

William Tyler | Finland: The Frontline Between East and West in the 20th and 21st Centuries

– Some of you may have heard me say that I found a talk that I gave yesterday about the Queen, a very difficult talk to give, to find the right voice to use. And I'm very grateful to a number of you, particularly American and Canadian friends, who took the trouble to email me and say, that they felt that I had got the right note. Now I thought it was going to be easier talking about Finland, because I'm back to straightforward history. And when I give an opinion, it's obviously an opinion, but the facts are the facts. And I was thinking about how to begin, and I've written quite a lot, and I often do that. And then I go back, and think I've got to have a decent beginning. And then right at the very end, I think I've got to have a decent end. And I took a book, which is called "History of Nations," edited by Peter Furtado, "History of Nations." And in the chapter on Finland by a Finnish historian, he wrote this. "To many historians, the story of Finland sandwich between Sweden and Russia, between east and west." And that's going to be my theme this evening, or whenever time you're listening to me, "Between east and west, seems so complicated. It can only be understood by Finn's themselves." Well maybe think, oh goodness, perhaps I've taken on more than I can chew. It wasn't a very encouraging comment, but here it goes. I'm going to talk about Finland in the 20th and 21st centuries, but I need to give you a little bit of an introduction. I think you all know that Finland has, I know this is poor English, an almost unique language. It's linked only to the Hungarian language and the Estonian language. And it has a culture that largely distinguishes it from its Nordic neighbours. That is to say Sweden and Norway. Let me say something about its early history, because I think that's important.

In the early Middle Ages, the Finns were a peasant society of farmers and fisher folk, a very small population. They had and developed no Indigenous aristocracy. And hence they had no feudal system. And that fact alone makes them stand out from other European nations, who had lords and princes and kings and all the rest of it. And a very, very structured feudal system. The lord at the top, the peasant at the bottom, and the king on top of all. England didn't have that. This rural peasant society had something else that was different, which is also important in the story of the 20th century. They valued the place of women in a way that other European societies did not in mediaeval times. They valued the place of women, because the woman and the man, the husband and the wife had to work in unison, in very tough conditions to be able to bring up a family. And it's interesting to note that in 1,907 when Finland gained its first parliament, that is before either Britain or America gave women the vote. In 1907, the first Finnish Parliament, 1/10th of its MPs were female. So their attitude to women in the 20th and 21st centuries has been in advance of states like Britain and America. By the 14th century, the Swedes

had moved in with an aristocracy. And even today there are Swedish speaking Finns.

In fact, in education, when I visited Finland on part of a education visit to a university in the middle of Finland cardiovascular, the professors told me that they had to give a lecture not only in Finnish, but also in Swedish, if there was one single student that insisted it be given in Swedish, the Finns being very practical people overcame this largely by lecturing in English, which is extraordinary, and the Americans will be amused. I visited the adult education centre on an evening off and I said, "Could I look round?" And they said, "Yes." And I said, where I came from, and funnily enough, the college I was principal of in London was a text about my college in the book that they were using to teach English. At the end of my little visit, they said, "Would I come in and teach next week on a regular basis?" They thought I was at the university for a term. I was actually there for a week. And I said, "No, I'm sorry, I can't." And they said, "Oh, we're very sorry because we can't find English speakers." I said, "What do you mean you can't find English speakers?" They said, "Well, we can only find Americans, so we don't count Americans." "Oh, dear, I shouldn't have said that," but that's what they said. Very interesting. The things are an interesting people. You have to get to know them, that they are very reserved people. I was invited to a Friday evening meeting of the faculty that I was visiting, and we met and they served drinks, mainly beer and peas. I've never understood quite why you had peas, but there were peas, as we might had nuts, they had peas, and very few people spoke. And when it was over, I said to the professor, who was my host, I said, "Look, I'm so sorry. Obviously my presence here stopped people speaking." And he said, "Oh, no, by the contrary," he said, "They were far more talkative tonight were you there than we normally are." And they barely said a word. They are a very different and very interesting, and then very highly educated people. So by the 14th century, the Swedes have moved in and by a treaty with Russia in 1323, Russia acknowledged Sweden as the ruler of Finland. So this begins at East West clash, Russia always the power in the East as far as Finland is concerned, but at this stage, not Germany, but Sweden is the power in the West. And Sweden introduced a whole range of things. And in fact, all the sort of laws and religion, when reformation came, Protestantism came, they introduced Lutheranism. So there's a mix actually in Helsinki of Greek Orthodox and Lutheran. Greek Orthodox? Yes, Greek, because in 1917 when Finland broke with Russia, they abandoned Russian orthodoxy and embraced Greek orthodoxy. It's one of those sort of questions in a big quiz on television for a million pounds or a million dollars that most people wouldn't know. So if you ever asked on a big TV quiz and you're going to win a million. And you remember that I said that many Finns belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. Can you just remember it was me and I'll send you my address and bank details and we can send some of the million to me.

I said in 1917, they broke with Russia. That is because at the end of the Napoleonic war, towards the end of the, towards the, well, the beginning of the 19th century, towards the end of the wars, Finland moved from Swedish control to Russian control. And it became a Grand Duchy of Russia. From 1809 right through to the Russian revolution of 1917, the Russians recognised all the Swedish institutions and didn't seek to change them. And so the Grand Duchy was in a strange relationship in some ways with Russia. But by the end of the 19th century, when the Czars were in trouble, they attempted a policy of Russification, which the Finns now call the period repression, a period of repression. And they began to think of themselves as Finns. And they produced a great book as it were detailing the origins of Finns called the "Kalevala," which is extraordinarily famous book written by a Finnish doctor based on old documents, but supplemented by the doctor's own imagination. But it gave them something that they could hold onto. We are not Russian, we are Finns. By the early years of the 20th century, the Czars were in even more trouble, and in 1905, they lost the war in Japan. And as a result of it, they tried to ameliorate their Russification policy in Finland. And as I said earlier, they introduced a parliament for the first time in 1907. Now that parliament was the parliament of the Grand Duchy of Finland, which was still part of Czars' Russia. Finally, they had an opportunity to break from Russia during the Russian Revolutions of 1917, after which Russia was thrown into civil war, the Red Armies of Lenin and Trotsky against the White Armies. The Finn seized their chance and declared their independence. But civil war came to Finland as well. There were Red Finns, Marxists and there were White Finns, those who supported a Democratic Finland. Now both the Reds and the Whites in the Civil War did not want anything to do with Russia. The Marxist Reds wanted an independent Finland just as much as the White Finns wanted an independent Finland. On the right side of politics, the Whites, there was a division between those who wanted a Democratic Republican Finland and those who wanted a Monarchist Finland on a Swedish model. In other words, a constitutional monarch. This war, this civil war, which lasted from January to March, quite a short period of time in 1918, was a very confused war. And let me just read you a comment about how confused it was. I read this. "This bloody civil war in Finland between the Red socialists and white supporters of the Finnish state. The complex nature of this war is attested by the fact that it's being difficult for the Finns to find a name that everything can accept. It has been called a revolution, a rebellion, a class war, a war of brothers, a war of citizens, a civil war, depending on their viewpoint. And the Finns still find this civil war a difficult thing to teach in school and a difficult thing to come to terms with, particularly because both the Red and the White Finnish armies committed terror, White Terror and Red Terror, it's called.

And as a result of these terrors, 1,650 White died as a result of Red Terror and an incredible 10,000, we don't know exact numbers, 10,000 Reds perished by the White Terror, which became a cleansing of

political views. Why more Reds were killed by the White? Is because the Whites eventually in March 1918, won the war. How did they win the war? Which looked as though it might end in stalemate, because Germany still fighting the First World War in March 1918. Remember, the First World War doesn't end until November 1918. The Germans supported the White Finns. Why? Because they want a bulwark against Russia. Wow. East and West, hold Finland caught now not between Sweden and Russia, but caught between Germany and Russia in the midst of the First World War. They even, the monarchists selected through parliament, a German prince to be king of Finland. He was in fact a relative of Kaiser Wilhelm II. But before that could happen, Germany had lost the war in November 1918, and Finland became a Democratic Republic rather than a democratic constitutional monarchy. Many of the Reds who'd survived the White Terror, remember 10,000 have been killed. Many of the Reds who survived White Terror fled to Russia. And so in a sense, some of that opposition to a right wing government had gone. When I'm saying right wing, please don't think I'm talking in terms of fascism, I'm just meaning centre right. Many of those on the far left, the Marxist had left. In total during the civil war, it's been estimated at over 1% of the population were killed. There were 15,000 orphan children left, for example. The left and the right were both divided. There is no unity in Finland at this point, but gradually with, I suppose you could say that the left had, even the Democratic left, had lost a lot of esteem because of its link with the communists and the Red Terror and the escape to Russia of many of the Reds. It's on the right that they have trouble.

Now remember, we're in the 1930s, and we all know about the rise of fascism. And a group emerged, that was a very odd group, and this odd group in the 1930s began to cause considerable trouble to the government. In the end, this is a group called Lapua, named after a Finnish town. They attempted a coup d'état. Some of them had expressed a view that Finland needed a Finnish Hitler and the conservative government that if I can use a British term, Centre Wright Government deployed the army against them and crushed them. And so this potential fascist element in Finland was crushed in the 1930s. And by the time war came in 1939, Finland was a well established democratic free country and recognised as such. But it had problems internationally because it was fearful of Stalin's Russia. It began by trying to create a military alliance in the Nordic countries, Denmark, it's Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. But the others wouldn't play ball. And so the Finns then went for neutral alliance, and that's what they had. They couldn't get any help from outside of Scandinavia. Why? Well, because France and Britain had washed their hands of continental affairs basically, during those interwar years. So Finland had its problems, but it also had enormous amount of success. Why did it have managed that? Well, it had a lot of success in terms of what happened in the country as a whole. For example, it dealt with the Swedish problem because there was this minority Swedish group, much larger then than it is now. It was up to about 10% then, and it's down to

about 1% there. That Swedish group could cause trouble. Then they instigated what I said earlier, two official languages for Finland. That is to say Finnish and Swedish. So they dealt with that problem. They also had a rising standard of living caused partly by urbanisation and improvements to infrastructure. And as a result, the population began to rise from 3.1 million to 3.7 million in the interwar years. It's still small. They also introduced the concept of what in Britain, we will describe as a welfare state. Something that was happening in Denmark, in Norway and in Sweden began to come in the same way here in Finland. And it was a rather important development and all sorts of things followed. For example, there was support social insurance against accidents, against disability, against old age. There was aid for mothers and young children, state aid. There was aid for the infirm, for the mentally deficient, as they said at the time, and for alcoholics. They put money into social housing. Women had had the vote since 1906, and were given full legal equality in 1919. That's long before. Britain only has half the vote. Half, not a full 100% women did not have the vote when the vote came in in 1919, and American women get the vote in 1920. This is one of those social democratic Scandinavian Nordic countries. You can't really use the word Scandinavian in Finland. It really is a Nordic country. It's not the same as the others, but it's part of that Northern development in the 20th century. And Finland was well into that.

So for all these reasons, Finland was advancing as a free, developing, successful, democratic state, except a Sword of Damocles hung over its head. And the Sword of Damocles was of course Stalin, USSR. And in the 1930s, there was a clash of political cultures between the rise of fascism in Germany and the rise of Marxist Leninism, or I prefer to use the word Stalinism in the USSR and Paul Finland is caught between the two jaws, the lower jaw of Germany and the upper jaw of Russia. And it was a very difficult position for them to be in. When I visited Finland on one occasion, when I went to the University of Jyväskylä, I was in in a hotel and I was waiting for my host to come and collect me, take me to university. And I was looking out the window, and then I went for a little walk and there was a square outside the hotel, and there was all these elderly people hunched over because it was in winter, hunched over, queuing outside what looked like a warehouse. And I said to the host when he arrived, I said, "What were these elderly people doing?" And he said, "Oh, it's a Friday. They've collected their old age pension, and they're now queuing for vodka, and they were going to spend it on drink." And he went on to say that Finland had a massive drink problem and they had a massive problem with children drinking at the age of eight. And later on a quite different occasion, I discovered that Finns used to take the ferry across from Helsinki to Tallinn in Estonia, book a hotel room and simply drink the weekend away. So it's strange to note that in the interwar years they tried the American answer to that prohibition. This is a history of Finland, which is on my block by a Finnish Professor Henry Mailander, a Finnish professor of history, and it's

very well translated and it's an excellent book. And he wrote this.

One of the much discussed but failed social reforms of the 1920s was the so-called prohibition act, a total ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol. The demands for such a law mounted in parallel with better standards of limit, which facilitated access to alcohol, but at the same time reduced public tolerance of unbridled drunkenness. The law came into force in the summer of 1919, but soon proved ineffectual and was repealed in 1932 after a referendum in which 71% voted against prohibition. In practice, the police had little success in preventing restaurants from serving alcohol. The act also resulted in large scale smuggling of spirits, largely vodka from Estonia. Interesting, isn't it? There are other examples of prohibition other than the American, but I thought for my American listeners, it will be interesting to see that parallel in Finland, which had a drinking culture quite different from the American drinking culture. And they still have a problem today with alcohol as much as with drugs. I said the population had risen to just under 4 million by the beginning of the war. Well, the population today, that is the latest statistics on this current year, 2022, is 5 1/2 million. So Finland is still a very small society, and it's still extraordinary rural. I guess some of you have been, I'm sure lots of you have been to Finland, and I don't know whether you felt the same as I did flying into Finland. Now I didn't fly, I flew into Helsinki and I've, on this particular trip I've been talking about, I flew up, changed planes and flew up to Jyväskylä and the trip in Helsinki and Jyväskylä because I was intrigued and looking out the window as one does. I don't think I ever saw anything but trees, trees. Interestingly, when I was in Jyväskylä, I saw a huge train, goods train carrying nothing but trees, well the chopped trees and being prepared to go for export, wood. And I said to a Finnish colleague, I said, "I thought Finland them was meant to be very green and environmentally concerned." Why are you chopping down these trees and exporting them to the west?" And he said, "Oh, don't worry, William, they're not our trees, they're Russian trees." We import them from Russia and then, and then export them to the rest of Europe. I love, I just love the Finns, and, of course, they don't show humour. They just do it with a very straight face. Wonderful people. They really are.

Now I've said that during these interwar years, the one Sword of Damocles hanging over them was fear of Russia. This long hatred of Russia that they've been under its control since 1809. But in particular, the Russification, the era of repression of the 1890s, let alone the Finn's determination to be a democratic nation against the Marxism of Stalin's Russia. There was a poem written at this time by a Finnish poet, which has a stanza which reads like this, which I think is fantastic because it illustrates the point I'm trying to emphasise about Finland being caught between east and west, Like a chasm runs the border In front, Asia, the East In back, Europe, the West Like a sentry, I stand guard. Finland stands guard between the Asiatic hog as

writers in the interwar years might have described it, and civilization, that's how they saw it. They saw themselves as the first bastion of civilization against the barbarity of Russia. But they're small, 3.9 million of them when war comes. And Finnish fears were only two frighteningly true when Russia invaded Finland at the start of World War II in a war that we call the Winter War, because it was fought between November 1939 and March 1940. At which point remember, that because on the pact with Germany, Russia is not at war with Germany. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. So Russia takes advantage of Germany being at war in the West, but not at war with it to invade Finland. There is some dispute amongst historians what their aim was, was their aim to secure the borders on the map I sent in the red bits are what the Russians wanted. In particular, they wanted the bit on your map called Karelia, because right at the bottom in the yellow whatever the brand bit, which is Russia by the lake, Lake Ladoga is St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was only 20 miles from the Finnish border. So they want Karelia, they also want the two other parts. And by taking the northernmost part on your map, Petsamo, they could deny Finland access to the Bering Sea and the Arctic. Others say that Russia wanted more than that. It wanted to reconquer Finland, reconquer the territory that from 1809 to 1917 had been the Grand Duchy of Russia, much the same as Putin wants to recover the Ukraine. And it probably is true that if they could have got away with it, they would have taken the whole of Finland. But rather like Putin is doing with the Ukraine, they readjusted the history. Oh, no, no, no, we never wanted the whole of Finland. No, no, no, we never intended to take the whole of Ukraine, but don't trust the Russians. The Finns know that only too well. The League of Nations offered no help accepted the attack by the Russians is illegal, doesn't help Finland. No one comes the Finland's aid. Britain and France are fighting a war of survival. America is in its isolationist mode. No one from the west. You can say this is one of the failures of the League of Nations. Perhaps that's true. The Russians had demanded the territory, which is the red on the maps, and the Finn said, "No, we're not doing that. We're not giving up that territory." The war is called the Winter War, because it was fought in the winter and temperatures reached as low as minus 45 degrees paranoid. And the Russians as the day in Ukraine were ill-equipped, ill-armed, low morale. And the great Finnish General Mannerheim pushed them back successfully. For two months, the Finns were winning. 3.9 million of them, unlike Putin, at least to the moment, Stalin recognised that something had to be done and the Russians reorganised their supply roots, their arms, and their method of fighting warfare. And they advanced in February 1940, and by March 1940, managed to bring the Finns to a treaty, the Moscow Peace Treaty of March 1940, in which those red parts on your map, I've got my map here, that's why I'm looking. The red parts on your map were seated because the Finns had no choice to Russia. They lost 9% of their territory to Russia. But, and very important but, Finland remained a sovereign nation. Russia did not take back the whole of Finland. It simply took the bits they wanted most. So you can compare

it to the Ukraine when Putin said, "Well, actually all he wanted was the bits in the East," and he never really wanted Kyiv anyhow, and that's the treaty that was agreed. And Finland prestige in the West rose because of its holding of the Red Army. For two months of the Winter War. The Soviet Union had been shown to be weak. This was an added incentive for Hitler in Berlin to attack Russia. If the Finns could push them back in too much, just think what the Verma could do, it could destroy Russia. And as we all know, in June 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia. Now the story so far is straightforward. Russia invades Finland. The Finns push the Russians back. The Russian counter push, and the Russians agree a peace treaty in which Finland loses 9% of its territory. Clear.

But now something different happens. And that is that Finland becomes allied sort of with Nazi Germany against Russia, on the basis of my enemy's enemy is my friend. In January, 1941, that is months before Hitler launches Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. Let me read what Professor Mailander says. He says this. In January 1941, a plan was drawn up in complete secrecy for Finnish German cooperation in the great push towards Russia being planned by Germany. The Germans would have responsibility for the offensive from the northern half of Finland. The Finnish military leadership agreed to attack across the Karelian Isthmus and around Lake Ladoga, of course, because they want Karelia back. But the Germans need a base near to Russia, and Northern Finland provides her with that base. The Germans were intending to take St. Petersburg as it was then Leningrad. The entire operation, let me read, was expected by the Germans to be over by the Autumn of 1941 the latest, coordination of Germany and Finland's military forces took place immediately with a general mobilisation of the Finnish field army. 12 days before Germany declared war in June 1941 on Russia, the Finns were well prepared, organisation was good shape, fire part had been doubled since the Winter War by huge purchases of weapons. And over half a million Finns were under arms, considering the population of Finland, this wasn't back the largest mobilisation among any of the countries in World War II. So how can Democratic Finns ally themselves with Nazi Germany? Well, in the same way, but in 1941, Churchill's government allied itself with Stalin. My enemy's enemy is my friend. Finland was anxious to deal with Russia and as it were put the problems of Germany on a back boiler in the same way that Churchill wanted to deal with Nazi Germany. Before dealing with Soviet Russia, Churchill always thought we would have to go to war with Soviet Russia once Germany was defeated. That's another story for another day, only just say that the Americans strongly objected to that, and indeed it would've been disastrous. But this align with Nazi Germany posed deep moral and political issues for the Finns, let me just read you a small piece here. All through the war, the Finnish government consistently refused to enter into any political agreement with Germany. Firstly, it was impossible for domestic political reasons. Public opinion was clearly appreciated before in Finnish-German relations because it was seen to reduce the risk of a Soviet

invasion. But there was no love. Of course, there wasn't for Nazi Germany. It was a real and terrible political tangle, that the Finns got themselves in. By 1944, defeat for Germany in the Second World War looked more and more likely, and Finland couldn't escape now German clutches. It's seen by the West as in collusion with Germany, and it's still caught between east and west. And as the German Army in the east collapse, Russia went on an all out offensive against Finland. And this led to a further war, which is referred to as the Lapland War, Lapland because it was in the North of Finland, a war fought between 1944 and '45 when the Russians attacked the Finns again. That war left terrible devastation right across Northern Finland when I was in this town of Jyväskylä, I said, "Why are all the buildings modern?" A stupid question. They were all modern because the old town had been of wood, and the Russians simply burnt it to the ground. When you don't know a history and you make silly comments like that, you don't half feel foolish, I can tell you.

So what about this war? Finland comes out of it in a strange way really. There were Finnish politicians put on trial in a war tribunal like Nuremberg and Tokyo, held in Helsinki, but none of them were shot. Some were imprisoned. But the last prisoner to be released who was a former interwar president, or sorry, wartime president of Finland, was actually released as early as 1949. The West realised, the West realised that Finland was indeed pushed into this war and it had really no choice. The Finns today will tell you that they were extremely lucky. And the analogy is with Austria to avoid Russian occupation and to be subsumed like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania back into holy mother Russia, or in their case, Marxist Russia, Finland, who had escaped in 1917, just as the three Baltic states had escaped, managed to escape again in 1945. And I find this very difficult to quite grasp, the Finnish professor writes, Finland was never occupied. Its political leadership was therefore able to retain the right to determine the country's future throughout the entire course of the Second World War, despite the military condition with Germany. The coalition with Germany, sorry, the civilian population suffered severely during and after the war. For in comparison with many other war torn lands, it escaped exceptionally lightly. This was ultimately due to the fact that the country's conscript army had succeeded in its task in spite of losing the war. And the Russians simply felt that it was a bridge too far, even for them to reoccupy Finland. Well, not to, well to reoccupy prior to 1917, they'd not occupied, had they occupied it in the war, I don't think it would've escaped. I think it would've been part of Russia. But because it maintained its independence, even though it had been in this peculiar relationship with Nazi Germany after the war was over, the West was much more supportive. Britain and Sweden, for example, needed Finnish wood and Finnish ore, and there was a link, an economic link. What happens after the war? Well, after the war, Finland continued with its policy of a welfare state. Along that path, it went, stability was provided by President Kekkonen, K-E-K-K-O-N-E-N, Kekkonen. Kekkonen was president of Finland for quarter

of a century. Despite the fact that between 1945 and 1948, the Finnish communists obtained nearly 25% of the popular vote, and Finland managed to deal with the Marxist left. It managed to deal with Russia who demanded reparations. It dealt with the reparation by paying back, a metal products and Russia never, ever seized Finland. And the Finns still think that was a remarkable, an absolutely remarkable state of play. Finland now followed a policy of neutrality, which it had followed previously. And in the early stages of the Cold War, post 1945, a policy of neutrality, which was also followed, remember by Austria, a policy of neutrality looked to be a sensible position to take, as indeed did Sweden follow a policy of neutrality. But Finland is a member of the United Nations, which has more teeth. So there is some support in the West for Finland.

In 1995, Finland joined the European Union, which was quite a surprise, I didn't a surprise to the Finns, but it was a surprise to others as well. And I happened to be in a reception in London in the Finnish Embassy at the time when the boat was taking place. And I said to the Finnish ambassador, can you tell me whether Finland is going to abandon policies and neutrality? Because joining the EU makes it certainly an integrated part economically, but also politically of the West. Is it going to vote to join? And he said, "Yes, we will vote to join." And I said, "Why?" And he said, his answer was very clear, because if Civil War comes in Russia, and remember this is at a time of great change after 1991 in Russia, and there was a possibility that Russia would fragment. He said, "If civil War comes to Russia, and there are Russians fleeing westwards, the Swedes, I think he said, damn Swedes, the damn Swedes will open their doors to the Russian refugees. And how did they get to Sweden? Through Finland. So he said, "We can't, we need the European Union." And when I was in Jyväskylä and a little earlier than that, I was at the airport being sent, shown, being sent off as it were, waved away. My plane was delayed and it was delayed because the civil airport was also a military airport. And we were told we had to wait for military aircraft and one single military aircraft took off. And the Finns who are said by the Swedes to have no sense of humour, untrue. My Finnish professor friend turned to me and said, "William, you have been privileged this morning you realise, you have seen the entire Finnish Air Force practising to repel the Russians," one aeroplane. They're still frightened of Russia. And as a result of that, a fear, when Putin in the second invasion of the Ukraine, which is going on at the moment, flexing its muscles in the name of Imperial Russia, Tsarist, Stalinist, Putin's Imperial Russia, they're fearful. What if Russia doesn't attack Estonia, which everyone thinks is the most likely object of attack in the northern part of Europe? What instead if he was to attack Finland? And the Finns have got jumpy and the Swedes have got jumpy, and at the moment Finland is negotiating, joining NATO, it's policy of neutrality, gone. A clear alignment with the West, but in truth, when it declared its independence in 1917 from Russia, it had made a statement that it was with the West and this strange alliance with

Germany coalition call it what and will in World War II is a sort of twisted example of its commitment to the West against the East. And Finland believes itself to be in the front line all over again. NATO troops will begin to exercise in Finland, very near the Russian border. That is a real positive for the Western alliance, but a positive for the Finns as well. It gives them the security that if Russia was attacked, NATO bluntly America would be forced by the NATO treaty to come to its aid in a way that the West did not, or put it how you will, could duck the issue with Ukraine. It cannot now duck the issue with Finland.

And I said at the beginning, I didn't know how to start and I didn't know how to end, and I did have an ending and is I thrown it away. It wasn't very good. In fact, it was very bad. And then I discovered that Dennis is going to give a talk later today on Sibelius and his great work, Finlandia. And I thought, well, that's given me an idea because in that great piece of music, there is a poem, a song, written by Sibelius in 1899, and the last stanza of that seems to me a really important message for every one of us, all of us listening tonight and speaking tonight. 1899, let me remind you, Finland was part of Russia, but they had a sense of being Finnish at this point, And Sibelius wrote a poem. This is my song, O God of all the nations, a song of peace for lands afar and mine this is my home, the country where my heart is; here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine: but other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine. He's dreaming of a free pin. My country's skies are bluer than the ocean, and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine; but other lands have sunlight too, and clover, and skies are everywhere as blue as mine, O hear my song, thou God of all the nations, a song of peace for their land and for mine. And the final stanza, this third stanza, I find very moving. and I'm going to end with that.

Sibelius wrote, My country's skies are bluer than the ocean, and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine; but other lands have sunlight too, and clover, and skies are everywhere as blue as mine, O hear my song, thou God of all the nations, a song of peace for their land and for mine. What a contribution that is. What a contribution to the world for Sibelius. And what a contribution is that line or two lines, O hear my song, thou God of all the nations, a song of peace for their land and for mine. What Finland knows is in the front line if Putin decides to do something quite dreadful. Thank you very much for listening. I hope it was clear because I'm aware that many of you may not have known much Finnish history before I started. This is the point at which someone says, well, I'm a professor of Finnish history and wherever, and I disagree profoundly, I hope not. Let's have a look at questions, shall I?

Q & A and Comments

Judi. Oh, thank you. Somebody's commenting about yesterday. Thank you for that.

Eleanor has put, even now the Finns regret losing Karelia. Very close to the Russian border today, there is a wonderful museum showing why the Finns still want Karelia including Vyborg back. Well, that's true. I'll read the second part of what you're saying in a moment. Eleanor, that is true, except that the Finnish government has said, that they do not have any outstanding claim on Karelia because there are no Finns left in Karelia. But on another occasion, when I was in Finland at a conference in Helsinki, we had one of those nights, the sort of nights you have on foreign holidays where we had a Finnish folk group sing, and I'm interested in folk loss. I was looking forward to it, but an Australia colleague said, oh, he said, "This is going to be awful" he said. They're so dreary Finnish folk song, it's all about how a young love has been separated because they've lost Karelia. He said, usually it's a man singing in Finland that Karelia is lost and that's where his girlfriend is. He said, if you are lucky that it's the girlfriend that's in Finland and the lad that's in Karelia, and indeed he was absolutely right, it was exactly like that.

Now, Eleanor, you've said something different. Also, Finland has a history with Russian Jews, as Jews who are made to serve in the Russian army in the 19th century were if they survive 25 years of service, some were permitted to live in Finland. Yes, true. What I was going to say was, I think Judi is going to go on and speak a little more about all of that.

Oh, thank you, Frank, that's kind of you. Mara, Kissinger sounds as bright as he always was, was it? Was it in the genes? I'm not sure what you are referring to. If you're referring to his new book, I'm afraid it's had a very poor reception. I've not read it, so I shouldn't really comment.

Loved your presentation. Wonder what you thought of the fact that no mention was made in the Abbey, says Edna, of other faiths?

Perhaps I should answer that because unlike America and most other countries in the world, we actually have an established church. The Church of England, other faiths were all represented. They were not represented as far as I'm aware at the funeral of Georgia Sikh, there were lots of people represented. In fact, there were all faith groups around the queue helping people queuing when they were going past the coffin. And in fact, the Archbishop at Canterbury was with a Jewish female rabbi, for example. So I can't answer that other than that's how it's done. I wouldn't have expected others to par. The interesting question would be whether other religions will be involved in the coronation? Now that's a different issue. That will be interesting to see.

Right, thank you. Who's that? Lynn, thank you for your comment about growing up. A lot of you, South Africans have also emailed me saying they can remember the death of the king and being in British South Africa. And Sandy, her small children old ages were crushed in the Russia theatre exits in order to avoid Nat Banton in the North of England. My father was caught in a situation as an officer in the Royal Artillery in India, in Bombay, modern day Mumbai in 1945, '46, when they went to the cinema, all British soldiers had to stand up and officers had to salute whilst the Indian audience rushed out of the cinema with a lot of abuse aimed at them.

Thank you, people being nice to Wendy, please Judi pass those nice comments about Wendy on, would you?

Yes, Marilyn, you're quite right. The challenge in life is not to agree, but to respect differences. That is the basis of democracy. And that's why populism is so difficult to deal with because they think they have the answer. And that's very well, I think it's very dangerous. Do I know who the people in uniform, weren't in uniform? Yes, they were members of the House of the Queen's household quickly.

Carol then says, please ignore. Okay, I didn't ignore, sorry. Yes, yes, Gene. That was my point about medical reports isn't about Finland, but what I said about medical reports of older politician. We've seen doctors and other professionals are willing to say what is expedient for them to say, that's true. And we've seen it in America. But we have in the past seen it in Britain as well, not least with the death of George V, it was given a big dose of morphine at the right time. So he got, his death was reported in the morning papers and not in the evening papers because it was thought that was not appropriate for the death of a king to appear in the oath. Ridiculous. And oh, this seems to have struck a nerve.

Arlene says, I find it problematic that many US legislatures, legislators, I guess, and Supreme Court judges and presidential candidates are very old. Many people retire in their mid-60s and they do not hold such a power. I completely agree that people in their 70s plus should be retired. Oh, well, I stopped now then. There are some, well, I am retired, but I'm not retired. You know what I mean? But no, Arlene, I shouldn't joke about it because I think you are right. I think there is a problem about that, and we've got to be careful in democracies not to alienate the young. We've got a problem in Britain with an ageing king. That is true. But he will be aware of that. And you'll see younger members of the royal family take, that's why the two children were there yesterday.

Why and how is, oh, Marion, I'm sorry. I'm not a linguist, it's a Finno-Ugric language. They are all linked, and it's linked right back in very earliest times when a group of people developed this language, which only stuck in Hungary, in Estonia, and in Finland. Many of you

know this story because I've told it before. And it was a story told to me by a very, a very interesting Jew who was on my board of governors, Professor Finkelstein, and Finkelstein told me that there was a joke, a Jewish joke, which explained what happened. There was this tribe coming from the east, as they always did, and they came to a signpost and one of the sign, one of the boards on the signpost said, to the land of sweetness and honey and sunshine. And the other said to the land of cold and winter and ice, and the intelligent ones who could read became Hungarians. And the unintelligent ones who were illiterate became Finns, and told, he assured me it was a very old Jewish joke, but it stuck with me and it helps. What defines East and West? Well, East and West is the, we are looking at it.

I don't know who's that? David. I don't know David, whether you are American or European. In Europe, East and West is the division between Russia and the rest of us. It became fashionable to use those terms, particularly during the period of the Cold War. If you go back to the 18th century and British imperialism, the East meant India and the West meant North America. But normally now we see East and West in Cold War terms. The West, of course, including America and the East Russia. You are absolutely right, if you are looking into other parts, other language, it's a shorthand if you like.

Myrna said, perhaps use oriental, occidental, well, that would apply if we were looking at Asia and that terminology is used. I was talking about Europe, and that's the normal sort of language that politicians and historians use. I can't tell you, Phil, about more of the language. I'm sorry, but I really am not a linguist, and that's way outside of my competency. Margaret said I had a Finnish woman in my English class. She spoke Swedish. She chose me over the American teacher too. Well, that's lovely. If she spoke Swedish, she would've been terribly Posh really, in Finland, because she would've been part of this Swedish aristocracy. Was Poland also a Grand Duchy? Oh, you caught me on the hot. Yes is the answer to that.

Q: When did the Finns become Christian?

A: Originally Catholic Orthodox, originally Catholic, and then converted by the Swedes to Protestantism. They become Christian, sort of a roundabout, the millennium, a 1000, 1100, 1200, that sort of period.

Oh, Sonya, when people put all their name in one, it's sometimes difficult to work out what their name is, but I'm sure it must be Sonya, I can't be Sonya Love. Sonya, we were recently in Finland and impressed by their lifestyle and philosophy. Sisu is their resilience in the face of adversity. Fika is their mandatory coffee breaks to return to maximum efficiency at work. Yes, they do rank near the top of the happiness and educated indices. They also unfortunately have high numbers of suicides because of the dark winter.

Q: During the civil war, did most people live in urban or rural areas?

A: Mostly in rural areas. What kind of jobs and economy did they have? Agriculture played an important part, but I mentioned timber. There's ore, O-R-E in Finland as well. They develop, of course, ship building that there's a range of things that they were involved in. There's not one outstanding, this is not like Sweden with its manufacturing economy.

In 1970 says Sally, we had a Finnish old pairs, father was in prison for alcoholism, really? She was very difficult to get to know, was very kind to our children. I've visited a few times and found them introverted and depressive. This is typical. Yes, it is, but I'm not really sure. Yes, that's true. They are introverted, but you've got to get to know them. I was close to them only for a week. I think if I'd stayed for three months. You would sort of get under their skin. I may have told some of you this story before and I apologise, but it fits.

On one occasion, I gave a lecture during my visit to Jyväskylä on the folklore curriculum for adult education, sounds boring. And it was very formal. I had to wear a gown, and a Swedish friend of mine said another adult educator. He said, "Look, I'll bet you 10 pounds, William, 10 English pounds, you can't make them laugh." And it happened to be the day in England, in Britain where we celebrate Red Nose Day. It's the raised charity. It's done on television and they produce red noses and I had this classic red nose and I put it on, I've got a gown, I've got red nose, and I went in and I just stood there and none of them laughed. And I could see my Swedish friend absolutely doubling up and putting his hands up, 10 pounds, 10 pounds. And then one of them laughed and they all laughed and I asked them afterwards, runs up Finns I knew and they said, well, we find it very difficult to laugh and we didn't want to appear to be rude, but we did realise you were attempting to be funny. And we did find it funny and we thought it was a good introduction, but we didn't like to be the first and laugh. I won my 10 pound.

Nobody came to help Czechoslovakia when invaded by USSR in '68. As a result, we managed to flee and live in the UK says Tanya. People here were telling us it was terrible. We really cried when we saw it. I know it's different with Finland, but crying didn't help and total oppression followed.

Yes, that's true. But Czechoslovakia in 1968 was very much part, as Hungary was in 1956 of the Eastern block. Tanya, I don't wish to in any way less than the horror of what you went through. Please don't think that. But the reason the West did not intervene is if it had, Czechoslovakia was not a member of NATO, was not in the Western block. If the West had intervened, it would've led to the Third World War and possibly the dropping of nuclear bombs across Europe. There was no

way. In the same way that NATO is deciding not to go into Ukraine, if Finland joins NATO, well, when Finland finally signs the final declaration and joins NATO, that will be thought that that will be enough to deter Putin. Now the problem is it may not. Putin, well, Putin's difficult to unravel. If Putin is the psychopath that many think he is, that might not stop him. He might yet drop a nuclear warhead on Ukraine, but he could equally do so on a NATO country and believing that the West will be too weak, hit back that there are no easy answers in this world, and thank God none of us are in a position as a prime minister or president to make that decision. When do you press that red button? I've said all I can say about the language.

Yes, Angela, I think you are right. We watch you say about Jews, that is going to be, I'm sure truly will be saying something that.

Susan says near my home in Toronto is a Finnish Lutheran church. It has a basilisk plaque showing refugees and texts the crying godless Russians, yeah, yep. Did I understand that Finland, the doctor policy and tragedy only after the war where Sweden was neutral throughout the war says Johnson. Yes, you are right, because Finland had a policy of neutrality before the war, but Russia invaded and therefore Finland had to act, so it's neutrality was not recognised. Then it invited or the Germans asked to come in and the Finn said yes, because they were fearful of Russia and so the neutrality was worsened a second time. Sweden's neutrality as I said when I talked about Sweden, is something hotly debated in the Nordic countries.

Lawrence says, most of the Russian cars exported to the West for years up the war were made by Valmet in Finland and that is why the build quality and reliability was excellent. They were also assembling Audis and Porsches in the same factory. Lawrence said something I didn't know.

Thank you very much indeed. What I do know is that the best Russian tsarist chocolate, Fazer's chocolate moved the Finland in 1917, and you can still buy it. So you can eat Russian tsarist chocolate.

No, you are right, Lena. No Finnish and Hungarian are not mutually intelligent, nor is Finnish and Estonian, but they are related in terms of language groups and as you say, they're part of the Finno-Ugric group. If people are really interested in language, perhaps you should ask Judi if she can find a linguist to speak to us all. It's way beyond my, I'm flattered that people think I can answer that question. I really can't.

Who is this? Dennis. I will remember in '39, the British had produced a successful propaganda stolen the called The Lion has Wings. When Russia attacked Finland in the November, that went round was the lion has wings, but the bear has fins. Oh, now I didn't know that either. I'm learning a lot, Dennis, that's all fantastic. The lion has wings,

but the bear has fins. Britain declared war during World War II on Finland. That's true. The Americans didn't. When did we make peace? 1945. Finland has produced a disproportionate, I'm a classical musician.

Q: Do you have any idea what there is about Finnish culture lies behind this?

A: No, I don't. Except that Finnish culture. Well, partly it's because of the dark winter night, and therefore music played an enormous part in Finnish culture because what do you do in those years before television and the internet and they have maintained a high culture in a way, well, certainly a high culture has never existed like that in Britain. Mannerheim was elected, was the answer to how was Mannerheim prison.

Oh, that's, Carol, you like my ending. Thank you very much. Who is this? Carol. Finnish Jews were saved by the Finns as they refused to send them to Germany. The Russians exacted harsh reparations after the war. A Finnish acquaintance of mine explained that as children, they needed to share one pair of shoes in winter to go to school on alternate days. I visited Finland in December '68, on the bus to Helsinki, they played on the radio "Jerusalem of Gold." It was amazing. The country has the most phenomenal architecture and design that is recognised for all over the world. Yes, it does. The Finns, it's just not music, it's architecture, it's all sorts of things. The Finns are extraordinarily highly cultured. Carol, apropos to the ammunitions, the Israeli firm, Sultana Factory of Pots and Pan has brought Candace Steiner to Israel to help make arms too during the War of Independence, it belonged to a Finnish Jew.

Oh, Barbara, you are the sort student I love. She says, no question, just thank you. Oh, Barbara, you can come again. The Finns absolutely refused to hand over their Jews the Germans. What do you think of Russia's strategy of holding referendums in Ukraine's larger Russian population doing extra hands? Says Harvey. Not much because they have moved a lot of the Ukrainians out or the Ukrainians have fled. It would not be a genuine referendum. You can't hold a referendum like that. You have got the stick by international law, and international law says it is Ukrainian.

- [Judi] William, would you like to just do one or two more?

- Yes, I will.

Q: What system of law do they practise in Finland?

A: I'm not quite sure, Barry, what what you mean by that? It's Finnish Law. Oh, and probably, no, not based on Russian, based on the old Swedish law. It's very Western European. I know to yesterday, the Dean

of Windsor referred to the king as defender of the faith ignoring that Charles changed the defender of faiths. No, Charles can't do that. That he said he would be chamberlain of defender of faiths because he takes a wider view, but he is the defender of faith in terms of the church of Finland. It's what's in the Constitution. What is going to be interesting is to watch what he does at the coronation. Remember, the funeral was organised by the Queen, whereas the coronation will not be organised by him, so watch his space.

Please don't retire. I think I'm okay for a couple more weeks anyhow.

Can you repeat? Michael says, my comments about George V and morphine. George V was given morphine to kill him basically and they gave him the heavy dose so that he would die, so that his death would be reported in the morning papers and not in the evening papers because it was thought the evening papers were not appropriate to announce the death of the King in. Yes, Patrick says, let me read it because I think you are right. You probably know that David Owen, ex British Foreign Secretary book, "In Sickness and in Power," is a really good read on ageing illness. Yes, it is because David Owen was a medical doctor before he became a politician. If you've not read "In Sickness and in Power," by David Owen, it is worth reading, and although it's linked to Britain, it has a wider significance.

I'll leave it there then. Bye-Bye everyone, bye-bye.