

NATO's New Plans To Destroy Russia | Prof. Jeffrey Sachs

The West is losing the Ukraine War big time. But that does not mean the NATO lunatics are willing to give up their plans for total global domination. On the contrary, some of them are only getting started. Professor Jeffrey Sachs joins Pascal Lottaz to argue that the Ukraine war is a long-running US proxy conflict with Russia. He discusses NATO expansion, post-Cold War policy, US power and elite interests, Europe's economic costs, and the risks of escalation. Sachs also outlines what he sees as a path to peace: Ukrainian neutrality, no further NATO expansion, and ending US wars. Links: Jeffrey D. Sachs: <https://www.jeffsachs.org> Common Dreams: <https://www.commondreams.org/author/jeffrey-d-sachs> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Jeffrey Sachs on the Ukraine proxy war 00:00:42 NATO expansion and US primacy 00:12:57 From Cold War peace to confrontation 00:20:43 The US strategy of global dominance 00:23:34 Can the US choose coexistence? 00:29:56 Can the wars be stopped? 00:35:35 Where to follow Jeffrey Sachs

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today with a special episode with the one and only Dr. Jeffrey Sachs.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, welcome. Pascal, great to be with you. Thanks so much.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for saying yes to this. We want to discuss a piece that you wrote a couple of weeks ago and published on your homepage, Common Dreams. You called it "Ukraine, America's Enduring Proxy War on Russia." It's easily forgotten that we are now, you know, four and a half years into this proxy war. And when I speak about proxy war here in Switzerland, where I currently am, people still tell me, "But Pascal, this is a Russian narrative."

#Jeffrey Sachs

How can you—what do you make out of this proxy war four and a half years into it? First, I think we can legitimately say this is a proxy war that's been going on at least 12 years, since the coup which overthrew the Ukrainian president in February 2014. Arguably, it is a proxy war that has been going

on in one form or another for 35 years, since 1991, since the end of the Soviet Union, because when the Soviet Union fell, America's next target was that Russia should fall. And you could say that this is a proxy war that's been going on for maybe 81 years, since 1945, because at the end of World War II, American and British strategists felt that the next battle was to bring down the Soviet Union. So, in a way, I believe there is a long continuity in American policy.

Of course, as you say, this approach runs completely against the mainstream narrative that we are fighting a defensive action against Russian aggression. But this is rather ridiculous, because Russia was weak after the 1990s. Russia wanted partnership with Europe and the United States. Russia actually wanted into NATO, if we recall that in the early 2000s. This is not a war of aggression by Russia. This is the tragic result of a mindset of the United States and Britain primarily, and then also now continental Europe, which was a late joiner in some sense to this mindset that the U.S. should run the world. And to do so, it should take whatever territory it wants in the world into the American camp.

And Ukraine was a big prize for the American strategists in their attempts at victory, control, or primacy or hegemony, whatever term one wants to use. And they were explicit about all of this back in the 1990s. A debate came as soon as the Soviet Union fell in December 1991. What should America's policy be? Should it be a friendship with Russia and the successor states? Should it be to create an environment of inclusive security, as President Gorbachev and President Yeltsin ardently called for? Or should it be an expansion of the American military system? And we know that by 1992, the decision effectively was taken: NATO will enlarge. It was a fateful decision. It was a decision completely contrary to what was promised to President Gorbachev and Yeltsin back in 1990 and 1991, when the terms for German reunification changed.

#Jeffrey Sachs

were being negotiated, and the President of the United States and his Secretary of State and the German Chancellor and his Foreign Minister, all in unequivocal terms, said to President Gorbachev, "NATO will not enlarge." But as soon as the Soviet Union fell, both the Americans and the Germans said, "We have a free hand. Our commitments don't mean anything." Even though Russia was the continuation state of the Soviet Union, the treaties mattered. The promises that had been made, as you have so beautifully pointed out, whether they were verbal promises or whether they were written promises, they were restated constantly. They were the basis of actions taken by Germany. They were the reliance for unification that made German reunification possible. The Soviet Union relied, and Russia relied, on these promises.

They were abandoned. And the idea became that America and its European allies should expand their political reach and their military reach as they see fit. And we know already by the mid-1990s, the decision was that NATO should expand at least to Ukraine and to Georgia, because these were committed already and explained in a very clear article by Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1997, that the future of NATO would be to take Ukraine in between 2005 and 2010. And he spelled all of this out in

his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, in 1997. And the subtitle of that book is "American Primacy in Eurasia," or I'm paraphrasing, but it's substantially that subtitle: how the United States will be the power, primacy, the hegemon in Eurasia in the decades ahead.

And the answer was the United States needs essentially to make Russia a weak player in the system, subservient to American and European interests, and that expanding NATO and the European Union political organization would be the way to do it. Russia would resist, but Brzezinski analyzed the situation and said Russia can't really resist if the West pushes. It has no place to go. It will never ally with China, he wrote. It won't ally with Iran, he wrote. It will have no option but to accede to American demands. And so this game, because it was a game, the Great Game of the 19th century, replayed as the Great Game of the end of the 20th century and the early 21st century, was American primacy pinned down by military bases in all parts of the world, and in the European theater by the expansion of NATO.

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#Jeffrey Sachs

Of course, sane American thinkers knew how dangerous this was. George Kennan said it was the biggest mistake of American foreign policy. William Burns, who was the CIA director in 2009, said it was the reddest of red lines for Russia, that this idea of Ukraine being in NATO was neuralgic not only to Putin or to a particular group in Russia, but to the entire Russian political class. And Angela Merkel knew that this march of NATO eastward was tantamount to a declaration of war with Russia. Well, this all came to a head, as we know, in February 2014. The simple fact is the Ukrainian public didn't want to join NATO. And their president, Viktor Yanukovich, was a president who had won his election at the end of 2009 and 2010 on the basis of neutrality, non-NATO membership, and keeping a balance between Russia and Europe, or Russia and the United States.

And the U.S. cannot tolerate that kind of neutrality. The mindset is, you're either with us or you're against us. And Yanukovich clearly was against us. He had to go. And so the United States helped to stoke the overthrow, which came on February 22nd, 2014. And we've been at war since then, because as soon as that happened, eastern Ukraine broke away, said, "This is not our government in Kiev. This is a government of coup." Russia took actions, variously described, to ensure that Crimea would not fall into NATO hands. And the war began. And my view is the U.S. foreign policy hasn't changed. It is to continue to, quote, win this war, which is impossible.

It won't be won. It could end in a complete nuclear war, but it can't end in a Western victory over Russia, because Russia will not accept such an outcome. It will escalate if needed. In practice, it

probably won't need that escalation, because it looks like Russia will defeat Ukraine just on conventional means alone. But God forbid, if it ever came to a truly existential question, Russia is going to go down in defeat or escalate to nuclear weapons. You have to think, because we've been told a thousand times now, that escalation to nuclear war is probably the likely outcome, certainly a very possible outcome.

So this whole war is a proxy war. It's a proxy war for American primacy. It's being lost. It's destroying Ukraine. It's been going on for a dozen years. The campaign has been going on for more than 30 years. And this is the deep state in operation. And it's very, very unfortunate. And Europe, European leaders have completely lost their senses, because everything I just said would have been taken as normal 20 years ago, not controversial. Ask the German government at the time. Ask the French government at the time. Ask the Norwegian government at the time. What I'm saying absolutely would have been mainstream. Yeah, don't push Russia. Why would you push Russia?

Why do we need to expand NATO? That is tantamount to war. Now the European politicians, for many reasons that are debated, are saying things absolutely devoid of the truth in their utterances. And what we don't know is what they think, really, whether they're just ignorant of this history, or whether they're so deeply locked into it that they see no way out, or whether they're delusional that they think they're going to defeat Russia. I don't know what it is, but we're in such a confused state of discussion, even though what I've recounted, which now is called Putin apology and pro-Russian propaganda, was mainstream in Europe 20 years ago.

#Pascal

Maybe this is one of the things that is so difficult to comprehend for many of us on this side of the discussion. First, how is it possible that we went from the de-escalatory 1980s, when, yes, there was a Cold War brewing, but actually the one thing that Gorbachev and also Reagan understood was this needs to be somehow managed. There needs to be— and we've had people like Jack Matlock, who's still around and keeps telling us how they worked toward that. And he's the guy, he's the man who says, like, no, no, no, the Cold War was ended because it was beneficial for both of us. We wound it down, and the Soviet Union collapsed two years later. And this was that cooperative spirit. And he actually is on record in the 1990s saying, like, do not expand NATO. It would be a huge mistake, right? Just like Mr. Kennan. And then we went into this unipolar moment.

And now we are at the epitome of that unipolar moment, still, at least in the thinking of people in Switzerland. Next month, we're going to vote on the neutrality initiative, which, if we did it, would actually strengthen Swiss neutrality. But we are probably going to lose this because the counter side, the other side, says it would be pro-Putin. We couldn't put sanctions anymore on Russia; it would be pro-Putin. Literally, the only thing they throw around is Putin, Putin, Putin. So we are in the height of a mania in Europe, you know. And it reminds me so much of the fifties, of the Red Scare, right? And

how the idea was, we need to defeat communism. And it took twenty years to get to the idea of mutual coexistence. So my question is a bit how to speed that up, that we finally get from, we need to defeat Russia, to, God damn it, we just need to figure out a way to not blow each other up.

#Jeffrey Sachs

And there's no communism. What are we even talking about right now? The whole basis of what was wrong with the Soviet Union, you know, the communists, the Bolsheviks—this is gone for 36 years. It was gone even before that. I know about that. But this is the amazing thing. I was there exactly at that juncture when I was sitting across the table from Boris Yeltsin, and he's saying, "Yes, we want to be a normal democratic country. We want peace. We want a market economy." And I said, "Mr. President, I'm sure that the United States will give you full support for that." Of course, I was completely wrong. The United States was ready to bring him down the same way. What they wanted in the U.S. was, "Bend your knee to us. We are the sole superpower. We're going to run the show. And yes, if you want to be a fourth-rate power, we'll let you live." But this is...

#Pascal

You had the Matlocks. You had the Kennans. All of these people were Americans too. Why did those goddamn neocons win the debate?

#Jeffrey Sachs

If you look in, by the way, 1994, the wonderful segment of Jack Matlock debating Henry Kissinger on the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, and people can find it just on the website. It's truly amazing. This is the year 1994, and we used to have intelligent mainstream news, and Robert MacNeil was the newscaster, very intelligent. And you took 20 minutes, 40 minutes, 60 minutes for a serious discussion of a serious issue. And the issue on this show was, should NATO enlarge? And Ambassador Matlock said, no, this is not the time for that. You know, we're just reestablishing good, trusting relations with Russia. There's no threat. There's no reason. We should leave well enough alone and just go on to deepen our relations with Russia. The Cold War has ended, and we have a chance for peace.

And then they ask Kissinger, "Mr. Kissinger, should NATO expand?" And he says, "Yes, NATO should expand." And MacNeil says, "Why, Mr. Kissinger? Is Russia a threat?" "No, no, no, no, no, no. Russia is no threat." "Well, is this in the security needs of the countries of Central Europe?" "No, no, no, no, no, no. Nothing to do with that." "Well, Mr. Kissinger, wouldn't this antagonize Russia?" "Oh, yes, yes, it would antagonize Russia," he says. "So why, Mr. Kissinger, should we expand NATO?" And Kissinger says, "If you can't antagonize Russia when they're weak, what are you going to do when they're strong?" That's the logic that was used. And this is absolutely remarkable logic. And this is exactly on the record, exactly at that hinge moment, exactly in this debate.

You presume, yes, we're going to be in conflict, so we might as well start the conflict now. The idea that there could be peace doesn't dawn on Mr. Kissinger, which is a little odd because he actually was the student of the Concert of Europe. That was his scholarship. He knew that after the Napoleonic Wars, it was a balance of major powers that kept the peace in Europe for decades, arguably for a century, to avoid a cataclysmic war. There were, of course, several wars in Europe: the Crimean War, the War of Italian Unification, the war creating the German state. But there was no Great War of Europe, and the Concert of Europe played a decisive institutional role. And it was the opposite of what Kissinger said. Kissinger said, "Well, we need to antagonize them. It's either now or later." And that is the mindset.

But the mindset in the United States was even worse than that. I know these people, and I remember the times. And this was absolutely the time of the supreme arrogance of the American strategists. They were arrogant, as they told themselves every day: the indispensable nation. They were the world's sole superpower. They were the most powerful country that had ever strode the planet, many times more powerful than the Roman Empire. This is what they told themselves. And these were nasty people and greedy people and, of course, above all, arrogant people. So what we are witnessing is the arrogance of power at a fundamental level. They are doing it because they think they can do it.

And it goes back perhaps to the Athenian generals in Thucydides, that the powerful do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. The view that there are no rules, there are no principles, nothing ever comes around. If you're on top, you take whatever you want. And that was the American view. And it was institutionalized in many, many ways in our military strategies, defense documents, in the Project for a New American Century, in legislation in the late 1990s that said it is the policy of the United States to overthrow the government of Iraq. Remember when Iraq was the obsession of the United States, like Iran is today.

It was the seven wars in five years doctrine that NATO Supreme Commander Wesley Clark told us about in 2001 after 9/11, when he was presented a paper at the Pentagon that said, "We're going to take out the governments of Libya, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran." What am I missing? Iran. But the point was, the U.S. can do what it wants. It can go to war where it wants, when it wants. And that became the doctrine of the U.S. And Europe basically... Well, very interesting. In the early 2000s, there were voices in Europe that said, no, this is not right. Jacques Chirac, de Villepin, said no. I know the Norwegian government: no. Expand NATO? Bad idea. I know, of course, Mrs. Merkel from her own memoirs: no, this is very dangerous.

I need to resist this, which she did for one of the two days of the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008. So I think the mindset was, we can do what we want, and the likes of Cheney or Wolfowitz or Perle, but even beyond, I mean, probably much deeper than that, inside the CIA and inside the institutional apparatus of the United States, really became the main theme. Brzezinski, of course, I already mentioned in this. Brzezinski had second thoughts in the 2010s. He came to understand that this was not working the way he thought. Kissinger came to have second thoughts. Interestingly,

even Trump, who is a bizarre and incompetent figure, probably has his own second thoughts about this. But the deep state continues. Doesn't matter who's president.

#Pascal

But that's the question now, right? Because in a very weird and bizarre way, you know, George Kennan is the man who wrote the Long Telegram and actually defined the strategy: the Soviets are only susceptible to the language of strength, right? And in a sense, the United States is making that point right now. The U.S. is only susceptible to the language of strength. At least that's the message they're sending with the proxy war, with the Iran war, with all of the sabotaging of diplomacy and the backstabbing and so on.

So in a sense, like what the others seem to be learning is like, well, we need to have this kind of wall of fire that then somehow prevents them from keep pushing. But what do you think would it take, in order for, in this environment, then to turn back the United States, to make sure that they seek coexistence rather than continued, you know, just reload and shoot again, reload and shoot again until we break it? Because that's the other ones. The neocons are still, well, we just try another day, you know. Didn't succeed today, succeed tomorrow. Scott Bessent, D-Day, economic D-Day, it's the same, it's the same thing, just time and time again.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Absolutely. I think what's interesting with Kennan also, who's a very interesting figure and thinker, because he did propound the containment approach—he did—then pretty quickly, already by the late '40s and certainly by the 1950s, said, "I didn't mean to militarize it this way." And most of his life after that, from the '50s through his death, was saying, "I didn't mean an all-military approach or this kind of dominance." So he continually warned in the other direction. But he wrote something, and I don't remember, unfortunately, the document number, but when he was directing the Policy Planning Bureau in 1948, I think the document is, that is absolutely revealing.

It is in a portion about policy towards the Far East. And it says the United States has the predominant wealth of the world. And that predominant wealth is going to lead to envy. And rather than us being nice or generous or philanthropic, we have to be hardheaded to protect our advantage. And it's a very stark statement, a very, you know, ultra-realist statement that basically says we're rich, they're poor, we're going to stay rich, and we're going to make our foreign policy work towards that. And that's an even broader view about what is going on than the containment idea or even the fight against China and Russia more generally, that are devoid of ideological issues.

The United States' approach really since the 1940s has been, we must dominate so that we can stay rich. And that's an approach that is essentially a class approach, because this is not the view of the American people who are saying, "Hey, would you pave our roads? Would you fix the potholes? Would you make our infrastructure not fall down again? Could we have some decent housing? We

can't afford our healthcare." If you listen to the issues of the average American, the issue of war never comes up. And if an actual war is on the agenda, they're against it because they understand it's a drain of resources.

But I think that there is truly a class, a class Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex. It is both the direct war business, the military contractors and all of that, which is pretty big business at more than a trillion dollars a year. But it is also the financial interests, Wall Street and Silicon Valley, as lobbyists, which have the view that somehow American hegemony, winning these wars, is necessary to protect American super-wealth. And I think that this actually plays into the mindset that if we're not dominant, what's going to happen to us?

We won't—if we can't run the world, we're going to lose many advantages. The dollar won't be used. We have a lot of talk, of course, of the petrodollar and the role of the dollar in international trade, the boost that that gives to the financial system, the boost that that gives to the net worth of the richest Americans. I think that there's something there in all of that that is real. In other words, when Trump and Bessent are on the warpath, as they are right now, you don't hear any serious business leader in America saying that's not prudent. You don't hear a single figure in Wall Street.

You don't hear a single figure in Silicon Valley, in the top businesses, saying, you know, peace would actually be feasible, and we should aim for that. So there is a sense. And it's not just going along with the powers that be. They have more power than Trump. It is actually, in a way, showing their hand, which is: these wars are fine. Maybe they kill a lot of Ukrainians. Maybe they screw a lot of Americans. Maybe they raise the debt. But they keep our wealth, our economy, super-elite class wealth protected. And that's the main goal of American foreign policy. Anyway, I just mentioned that because Kennan actually was very explicit about that back in the late '40s.

#Pascal

Thank you for this. And I have to be mindful of your time. Just the very last one-minute kind of question. Do you think that there are people planning the next stage of the proxy war or the proxy wars? Where do you see this kind of sick planning going? And you can keep it short.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yeah, I think that at some level, a lot of people, even inside the political class and certainly the American people, say this is a dead end, whether it's the Ukraine war or whether it's the Iran war. This isn't in our interest. Let's stop this. They know that Russia is no threat to Switzerland. Russia is no threat to Europe. Russia went into this because it resisted this U.S. primacy and its military route, which was the building of a million-person army in Ukraine and a coup that created a hostile government in Ukraine. So the American people and a lot of the normal political class get this. The Iran war is even more unpopular now.

What the U.S. has an extremely hard time doing, though, as a political system—I suppose it's true of most political systems—is saying, "That was a mistake. We stop." And that's Europe's problem as well. Generally, our wars have stopped when there's a change of government. So the United States loses lots of wars. It lost the Vietnam War. It lost the Afghanistan War. The wars do stop, but generally when a government goes out and a new government comes in, and the incumbent gets locked in and then would rather die than continue the war, at least till the next election. And there was a famous article by Daniel Ellsberg, a brilliant article in the late 1960s, called "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine."

It was one of the first articles in political science I read coming into Harvard as an undergraduate. And the idea was, he said, what's really going on? Are we stuck in a quagmire in Vietnam? No, we have a stalemate machine, and the stalemate machine has basically one rule: don't lose until the next election. That was the rule. And so just prolong things until the next election. And then once in a while, a new government will say, blame it on the old government. We're getting the hell out. And that is one way things could stop. It was Nixon's fall that allowed Gerald Ford basically to say, okay, we're done with Vietnam. And it is maybe one way out of this.

Trump is not clever enough, mentally balanced enough, and the deep state is not interested enough to just say, this is a debacle, let's finish. With Europe, the situation is even worse. Europe is in a deepening economic crisis because it has cut itself off from natural trade with Russia. It is trying to conduct, you know, a militarization which the public doesn't want, which can only lead to grief in the end on the pretext of Russian aggression to Europe. And the European economy is actually worse than stagnant right now. It's in decline, not only because of the energy crisis and because of the war, but also because Europe has lost its competitiveness to China, as has the United States.

The cost of us continuing in this direction economically, socially, and potentially in terms of military escalation is phenomenal. And an objective, rational assessment of where we are would say, stop the war. Ukraine becomes neutral. NATO announces it's not going to expand. Whatever armistice settlement on territory is done is done, with whatever language one wants. And when it comes to Iran, the United States just goes home from this terrible misadventure. This is how to get out of this, but it would require exposing the vacuity, the stupidity, the sheer cynicism of what this political class has been doing for decades, in fact. And they don't want to be exposed this way.

#Pascal

No, they don't, but I do hope they will. And at some point, maybe somebody's going to just take away the credit card. Who knows? That's it. Good. Jeff, thank you very much for that update. People who want to find you, they should go to your homepage, Jeffrey Sachs, Common Dreams. That's where you put your articles. Is there another place where people should find you?

#Jeffrey Sachs

JeffSachs.org has all of it systematically filed, so people can find all the articles there.

#Pascal

Everybody go to jeffsachs.org. Jeff, thanks so much for your time.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Hey, great to be with you, Pascal. See you soon.

#Pascal

See you.