

Western Projection: Creating Enemies to Maintain Power

The global center of gravity is shifting. One way we see this clearly is by the number of important conferences that are being organised outside the Collective West. My guest today recently visited two of those recently in China. Dr. Jan Oberg is joining us today again to discuss what he learned there. Links: Jan Oberg's Article on China: <https://thetransnational.substack.com/p/two-conferences-in-shanghai-reflections> Jan's article on Trump's Gaza plans: <https://thetransnational.substack.com/p/trumps-gaza-peace-plan-a-cruel-joke> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:03:37 Academic Freedom and Misconceptions About Life in China 00:09:09 Chinese Concepts of Peace vs. Western Militarism 00:15:16 The Dominance of Western Narratives in Global Studies 00:19:46 The Belt and Road Initiative as a Peace Project 00:24:25 Psychological Projection: Why the West Paints China as an Enemy 00:30:34 Western Solipsism and the Danger of Being "Number One" 00:34:52 Managing the Decline of the Western Empire 00:39:10 BRICS, US Isolationism, and the Refusal to Cooperate 00:41:30 Lessons from the Cold War: Can Europe Regain Rationality?

#Pascal

The global center of gravity is shifting. One way we see this clearly is by the number of important conferences now being organized outside the collective West. My guest today recently visited two of those conferences in China. Dr. Jan Oberg is joining us again to discuss what he learned there. Jan, welcome back.

#Jan Oberg

Thank you so much, Pascal. It's a great joy to be here. And I suppose you want me to say a few words about these conferences—yes.

#Pascal

Because you were invited there, you attended, and they were related to peace and security. Could you maybe talk us through them a little bit?

#Jan Oberg

Yeah, the first one was a huge event with about 500 participants from 50 countries, all invited by China—the municipality of Shanghai, the party, and many other high-level participants and speakers. It was the World Conference on China Studies. And, you know, that wasn't only focused on security.

It brought together a variety of perspectives on Chinese culture and society from people all over the world who study China, visit China—like me, and so on. But I was pretty surprised, because I want to emphasize that I'm not a China expert. I never was, and I never will be. My inroad to China, as you know, is that I'm interested in China's way of conceiving peace through the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—how they approach defense, how they conduct foreign policy, and how the Chinese have a vision of a better world, if you will, with the Belt and Road Initiative and all that.

So there was ample opportunity to meet people who were, first of all, like-minded and curious about China—which we generally are not in the West. And secondly, to get a lot of input about what other people do who study China, including those who see China as part of a global transformation and as a security actor, also a peace actor. And third, what I think is important is that many other countries ought to do the same, because when you bring together 500 people from all over the world, it means dialogue. It means mutual learning. It means exchanging views and, if you will, handling differences in how we perceive things. And that, in and of itself, beyond the academic purpose, actually leads to some kind of peace.

You know, a step toward peace is mutual understanding—listening to each other, having seminars, saying, “Oh, I disagree with you. I'm surprised you have those views. Explain them to me more.” And, you know, that happens both at the formal conference and also over dinners and breakfast in the morning at the hotel, things like that. So it was—I mean, I wish more countries would do the same. But of course, you have to have a lot of money to invite 500 people, right? And the other conference was the 10th-anniversary celebration of the Institute of China at Fudan University, which is run by Professor Shen Weiwei.

#Pascal

There's this preconceived notion in the West that in an autocratic country like China, you can't really speak your mind and there's no genuine academic freedom—that you're only free to say what follows the party line. What do you say to people who think that?

#Jan Oberg

Go there and see for yourself—that's all I say. I mean, there are so many misconceptions, all stemming from the media. Ordinary citizens, including my neighbors and others, ask, “How can you go to a dictatorship? Why do you go there all the time?” And I say, “Excuse me, go there yourself and see, because that's the only thing that'll convince you.” And I tell you, Pascal, I haven't met anyone who went to China, traveled around for two or three weeks—either with a tour group or individually, like I do—and came home saying, “Yeah, it was a terrible place. People were unkind. Everyone looked repressed and gray. It's clearly a dictatorship, like Czechoslovakia during the Cold War or the Soviet Union.”

#Jan Oberg

I've never met anybody who came home and said that. Everybody comes back and says, "It was totally different from what I read in the media. It has nothing to do with all those stories, you know."

#Jan Oberg

I'm not exaggerating, Pascal. I know lots of people who haven't been to China, and they have very negative views. And I know even more people who've been to China, traveled around, had a reason to go there for business or tourism or whatever, and they come back with a completely different view.

#Jan Oberg

I'm not saying everything's okay.

#Jan Oberg

I mean, that's not the point. The point is—what I tell everyone I talk with—you don't have to be pro-China, and you don't have to be anti-China. But you do have to be curious about China, because it's a fundamentally important country. For the future of the world, whether you like it or not, you'd better learn about it. And secondly, don't learn from the media. It's impossible to sit in the West and really learn about China—that much I can say. You have to go there. And the other thing is, it will enrich your life to meet the Chinese and see what they've accomplished over the last 30 or 40 years.

It's unique, as far as I can see, in human history. Now, I may sound over-positive, but I've seen China in 1983, when I traveled around with a Danish cultural delegation. I saw the poverty, I saw the dirt in the hospitals, I saw the muddy roads. And today, forty years later, I see the incredible infrastructure—forty thousand kilometers of high-speed trains. I see cleanliness everywhere. I don't see a piece of paper lying around in a railway station. I see happy people, I see people consuming, I see people who have the basics. I see a country where there's no more poverty.

#Pascal

You also went to the countryside. Sorry? You also went to the countryside. Yes, I went to the countryside. You still get a modern country.

#Jan Oberg

There are huge contrasts, but there's nobody who suffers. There are people who live completely different lives from those in Shanghai, Beijing, or Hangzhou, or wherever. I went to a small village about 70 kilometers outside Hangzhou, with 1,500 inhabitants. I tell you, that's a small place—the ancient village of Shen Ao, with 1,500 inhabitants. I stayed there for four days in a small hotel. And it's the same there: people live a very good life. They live as handicraft people, they live on cultural

festivals, they live by cultivating the soil. But there's nobody suffering, and people look happy, people are kind and helpful. Let me give you an example of one of—I don't know how many—I've experienced like that while traveling alone.

I always travel on my own, and I don't plan where I go. The morning after I arrive, I tell the receptionists, "I'd like to go tomorrow morning and see the sunrise over the Fuchun River." By the way, that's another story, but it's part of China's art history and also the title of a modern film called **Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains**. That's what inspired me to go there. I said, "I'd like to see the sunrise." Since I'm a photographer, it was supposed to be a place where you see the mist and a special atmosphere and all that—but it turned out not to be so. I asked, "Can you get me a taxi tomorrow morning at five o'clock so I can go to the river?" And both of them said, almost in stereo, "You don't need a taxi."

"We'll take you there." You know, five o'clock in the morning, the receptionist says, "I'll take you there." This is what you experience again and again in China. I'm not romanticizing—I can give you other examples. There's no discussion; they're very kind and helpful people. They speak a little—not in the village, but some people in the big towns speak English. They have English names, and they go out of their way to be helpful, kind, and to learn from you. That's what's so interesting: they want to learn about us, they want to connect with us. My wife once sat at the Hongqiao Railway Station in Shanghai, and a lady came up and said, "May I sit here and practice my English with you? Where are you from?" It's a totally amazing openness—something a Chinese person would not encounter in Sweden.

#Pascal

Now, I mean, we see all these negative stereotypes, right? And they're getting worse and worse in Europe and in the US—especially when it comes to the social system, to stereotypes about the social system, and to stereotypes about security. So, when it comes to framing peace—and you're a peace researcher, you've been doing peace research all your life—what struck you about how your Chinese counterparts or interlocutors framed peace and the future of humanity?

#Jan Oberg

Well, you know, the formal thing—which is also a reality—is that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, or the Panchsheel, developed by India and China, what is it, seventy years ago, are in the Constitution of China. That's something you can't run away from. It's not just something they talk about; it's built into the Chinese Constitution. Secondly, I think the Chinese have understood something that we really don't understand—particularly when you look at Donald Trump's so-called peace plan. I mean, I'm amazed, I'm dismayed, and I feel it's tragic that the whole world can call that rubbish a peace plan—a peace plan!

#Pascal

Let's come back to that later.

#Jan Oberg

But we'll get to that, yes. So, the Chinese... I don't know where it comes from, but that's why it's interesting to study. They've built peace into social actions, into the economy, into the way society is structured. They don't have much of what I would call the Western "repair society," by which I mean: first, we have a defense policy that says I can kill you thousands of kilometers away with offensive deterrence—long-range weapons. That's NATO in a nutshell. That's offensive deterrence from afar: if you don't do what I say, I can kill you far away. Which will never—well, it should be pretty obvious—that will never create stability. Then we do that, we get an over-armament problem, we get a militarism problem, and we get wars.

And then we say, oh, we need disarmament and peace negotiations and all that, right? But what about doing the right thing from the beginning? What about building these things into dialogue, into consultations, into institution building—where we handle conflicts before they break out in violence? That's a very important distinction: the one between conflict and violence. I'm not saying—and this is one of the things I raised in the conferences in China, both of them—I said, it's amazing that among all the things you've imported to China—capitalism, the idea of a party, consumerism, Western art, Western music—and then you've changed them. You've given them, you know, Chinese characteristics.

The only thing you haven't changed is the import of militarism—long-range weapons and all that. And then, of course, they would say, "Well, ours are defensive." Now, nuclear weapons are not defensive. They cannot, by any definition, be called defensive. And other things aren't defensive either. But basically—and you and I know this, and everybody knows it—that's why it's so ridiculous to call it a threat. China doesn't conquer the world; it has only one base outside its own territory, and so on. But they have a different conceptualization of peace, coexistence, listening to each other, and dialogue than we have in the West. And that's interesting to me. What I don't understand are two things.

Why has it led to basically the same type of military, weapons-first security politics? And secondly, I'm surprised that, as far as I've been able to find out, Nanjing University in China is the only one that has something like peace research. Actually, one of my mentors, Johan Galtung, was giving guest lectures there. There's no peace research, no peace and conflict studies anywhere, as far as I know, in China. And that's something I'm surprised about. This could be a way for China to profile itself in the future—that among its programs, it has, of course, peace and conflict studies, reconciliation, forgiveness studies, nonviolence, and so on, taught at its universities. Because when you get to the think tanks and research institutes, it's pretty traditional.

I'm not saying it's not highly qualified. I'm saying it's not infused with the values of academic peace studies. Individuals have it, but it's not institutionalized. So I'm working on the idea that maybe I can

do a little bit to spread peace and conflict studies in China, which I think would be one of the things I'd be most proud of in my life if I could achieve that. When I go to China, I speak with intellectuals and academics, and I do it with great respect, because their policies are different from those in the West and they're the object of so much injustice. But I still think it would be a good idea to have academic peace studies in China.

#Pascal

I mean, there's a lot of security studies in the West and in the East. And security studies is often a misnomer, because it's more about studying how to create calculated insecurity everywhere in order to somehow feel stability. A lot of traditional IR studies are basically that—how to create models, math, and game theory around deterrence, as you already said. Did you find any other framing of the international situation that was profoundly different from the discourse you're used to in Europe?

#Jan Oberg

Well, that's a difficult question, because when you go to a conference with 500 people from 50 countries, it's not a China thing—it's a world thing, if you will. There are so many approaches. But let's say that over the years, probably since '45, about 90% of the books studied by 90% of the students in international relations, political science, doctrine studies, and strategic studies have been American books by American scholars. And you know that China is also very open to Western scholars coming there and speaking—including, you know, Henry Kissinger, shortly before he died at the age of 100, and they revere these thinkers, Joseph Nye also, etc. Yes, and those influences are something we as scholars should—I wouldn't say be against, because a lot of good work has been produced in the United States.

But the dominating role must go. There's so much else produced around the world by other scholars—whether in Africa, the Middle East, China, or other Asian countries—that it's totally ridiculous that 90%—I'm saying 90%, you know, this is not empirically proven, but I'd say at least—comes from one place. I'm a product of it myself, but I'm also a product of the Scandinavian tradition of peace and conflict studies that was very much associated with the name of Johan Galtung. I don't see why we shouldn't have global learning, global authors, and global books. This is totally possible today at our universities. But, you know, it looks like that when I see the curriculum for something called peace studies at a Swedish university. I'm just saying—one, it's not peace.

Two, it's all culture-specific Western. There's nobody at Lund University studying non-Western theories of international relations or philosophies about peace or anything like that, you know. And that makes us totally unprepared for the world that's emerging. The difference is that the Chinese know a lot about the West. They've imported many things from the West and given them Chinese characteristics. But they also have a curiosity. For example, if you're in a shopping mall or a

restaurant, you'll hear Western or Western-inspired music—that's very clear. And if you go to any big museum in a major city, at some point every year or every second year, there will be an exhibition of Western art.

I mean, Shanghai's Modern Art Museum, when I was there, had a huge exhibition from a Paris museum about French Impressionism. Now, they've sent millions of students to the West who come back and speak English. I mean, you can go on and on and on. The Chinese know far more about the West than we, generally in the West—with the exception of brilliant scholars who've been curious about it for 40 or 50 or 100 years—know about China. We know almost nothing about China compared with what China knows about the West. And that is going to be absolutely fatal for the Western world. Because of that lack of knowledge, you can exploit and spread the propaganda the Americans and Europeans direct against China. That's only possible because the population doesn't know anything about China. Otherwise, they'd say, "Hey, that's propaganda."

#Pascal

At the beginning of the talk, you actually described one of China's signature foreign policies—the Belt and Road Initiative—as a peace-bringing, peace-oriented, connectivity project. In the West, in Washington but also in Brussels, they often portray it as China trying to take over the world or trying to debt-trap countries. In what way do you think this connectivity project is actually something that can foster and support peace, rather than the dystopian image the West tries to paint of it?

#Jan Oberg

Well, I would say, from a peace research point of view, it's old hat, Pascal. When you bring people together in some kind of equitable relationship and cooperation—not, you know, vertical exploitation, fragmentation, and all that imperialism does—because that also has the idea of cooperation, but it's north-south and has always been that way. We get the most out of it, and they get less out of it, right? But if you do it horizontally, and you do it with equality, equity, win-win—preferably 50-50, though that's difficult between a huge country and a small country—then it's different. And there are details in all this that I don't know anything about.

But when you do that—and I emphasize win-win, not win-lose, like in colonialism and imperialism—then you build a barrier against inequality. You stop starting wars and killing each other. You see what happens now: hatred has gone completely unchecked in Europe against Russia because there's no cooperation. If we had followed the German and Willy Brandt idea that we need to cooperate with each other to keep the peace and not start wars against each other, we would be in a much better place today. But the fools of the West started the NATO expansion, antagonized, confronted, humiliated Russia—and Russia reacted, in my view, the wrong way—but they reacted because we did not build cooperation. Now the idea is only sanctions, no cooperation, no energy, and so on.

We don't want to be dependent. The whole point is that the Chinese have seen that if you get people together—connect people—if they become mutually dependent, equally dependent on each other—you sell this, I buy this, I sell that, and you buy that—and we have a transport network, and we do this, which Xinjiang is about at the moment. It's going to be the most interesting province in China, in my view, in the future between China and the West. When you do these things, when you get to know each other and cooperate every day, the chances that you start a war, start killing, and start hating each other are much smaller than when you don't know each other, don't work with each other, or when you begin to exploit people.

That is—it's so, I mean, it's embarrassing to say something this banal on your channel, but that's what it is. We don't understand that in the West. We think dominating is good. We think having a mission is good—making other people like us. That's the worst thing about Western culture: the missionary idea. They should be like us. The fourth world should be like the third, the third like the second, and the second like the first. And we think we're winning, that we have universal values. No, we don't. And the Chinese have understood that. If you try to dominate, if you try to export your own system, you only create animosity.

Because who are we? Would we like somebody coming and telling Swedish society that we should practice Sharia law with a missionary idea? No, of course not. So the idea the Chinese are putting forward is: let's cooperate. You don't have to be like us. You don't have to have a one-party system. You don't have to be Buddhist. You don't have to be Confucian. You don't have to be this or that. But can we do something together—in unity and diversity, peace and diversity, not in uniformity? This is so fascinating for someone who's worked his whole life with peace and what peace means. Peace is different from culture to culture.

#Pascal

Why is it, do you think, that we in the West seem dead set on always having an "other," on always having somebody to portray as an enemy—either an active enemy like Russia or a potential enemy like China? It's true that China has border disputes—disputes over islands with Japan, border disputes in the north with Russia that were resolved, and border disputes with India. There are moments when soldiers actually die on these contact lines. But the last time China invaded another country was in 1979, and that was Vietnam—and there's a lot to unpack there. So why is the West so determined to project extreme violence, or the idea of extreme violent tensions, onto China, when the only one that, empirically speaking, constantly uses highly violent solutions to its problems is the West—everywhere in the world—and then somehow projects that onto China?

#Jan Oberg

Yeah, well, psychopolitical projection is part of the Western decline. You know, you blame others for doing what you do ten times worse yourself. That's one thing. I think we're onto something, Pascal,

that others would call deep cosmology, or ways of thinking, or cultures—something we’re increasingly dealing with at the Transnational Foundation. Because we’re sick and tired of the traditional, superficial, weapons-based geopolitical and military commentary that never gets to deeper things. Why are things the way they are? And when you get there, you begin to discuss how they can be solved. All this commentary about what Trump said yesterday, you know, is not going to bring us anywhere—not a good place, at least. And we’re bad academics if we have no ideas about how to find solutions.

It’s the same as going to a doctor who tells you, “You’re terminally ill, and I can do nothing. I have no idea what to do.” That’s not the kind of doctor you’d want to see. So all these people talking about what was said yesterday—militarism, new plans for military security guarantees, and things like that—are, in my view, not getting anywhere. What we’re talking about here are less conscious, or even subconscious, ways of thinking that influence the Western mindset. For instance, we divide everything into good and bad—no gray areas in between. Male or female. We divide things into what I’m calling dichotomies, and those are important. Instead of saying everyone is a potential friend, we say everyone is a potential enemy.

If you have Christianity, there can only be one God. If you’re a Buddhist, there can be a few more things or figures to believe in. And this idea of conquering the world and making your own way of thinking universal is delusional. Gandhi was one of the first to point that out: we’re not against the British—they can be here—but their system, the way they think, is something we don’t accept in India because we have a different culture. So if you want to change these things, what really needs to change is the deeper way of thinking in the West—the things we take for granted every day, call natural, say, “Oh, that’s how it ought to be.” And therefore, China is seen as a threat because it has different values and thinks differently from us.

That’s the huge limitation of the West. You have people in NATO and elsewhere saying China is a threat because they have different values from us. I would say, wow, that’s wonderful—they’re different from us. Let’s explore what that means. But because we’re on our way down in the West—and all empires go down—when an empire is declining, we get afraid when somebody has better or different ideas, or does things in a different way, and we consider them enemies, right? That’s a civilizational, a Western civilizational disease. Instead of being curious about those who are different, we see them as potential or real threats and enemies. The same goes for immigrants, people from other cultures who come here—they’re basically met with a negative attitude.

Instead of being open and saying, “That would be fantastic,” and thinking it’s fantastic—because we’ve been living off the work of people from other cultures—earlier, you couldn’t buy a shirt, you couldn’t buy a transistor radio, you couldn’t buy anything, you couldn’t buy a car that wasn’t at least partly produced somewhere in the Third World. Now it’s all produced in China. We’re so dependent in the Western world on there being a world of people, workers, and others doing the things we

consume every day—tobacco, coffee, whatever it is. But we're not interested in who these people are. That is our great deficiency in the West. Now we're going to have to wake up. And if we don't—which I don't think we are at the moment, because we're so self-navel-gazing—then we'll stay stuck.

We're going to lose it. And I think we are going to lose it. There's no openness right now among politicians, scholars, or the media to the idea of another, non-Western world that does things differently from us. There's no such thing in our Western media. Open Chinese media—go on the internet, look at China Daily, CGTN, or whatever—and you'll see tons of stories about the West. Open Western media and you'll see nothing about China. And if you do, it's only that it's a bad country, a dictatorship, doing this and that wrong, and that they're a threat, so we must arm against them. That's the only story. You don't see those kinds of stories in Chinese media. Are we caught?

#Pascal

And I'm sorry I'm making this about the West now, but it's like—are we caught in our own solipsistic way of existing, where we keep thinking everything is about us and perceive everybody else as just a different version of ourselves? Which actually means you're perceiving others as yourself, just differently.

#Jan Oberg

Or people who could become copies of us. I mean, this is a missionary idea—go out and make everybody my Coca-Cola consumers, human rights activists, or whatever it is. We're selling democracy. We're, goddamn it, selling democracy all over the world as if it worked in our own societies. It doesn't anymore. It didn't even at the time when we did it. So yes, I think this is something that, Pascal, has to do with the danger of becoming number one. That is, you don't learn—you teach. If you're number ten in a system, you have nine others to look at and say, "How did they make it much better than we did?" We've got something to be inspired by.

But if you're number one, you teach, and you don't listen or learn new things. And that, of course, also means that if you transfer Western thinking onto China, China will have to avoid that trap. Being the strongest, most influential country—in economic terms, probably in sociological terms, in the way of doing things in the future, in the technological field—there's a risk that anyone who becomes number one loses humility, loses wisdom, loses caution, and says, "We can do anything." I have good hopes that this will not happen, thanks to Confucianism, to the harmony thinking, to the peace thinking that lies deep in Chinese culture. But you can never know exactly.

You know, there could be a leader long after Xi Jinping, or someone like that, who would have a different attitude from his wisdom and moderation. So we've got to help each other think about how to avoid anyone falling into the trap of arrogance—of thinking we are the center of the world. Now, the bizarre thing for the West is that we are what we call the Western world. Pascal, you come from Switzerland. I come from Denmark and live in Sweden. What we call the Western world is 12% of

humanity. My simple calculation is this: if those 12% are not more interested in the 88%—in how they live—than they are in themselves, those 12% will lose. They will lose. Because you cannot, as a small minority of 12% in the world community of humanity, afford not to be interested in the 88%.

Both if you want to dominate, and if you want to cooperate in a multipolar, multinodal world in the future—the new world is either multipolar or non-polar or whatever—but it is not unipolar. So the end of U.S.–Western dominance of the world is very clear. The only ones who don't see it at the moment are the Westerners themselves, because this is the outlook we have on the world. And this is dangerous. This is a dangerous moment for humanity, because there's an empire going down, and we do not have a Gorbachev. We do not have a man of vision, of moral standing, and of humanity like Gorbachev was when he saw that the Soviet Union—the last Western empire—went down. Now the Western empire is going down, and we don't have anybody who would reach to his knees in terms of morals, vision, or humanity.

#Pascal

What's the right way for not just China, but the entire world to approach this problem of the West going down? It's good that the West is going down, but it's also dangerous that it is. So on one hand, you have an inevitability, but it comes with inevitable dangers. What would be the necessary airbags to defuse not just the fall of the West, but the fallout from that fall?

#Jan Oberg

Well, I would have liked to see—and that was my hope way back in the '70s and '80s—that the European Union would be a different West. Right? A West that the rest of the world could talk with in a different way, a nonviolent West. Because that is part of the Western tradition too—a West that would not do what the Americans are doing. And now I see a Europe that has no independent standing, that keeps creating one crisis after another for itself—whether it's the war on Russia through the proxy role of Ukraine, or now, you know, there's going to be a "make peace." God forbid—no, don't ever use that about Trump's plan—there's going to be "make peace" without Europe. And they're anxious now, coming together and saying, "You cannot do it without us."

And Trump says, "I couldn't care less about you." And so does Putin, of course—they agree. There's been nothing new created by the European Union, nothing that could only be done by being a union instead of individual countries. That would have been one answer years back: that perhaps the European Union could be a new West that entered the global world in a different way—not dominating, but cooperating—a mutual, win-win European Union and the rest of the world. They haven't been able to do that. They haven't had the vision. And today we have the worst leadership in the European Union that we've had in all these years. So what I think I can say is, you can only hope for something really falling apart in the United States.

And Trump is also a very good destroyer of the United States and everything good it stood for. I've never been anti-American. But somebody could come up in the United States and say, "Hey, we've got to do it differently. This is the time for change." You know, some Martin Luther King-like, Kennedy-like, or maybe Carter-like figure. But maybe that's not something we even have time to wait for. No—that's why I know the future. Just let me find it. The final point is, the future will be either explosion or implosion. Explosion means the United States will go down through warfare. You know, I used to say, what would Hitler have done if he had had tactical nuclear weapons available in his bunker in Berlin?

The other one is implosion. That means, slowly, slowly, step by step, sector by sector, the United States as an empire will fall apart—economic crisis, social crisis, cultural crisis. It all comes together suddenly, and the whole thing collapses. It implodes. And that's what I would hope for as the least violent way for the empire to go. But it must go, and it will go. We should have a discussion in the West: how do we step down as an empire and join the rest of the world in a new way? We don't have that discussion because we are bent—our media, our politicians, our scholars are bent on continuing to dominate the world, because everybody else is supposedly worse than us. How about joining by invitation?

#Pascal

It's like, you know, one thing that struck me with the 28-point peace plan was that one of the points in there was the offer, like, "We will reintegrate Russia into the G8." And me and a lot of others were like, but they never asked for that. It's like, why would Russia want that? I think they have better options than doing that. Precisely. But how about the opposite? What do you think would happen if, for the next BRICS meeting, BRICS just invited the United States—"Come and talk to us"? Because, okay, maybe this is far-fetched.

#Jan Oberg

I don't know what—Pascal, could you just repeat that question? I got the message that the internet's cutting out a bit. You froze.

#Pascal

The question was, what if BRICS started inviting the United States? For instance, as an observer—"Please, join us as an observer. Come and discuss with us." Do you think that might be a way forward?

#Jan Oberg

No, look at it. I mean, they didn't turn up at the G20 in South Africa just last week with some kind of fake story about all white people being the object of genocide or something like that. I think the present American leadership—or lack of leadership, or mis-leadership—has this idea of self-isolation, which is why they want to grab resources in Canada, Greenland, Panama, and even outside to Gaza, etc., because they know. I call it the United States of Autarky. They're withdrawing from the world, if you will, and then ravaging the place to their own liking.

I'd love to believe it could be possible—maybe with different leadership—but that's not Trump. Trump doesn't care about cooperation; he doesn't even care to cooperate with NATO members or the EU. So, inviting the United States to participate in BRICS—I'd do it—but it would only show that they don't want to cooperate with the world. They want to dominate it. And as long as that disease runs so deep in the soul, in the mindset of the West, we're all going to have a problem.

#Pascal

You know, the most successful approach during the Cold War, in my view—politically speaking, to get to de-escalation and a constructive way forward—was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. That was a five-year-long endeavor, and it was actually the idea of the Soviets. They knew that if they pitched the idea themselves—because they had tried before—the West would just say, “No, no, no, no, stupid ploy, we'll never say yes.” So what they did was tell the Finns.

The Finns—they told them, “Please ask the Europeans, and then later the U.S., that we need some form of conference.” And the Finns did it. The Foreign Ministry of Finland actually sent out these notes, and by doing so, they created diplomatic pressure—because even no reply is a reply, and it's a very unfriendly one. Right. So you need to create something. And that actually spiraled and snowballed into what, five years later, became the largest transcontinental peace effort of the Cold War. Absolutely.

#Jan Oberg

I completely agree with you. And we're probably thinking alike because we're both fans of neutrality—and of Finland. Finland is awesome. Well, it used to be. Now Finland is a staunch believer in NATO, which, you know, used to be something different. For a number of reasons, it should probably be abolished. But long story short, those were the days, Pascal, when you had intellectuals leading Europe. You had people like Willy Brandt, people like Palme, people like Kekkonen, who, if I remember correctly, took the initiative for the OSCE. And the idea was that by having contacts—including military people meeting at each other's exercises—we would prevent war and have an Ostpolitik, meaning we would cooperate.

We also had a Germany that didn't talk about militarism but talked about what it had done and repented for it. And we had Olof Palme's idea—the Commission on Common Security. Now we have security at the detriment of others. We think stupidly, because there's no intellectualism left in Europe's policies. We believe that the more we can harm, the more we can humiliate, the more we can look strong militarily, the more we'll have peace. Of course, we won't. But that understanding was different back then because, first, there was intellectualism. Second, you had people who knew what war was—people who were running Europe at that time. The people sitting today don't know what war is. It's like a game on a computer to them. They're not even aware of what they're playing with. So you're absolutely right—that's what we need today, in my view, too.

And maybe we should think about how to change Europe in that direction, because I think it's rather impossible to influence the United States. It's a kind of, you know, autistic mood. But Europe, where we both have our roots, could probably still do something different. I'm not optimistic, though, when I look at the way they've treated Russia. They expanded NATO, and the way they've handled Nord Stream and everything else just gives me bad feelings about their ability to even think in terms of peace. If you asked Madame von der Leyen, "What is peace to you?" she wouldn't be able to say anything interesting. You couldn't have a five-minute conversation with her about peace—it would just be blah: strong defense, militarism, showing the other party where we stand. And it's everything but that. That's why we're living in dangerous times.

#Pascal

I don't know.

#Pascal

At some point, Europe will snap out of it. We'll come back. The question to me is, how long will this break from rationality last—the break that Europe is currently taking? Is it going to last another ten years or another hundred years? I don't know how long it will take, but at some point it must come back, because it's getting so obvious and even stronger. And I do believe that, on the ground, at some point there will be this kind of realization—like, we just can't go on living like this. That will come to Europe.

#Jan Oberg

But it's not there yet—but it will come. We're definitely moving toward the margins, toward the limits of what can be done without a big bang. One could say, let's be creative and positive. One could say that if... if Trump and Putin—and Trump particularly, because he's 28 points ahead according to all sources, his numbers, not those of Putin or certainly not of Ukraine's people—I'm not talking about Zelensky anymore. The only thing that interests me is the future of the Ukrainian people, who've suffered more than anyone. If they carry through this bizarre, amateurish, quasi-peace, that will

probably be a wake-up call for Europe. It could even lead to the end of NATO, because if the strongest power in NATO does this over the heads of Europe and its allies, those allies might finally see that they cannot gamble on cooperation with, or closeness to, the United States—at least under Trump.

And that will force some reasonably intelligent people to start asking, where do we turn when we can no longer trust the United States? It may also grab Greenland in the future, and it'll do bad things in Ukraine, and so on, because it has nothing to do with peace. There will be more war. You know, if they're humiliated to that extent by Trump making his 28 points work with Putin over the heads of the Ukrainians and the Europeans, I think that could be a wake-up call in the direction you're talking about. But I don't know. Europe's capacity to humiliate itself has been mind-boggling to me, because there's no leadership in Europe that's worth anything.

#Pascal

But why not try peace through humiliation? I mean, maybe. The other approaches Europe has tried so far didn't usually end very well—every other decade, really. But Jan, thank you very much for these insights. I'm always glad to hear your thinking and your process of conceptualizing peace, which I think is very important. People who want to read more from you should go to thetransnational.live.

#Jan Oberg

Transnational.live—and our Substack, and your Substack. We have hundreds of videos too, maybe not as good as this one, but still, all these videos we've done. We're working a lot with media outside the West; nobody in the West is interested in what we're saying. "Peace by peaceful means" is totally uninteresting to Western media. But we work with media all around the world, and we make tons of videos for people who don't want to read long academic articles—which we still produce. Let me thank you too, Pascal, because you're one of the very few people who are genuinely interested in peace. That's something I really respect and admire, because you come from a Swiss tradition, I guess, and it's part of your personality. You've seen the absurdity of threatening and using violence—it solves no problems, it only creates more. There are very few people around the world who have that attitude, but I'm grateful that you do.

#Pascal

Peace is like health. It's not everything, but everything is nothing without it. So we'd better care about it.

#Jan Oberg

Exactly. And, you know, Johan Galtung, whose father was a doctor, always said a good peace researcher does diagnostics. Some of them will tell you that if we continue this way, it will go wrong. And then you spend most of your energy and intellectual capacity asking, how do we avoid the worst, and how do we create something better? That is treatment. And that's what we are committed to in this foundation. I've been here now for exactly 40 years, on the 1st of January next year. We've always said, you haven't done research unless you've also suggested some solutions to the problem. That's what a good doctor does, and that's what a good peace researcher does. And that's what basically no intellectuals do anymore.

#Pascal

I'm looking for a therapy for this cancer of war, and I'd prefer it not to be radiation therapy. That, I mean, brings us back—you know, "rest in peace" is not the peace we want. We want an active peace, where people can actually enjoy it.

#Jan Oberg

Okay. Peace is conviviality and happiness, and developing the potentials that every human being and society have for something better than killing each other. Jan Oberg, thank you very much for your time today. Thank you.