound alarming even in a week when he has ordered tanks into Ukraine and missile strikes on Kiev.

Once again, I speak to the Ukrainian soldiers, he said, addressing his enemy. Do not allow neo-Nazis and Bandarites to use your own children, your wives and the elderly as a human shield. Take power into your own hands.

It seems that it will be easier for us to come to an agreement than with this gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis who are running your army, running your government. The speech seemed to be ripped from an alternate reality or from the Second World War where Putin appears to be spending more of his time as he launched the kind of broad military offensive not seen in Europe for nearly 70 years. All this week, Putin's mega-lo-maniacal tendencies have been on display like never before.

He summoned his aides for a surreal National Security Council that resembled a television reality show and launched tirades about Lenin and decisions that were made nearly 100 years ago. He also, for the first time, spoke about his maximalist goals in this war, regime change in Kiev, toppling the government of Vladimir Zelensky and replacing it with a more pliant leadership. Putin's call for a coup in Kiev indicates that if Russia wins this war, Zelensky will almost certainly not remain in power.

How he achieves that is anyone's guess. A number of analysts predicted this as Russia deployed more than 60 percent of its ground forces to Ukraine's borders and demanded concessions that

could never be granted. But Putin's unhinged appearances and apparent drive to war have raised questions of whether he remains a rational leader.

According to Tatyana Stanovaia, the founder of R.Politik, despite Crimea and everything else, Putin has always seemed an extremely pragmatic leader to me. But now, when he's gone in this war against Ukraine, the logic in the decision is all about emotions. It's not rational.

Those emotions are deeply rooted in history and the historical injustices suffered by Russia. Dmitry Muratov, the editor of Novaya Gazeta, said he saw Putin as a man with, quote, a historical map in his mind and a plan to use his military to achieve it. Central to that map is Ukraine, which he has described as an artificial state.

Quote, modern Ukraine was wholly and fully created by Russia, namely Bolshevik communist Russia. To help picture it, State TV ran a map earlier this week showing Ukraine cut up to represent what parts were presents, quote unquote, from various leaders, including Stalin, Lenin and Khrushchev. Some commentators said it represents the partition that Putin himself might be imagining if he gets his way.

While once the map might have been viewed as fantasies or media trolling, a Western diplomat based in Ukraine on Friday pointed to his speeches and to that map as a serious sign that Putin is weighing up a dismantling of the country. He is not pretending anymore. For the first time, I think he is revealing who he really is, the diplomat wrote.

With that as a background, let me share with you an interview that was done on Politico with a very well respected expert on Russia, Fiona Hill. This is by Maura Reynolds. It was published two days.

She's a senior editor at Politico magazine. She says, this is Maura Reynolds. For many people, watching the Russia invasion of Ukraine has felt like a series of, quote, he can't be doing this moments.

Russia's Vladimir Putin has launched the largest ground war in Europe since the second world war. It is quite literally mind boggling. That's why I reached out to Fiona Hill, one of America's most clear eyed Russia experts, someone who has studied Putin for decades, worked in both Republican and Democratic administrations, and has a reputation for truth telling, earned when she testified during the impeachment hearings for her former boss, President Donald Trump.

I wanted to know what she has been thinking as she watched the extraordinary footage of Russian tanks rolling across international borders, what she thinks Putin has in mind, and what insights she can offer into his motivations and objectives. Hill spent many years studying history, and in our conversation she repeatedly traced how long arcs and trends of European history are converging on Ukraine right now. We are already, she said, in the middle of a third world war, whether we have fully grasped it or not.

I heard another commentator, as an aside, saying, you know, people are worried that we're going to enter another cold war. Sorry, we're in it. We're, we're, we are back in a cold war.

And it may not stay cold for very long, the temperature is rising. But she said we are in the middle of a third world war, whether we have fully grasped it or not. Quote, sadly, we are treading back through old historical patterns that we said we would never permit to happen again, Hill told me.

Those old historical patterns include Western businesses who failed to see how they helped build a tyrant's war chest, admirers enamored of an autocrat's, quote, strength, and politicians' tendency to point fingers inward for political gain, instead of working together for the nation's security. Did you hear those three things? Have you seen these happening in recent years? One, Western businesses who failed to see how they are helping to build a tyrant's war chest. This is not only true with Russia, I would suggest, but also the King of the East.

Secondly, admirers who are enamored of an autocrat's strength. And you have heard more than one prominent individual talk about how they admire his stratagems, his genius, his ability to get things done as a leader, and to, you know, bring things about their people who just admire a man of action almost no matter what. By the way, the press in China has been hugely pro-Putin.

The Chinese people are getting a dose of heavy pro-Russia propaganda. They see this far differently than the West. And thirdly, and have you heard this, politicians' tendency to point fingers inward for political gain, instead of working together to secure the nation.

But at the same time, Hill says, it's not too late to turn Putin back. It's a job not just for the Ukrainians or for NATO. It's a job that ordinary Westerners and companies can assist in important ways once they grasp what is at stake.

Quote, Ukraine has become the front line in a struggle not just between democracies and autocracies, but in a struggle for maintaining a rules-based system in which the things that countries want are not taken by force. Make sense? We have had a system in place where when countries want a thing, there are channels and ways and means of doing that that don't involve the use of force. Every country in the world should be paying close attention to this.

There's a lot of danger ahead, she warned. Putin is increasingly operating emotionally. And I would underline, underscore, and put your yellow highlighter on that.

Putin is increasingly operating emotionally and is likely to use all the weapons at his disposal, including nuclear ones. It is important not to have any illusions, but equally important not to lose hope. Every time you think, no, he wouldn't, would he? Well, yes, he would, he'll said.

And he wants us to know that, of course. It's not that we should be intimidated and scared, but we have to prepare for those contingencies and figure out what it is that we're going to do to head them off. And I would submit we also need to figure out what to do in the event that he

gets a burst of anger, angst, or frustration and starts pressing buttons.

But this is from Fiona Hill, and she is as qualified as anybody on the planet to talk about Mr. Putin, specifically in Russia in general. I don't know that there's anybody who knows more than she does, who has been watching longer, or who has a better frame of reference in terms of these historical arcs. So Maura Reynolds said, you've been a Putin watcher for a long time.

You've written one of the best biographies of Putin. When you've been watching him over the past week, what have you been seeing that other people might be missing? Fiona Hill says, Putin is usually more cynical and calculated than he came across in his most recent speeches. There is evident visceral emotion in things that he said in the past few weeks, justifying the war in Ukraine.

The pretext is completely flimsy and almost nonsensical for anybody who's not in the echo chamber or the bubble of propaganda in Russia itself. I mean, demanding to the Ukrainian military that they essentially overthrow their own government or lay down their arms and surrender because they are being commanded by a bunch of drug-addled Nazi fascists. That was the article I read you before this one.

There's just no sense to that. It beggars the imagination. Watch out when people leave rationality because predictions are based on reason.

And when someone is being unreasonable, you can't predict what they are going to do. It's just, that's reason itself. She goes on to say, Putin doesn't even seem like he's trying to make a convincing case.

We saw the same thing in the Russian response at the United Nations. The justification has essentially been, what about ISM? You guys have been invading Iraq, Afghanistan. Don't tell me I can't do the same thing in Ukraine.

This visceral emotion, how many times have you seen this recur? This visceral emotion is unhealthy and extraordinarily dangerous because there are few checks and balances around Putin. He spotlighted this during the performance at the National Security Council meeting, where it became very clear that this was his decision. He was, in a way, taking full responsibility for war.

And even the heads of his security and intelligence services look like they've been thrown off guard by how fast things are moving. So, Maura Reynolds says, so Putin is being driven by emotion right now, not by some kind of logical plan? Fiona Hill says, I think there's been a logical, methodical plan that goes back a very long way, at least to 2007, when he put the world and certainly Europe on notice that Moscow would not accept the further expansion of NATO. Then, within a year in 2008, NATO gave an open door to Georgia and Ukraine.

It absolutely goes back to that juncture. Back then, I was a national intelligence officer and the National Intelligence Council was analyzing what Russia was likely to do in response to the

NATO open door declaration. One of our assessments was that there was a real, genuine risk of some kind of preemptive Russian military action, not just confined to the annexation of Crimea, but some much larger action taken against Ukraine, along with Georgia.

And of course, four months after NATO's Bucharest summit, there was the invasion of Georgia. There wasn't an invasion of Ukraine then because the Ukrainian government pulled back from seeking NATO membership. But we should have seriously addressed how we were going to deal with this potential outcome and our relations with Russia.

Maura Reynolds says, Do you think Putin's current goal is reconstituting the Soviet Union, the Russian Empire, or something different? Fiona Hill says, It's re-establishing Russian dominance of what Russia sees as the Russian imperium. I'm saying this very specifically because the lands of the Soviet Union didn't cover all of the territories that were once part of the Russian Empire. That should give us pause.

He's not limiting himself to re-establishing the USSR. He wants everything that used to be called Russia. That should give us pause.

Putin has articulated an idea of there being a, quote, Russky Mir, that's R-U-S-S-K-Y-M-I-R, or a Russian world. The recent essay he published about Ukraine and Russia states that the Ukrainian and Russian people are one people, a Yedinyi Narod. He's saying Ukrainians and Russians are one and the same.

This idea of a Russian world means regathering all the Russian speakers in different places that belonged at some point to the Russian Tsardom, not Kingdom, Tsardom under the Tsar. They've got a picture of the map here. When you see what was originally part of the Russian Tsardom, it will give you pause.

This is a map of the Russian Empire in 1730. It's pretty much a vast bulk of the entire continent. I've kind of quipped about this, but I also worry about it in all seriousness, that Putin's been down in the archives of the Kremlin during COVID, looking through old maps and treaties and all the different borders that Russia has had over the centuries.

He has said repeatedly that Russian and European borders have changed many times. And in his speeches, he's gone after various former Russian and Soviet leaders. He's gone after Lenin.

He's gone after the communists, because in his view, they ruptured the Russian Empire. They lost Russian lands in the revolution. And yes, Stalin brought some of them back into the fold again, like the Baltic States, some of the lands of Ukraine that had been divided up during World War II, but they were lost again with the dissolution of the USSR.

Putin's view is that borders change, so the borders of the old Russian Imperium are still in play for Moscow to dominate now. I'll let you read the rest of this article. But I think there is a rather short term view of this that isn't healthy.

Let me suggest to you another article. This is an article in The Guardian, published this past Sunday, the 27th of February, by Julian Borger in Washington. Putin's nuclear posturing requires the West to tread extremely carefully.

The challenge for NATO was to maintain support for Ukraine while making clear to the Russian leader that he has a way out of the crisis. They had the idea that they need to give him a face-saving exit so that he could withdraw and not be embarrassed. I think that's wishful thinking, to put it politely.

Successive generations, this is the article, successive generations have experienced what it is like to feel the shadow of nuclear annihilation loom over their daily lives. From the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 to the missile standoff in Europe in the 1980s, this is shaping up to be our turn. These people are obviously younger than us because we've already been through the other two.

I'll be honest, I'm nervous. Pavel Podvig, one of the world's leading experts on Russian nuclear forces said after Vladimir Putin declared his special mode of combat duty of the deterrence forces. It is the first time it's been done since the end of the Cold War, probably longer according to Podvig, an analyst based in Geneva where he runs a research project on nuclear forces in Russia.

Things have not been rational in the Kremlin recently so it's not a good sign. There is this constant thread by those who are in the know that there is unpredictable stuff going on. It does not seem rational to the outside view.

Among Russia watchers and nuclear weapons experts, there is no dispute that Putin's penchant for brandishing Russia's arsenal reflects weakness and insecurity and that is not a good trait in the leader of a nuclear superpower. The country's economy is hollowed out smaller in dollar terms than South Korea's and dependent on the vagaries of the oil and gas market. His regime relies increasingly on repression and its armed forces are proving far from invincible in Ukraine.

Russia's 6,000 warhead arsenal is the only thing that makes it a superpower. That's 6,000 warheads nuclear. Putin's nuclear signaling is designed to deter the U.S. and its allies from further intervention in Ukraine and implementing the economic measures that he may see as an existential threat.

But escalation can also take on a momentum of its own and because the margins are so thin, leaders have only a few minutes to make decisions if they believe their countries are under attack. The U.S. and its allies will have to tread extremely carefully in their response. It is not immediately clear what the practical implications of Putin's putting his forces on alert might be.

It could mean that bombs are loaded onto bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles onto mobile launchers are dispersed, or more nuclear-armed submarines are put out to sea, or it could be more of an administrative process. As I understand the system works, Podvig says, in

peacetime it cannot physically transmit a launch order as if the circuits are disconnected, a safety measure. Putin's order could involve connecting the wires so that a launch order can go through if issued.

The challenge for NATO allies now is maintaining the support for Ukraine that it needs for its survival while making clear that Putin has a way out of the crisis. I don't know how you do that. I don't think the West is capable of doing that.

I think that's just a pipe dream. So your other option is hope for the best but prepare for the worst. The threat of a no-fly zone over parts of Ukraine implies that NATO is willing to shoot down Russian planes.

This would represent a dramatic escalation while hints at regime change in Moscow are likely to deepen Putin's paranoia. You know, people are talking about, well, the people of Russia ought to rise up and depose him. That's not healthy to an unbalanced mind.

Laura Kennedy, an expert on disarmament, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, said there is no need or sense in mirroring Putin's reckless nuclear threats, which should be universally condemned. I think it's in everyone's interest for the West to spell out that the most punishing sanctions will be lifted when the status quo ante is restored. Now, this is according to James Acton, Co-Director of Nuclear Policy Program at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

But he added that off-ramps only work as long as Putin can see them and wants to take them, which in my mind is unlikely to the vanishing point. It's difficult for the West to create a de-escalation pathway, Acton said. Much presumably depends on how Putin views the domestic consequences of his backing down, something over which the West has no control.

So let me read you a final article here, which I think is really worth reading, worth hearing. This is published in the American Mind, AmericanMind.org. And this was published back on the 8th of February. And I find it to be prescient because it anticipated things that didn't happen until weeks later.

This is by Brian T. Kennedy, and it's called The Common Sense of the Ukraine Crisis. The Common Sense of the Ukraine Crisis. It's on AmericanMind.org. It's got a bold headline.

War with Russia over its expansionist rumblings would be a disaster. Ukraine, a country on the border of Russia, former part of the Soviet Union, is an improbable candidate for the sacrifice of American blood and treasure. Placing ourselves on the line for Ukraine risks the future of American civilization, especially since Russia's and communist China's formal pledge to support one another in a February 4th agreement strengthens their bilateral strategic cooperation, quote unquote, bilateral strategic cooperation.

They keep saying, well, Putin hasn't got the money. He's losing steam. He's losing momentum.

On February 4th, one month ago, day after tomorrow, they signed this agreement strengthening their, quote, bilateral strategic cooperation. This new agreement signals that the situation in Ukraine is about to get serious. He wrote this a month ago.

Most Americans will take the sensible view maintained from the American founders to John Quincy Adams that we, listen to this, we are friends of liberty everywhere, but guardians only of our own. We are friends of liberty everywhere, but guardians only of our own. However much we may want the people of Ukraine to enjoy freedom, it is not the obligation of the people of the United States to realize that goal for the Ukrainians, to make it happen for them.

That is the principled view of American foreign policy that has prevailed for most of our history. The practical view is more stark. Russia is a nuclear power with strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

Their arsenal is designed to wage war in Europe, Asia, and if necessary, destroy both the American military and the American homeland. Their arsenal is designed for this. They have advanced tactical and strategic missiles that can destroy American military forces, naval battle groups, and like communist China's recently tested rocket equipped with a hypersonic reentry vehicle, they can orbit the earth, reenter the atmosphere, and either blast an American city or electromagnetically destroy the electrical infrastructure of the United States, ending life as we know it.

They have this capability. Putin has got the controls essentially at his desk to do this. This does not mean the Russians are supremely powerful.

The United States has more than a capable military that can project deadly force anywhere on the earth, but what may start as a minor incursion into Ukraine could rapidly escalate into something much more serious. What happens if conflict does escalate between Russia and U.S. forces? Such as this, in my view, crazy idea that we should go over and enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine. The first Russian aircraft that flies into that space and faces an American aircraft, now what do you do? You shoot it down? You're now in a shooting war with the other big nuclear superpower on the planet.

It's crazy talk in my mind. Unless you are prepared, do you want to play a game? How about global thermonuclear war? It's crazy talk. You can't stick your toe in that water when there's a live electrical wire laying in that water.

You say, well, I'm only putting in my toe. You'll get electrocuted just as surely as if you dived in. Anyway, that's my two cents.

The United States has not engaged, listen to this, please. The United States has not engaged in actual combat on a large scale with a peer competitor for nearly 70 years, and we have not experienced mass battlefield casualties practically within living memory. The Russians possess tactical nuclear weapons and battlefield nuclear artillery.

If they are committed to taking Ukraine, they will also be committed to winning, in which case they would not be beyond using these weapons. If they did and U.S. forces were killed, what might our response be? Let us acknowledge that the United States does not possess a national missile defense capable of stopping Russian or Chinese nuclear ballistic missiles, or even an Iranian ship-launched missile. We do not have a nuclear missile defense umbrella, such as was suggested by President Reagan, and he was roundly mocked.

Remember Star Wars? Mr. Reagan and his analysts and advisors saw this day coming and tried to ramp up design and development of something that would protect us in this event. Well, it got squashed. It never came back, and we don't have one.

And these hypersonic orbiting and re-entering delivery mechanisms, there is no defense. If Mr. Putin decides he wants to vaporize an American city to draw our attention away from Europe and implode here, he has full ability to do it. So does China.

And the two of them in an alliance is an existential threat to life as we know it in this country. Just saying. Though we have the technological capacity, America has not built an effective space-based and multi-layered missile defense capable of protecting the United States.

Nobody's mocking the Space Force anymore that Mr. Trump initiated. In fact, I tuned a piano day before yesterday, or maybe it was last Friday, at a home where... No, it was yesterday, a Tuesday. The lady's son is in the Space Force, and he's going to his training and then deploying to Japan.

First brush I've ever had with the actual Space Force. I met this guy's wife, and child, but they and grandma were all in the house. And he's getting ready to deploy to Japan in the Space Force.

It's a real thing. And not to be laughed at, because the threat has now become more than just land, sea, and air. It's from space.

That's what orbiting weapons do. The United States does not possess a national missile defense capable of stopping these nuclear ballistic missiles. Even Iran, putting one on a ship and launching at us, we can't stop it.

These are not secondary considerations, but are central to whatever strategic calculation the United States must make when it comes to how it deals with Russia or any other nation with such weapons. You remember where Iran, and Arabia, and Togarmah, they're all allied with the King of the North. And if the King of the South is allied, and the King of the East, all three of these come against whoever is leading the EU in the West.

Where is the natural point of convergence for those three confederations and the EU who don't want warfare on their own soil? And the King of the North, King of the East, and King of the South doesn't want warfare on their soil. Where would they converge? Armageddon in the Middle East. It's a natural point of convergence.

Though we have the technological capacity, we haven't built this. Despite Russia's and China's protestations, our rudimentary missile defense system is at best capable of stopping a limited number of North Korean missiles. For 40 years, Joe Biden, a longtime opponent of missile defense, and the Democrat establishment have opposed the necessary investments in our national security that would have provided us with an umbrella defense against nuclear missile attack.

If we had a functioning political order, we would be working on a national missile defense, even with the technological challenges posed by hypersonic reentry vehicles and tactical nuclear weapons, with a Manhattan Project level of seriousness, as if our very lives depended on it, which they kind of do. To be sure, the Russians and the Chinese have no qualms about building their own missile defenses and space-based capabilities. That we have failed to do so sends a message to the Russians and the Chinese that the United States is not to be taken seriously when it comes to warnings about Ukraine or Taiwan or any other strategically significant spot in the world.

From their point of view, if America is not serious about its own national survival, why would anyone think it was serious about the survival of Ukraine? That Americans must listen to senators and congressmen of both parties discuss the deployment of U.S. ground troops in Eastern Europe and throw around hypotheticals such as the use of nuclear weapons against Russia is the height of absurdity. Even if war were somehow in the U.S. national interest, which it's not, no serious person would suggest it without first ensuring that a national missile defense was capable of defending the homeland and our forward deployed troops abroad. What then are we to make of a possible war in Ukraine? Remember this is written before the war started? Despite the tough talk by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Russia surely knows that it's only rhetoric.

Since in the first year of the Biden administration, Russia, a supposed enemy, was treated better than any American ally. The hallmark of the Trump administration's policy toward Russia was dogged pursuit of total energy independence by opening up American production of oil and gas. Given that Russia's main industry is oil and gas, Trump made the Russians less wealthy and less capable of playing the role of aggressor in European affairs.

In 2021, the first act of the Biden administration was to close the Keystone XL pipeline, reduce the global supply of oil that led to higher prices for U.S. consumers. These higher prices benefited the Russians who saw oil and gas revenues rise by almost 50 percent in the last year. We have financed at the gas pump the invasion of Ukraine.

Then the Biden administration removed sanctions from the companies building the Nord Stream pipeline supplying Russian natural gas to Germany, making our NATO ally more closely aligned with and dependent on Russia. So despite being vilified, and you remember the the alignment that Togarmah, Germany, is going to be allied with the King of the North? Well, you see the seeds of that already being planted. Despite being vilified by American politicians and

the regime media, Russia has strangely had its way with the Biden administration at nearly every turn.

This kind of diplomacy may well lead Vladimir Putin to the conclusion that he can push Joe Biden around and that the Biden administration is now merely posturing for domestic political consumption. In other words, given the Russian military buildup on the Ukrainian border, Putin believes Joe Biden is bluffing when he deploys U.S. troops to Eastern Europe. Putin wants Ukraine and believes the United States will not stop him.

And of course, we haven't, we didn't, and we won't. Putin has seen that communist China unleashed COVID-19 on the United States, that over 850,000 Americans died, that the U.S. economy and political system were devastated, and that Beijing literally got away with murder. Putin saw Biden ignominiously withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan and leave \$85 billion in military equipment and Bagram Air Base for use by our enemies.

Putin might be led to believe that the Biden administration is withdrawing the U.S. from the world stage and embracing a globalist vision where the U.S. is but one more nation in a multipolar world, and he would have good reasons to believe that it's so. There can be little wonder that Putin signed the strategic agreement with Xi Jinping when he did. Finally, some have suggested that this is Joe Biden's wag-the-dog moment to distract from his failed economic and COVID-19 policies here at home.

Normally, one does not play such games with nuclear superpowers. Now is the time to get serious about our own defense, from missile defense to the state of our armed forces, rather than believing that war in Ukraine is in our national interest. We can only pray that it is not too late.

Brian T. Kennedy, the author of that article, is president of the American Strategy Group, senior fellow board member, and former president at the Claremont Institute. He knows what he's talking about, and I believe pretty much every word of that article, and I offer it to you as perspective. This is why we want to watch closely as the interface of the conflict that has started somewhat in the east of that continent will inevitably move westward.

Where is it going to concentrate and consolidate in the last days? Israel. It makes total sense. We do not yet see these confederations in their final form, but we see the seeds being sown.

This makes me think we've got a little bit of time. However, keep in mind our discussion of Revelation 17, 18, along in there, and the gal in the red, white, and blue robes, and people standing afar off in ships, saying, well, all of that trade and commerce is gone. In that map, as we've seen many times, of the European confederation, king of the north, king of the east, king of the south, there is no eagle flying in from some far off place.

The U.S. doesn't seem to be involved in that final conflict for some reason. It's either absorbed into the EU picture, or it is not a player for imaginable reasons. So, not to worry.

We are in God's hands. He knows us by name. There is not a hair of our heads that falls to the ground that he doesn't know about.

He knows when a sparrow falls, and hopefully we're worth several sparrows. But it is prudent to know the signs of the times, to be aware and not naive. I would discourage anyone in our church from talking politics and this sort of black and white.

I had one more article I was going to read to you about the way people are talking and putting this in simplistic black and white terms. This is an article in foreignpolicy.com, and I encourage you to read it. It's called *The West is Sleepwalking into War in Ukraine*.

Let me just read you the first part of it. This was published on February 23rd. With some notable exceptions, opinion and commentary in the West have solidified around a black and white view of the situation in Ukraine.

The near total consensus is it's all Russian President Vladimir Putin's fault. Russia's stated grievances have no legitimate basis whatsoever, and the only conceivable Western response is to refuse to make any concessions, stand up to Moscow, send more US troops to Europe, though not to Ukraine itself, and to proceed with tough economic sanctions if Russia invades. In some ways, I wish I could subscribe to this view because it would allow me to stop thinking about this complicated set of issues and join the chorus, but I can't do that because key aspects of the crisis strike me as puzzling, and I keep hearing echoes of the same beliefs, tropes, and ingrained orthodoxies that have led US leaders astray in the past.

These reflexive responses are making a bad situation worse and are likely to do further damage to Ukraine and to broader US interests. That's the introduction. This notion that the brave defenders of democracy and women holding babies and all of the nobility, and I mean everybody, go to any news outlet that you happen to watch, and everybody is, is the Ukrainians are wonderful, noble bastions of freedom like unto our founding fathers and the Minutemen and mean old evil Putin.

Just as a quick suggestion for perspective, those of us who do remember or are familiar with the Cuban Missile Crisis, why did we come to the very brink of thermonuclear war with Russia back in the early 1960s? Because there was an existential threat too close to us for comfort. Russian missiles in Cuba, we cannot tolerate that, we will take action, we will go to war to make that stop. What do you think Putin's doing? I personally, with everything having been said about his visceral emotions and lack of rationality, I think that's one explanation.

I think another explanation is that he's made a very careful calculation about what the West will and won't do. And he's a chess player and he is, he's on the march because he knows that people are so afraid of nuclear conflict that they will not stop him. And he can reestablish this Russian empire that will be the king of the North.

And it may be sooner rather than later. It could escalate sooner rather than later. People have

been wrong about what he would and wouldn't do at almost every turn.

And I would not trust any prognosticators except such as those I've suggested to you tonight, who are taking the long view, who have watched him for decades and have, I think, a much more realistic estimate of why he's doing what he's doing and how it is likely to unfold. So I hope that's helpful. I hope it gives a little bit of perspective, both from biblical prophetic standpoint and a practical frame of reference, how to digest the news as it unfolds, if cities fall, if borders move, if Ukraine is carved up, or if the conflict moves to the borders of NATO and it starts being a conflict not between Ukraine and Russia, but between NATO and Russia.

Now's when you want to start locating your white sheets and getting your scissors and thinking, well, you know, might be time to start jumping up and down on the porch, because these pieces can very quickly align and move. We still have not yet seen a leader emerge in the EU. But you can expect that this crisis could produce that result.

And that somebody is going to stand up amongst those nations and rally the others with a practical suggestion as to how to respond. Who would that be? When will that take place? All I can say is keep your eyes on Turkey. That having been said, cheerio, have a great rest of the week.

And we'll be back in Matthew this coming Sunday. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, it is such a comfort that we have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind.

We pray that as we reflect on these world events that you will give us insight if there are any steps that we need to take or preparations we need to make. We pray that you will lay those on our hearts through the presence of your spirit and the truth of your word. In all things, we want to represent the Lord Jesus Christ to reflect your glory as we do so and to be ready always to give an answer for the hope that is in us, the optimism, the confidence, the security, the peace that we have in our souls because of all of the wonderful gifts you've given us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.