

Europe Only Accepts Hegemony & Bloc Politics

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs discusses Europe's reluctance to address the underlying causes of the Ukraine War, which is a broken European security architecture based on hegemony and bloc politics. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: [buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng](https://www.buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We are joined today by Jeffrey Sachs to discuss the negotiations to end the Ukraine war. As we now see, Witkow and Kushner have arrived in Moscow, and they're going to talk to President Putin to discuss how the war can be brought to an end. I was wondering how optimistic you are about these talks, because a key obstacle to an agreement is, of course, that especially the Europeans demand very strong security guarantees for Ukraine. The conviction is that security then depends on deterring Russia with NATO in Ukraine, while any talk of restoring Ukraine's neutrality is seen as capitulation. So, given that this is the mindset, do you think the peace negotiations can actually go somewhere?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, we've been dealing with this issue for decades, not just years. So the point you're making is completely correct. For decades, the West—the U.S. and Europe—has pushed for Ukraine to be part of the Western alliance. That has meant NATO membership and European Union membership. Those two distinct clubs have become more and more intertwined over the past 30 years, during which this Ukraine project has been carried out. Throughout this entire period, up until very recently, the United States and Europe were aligned that Ukraine would become part of NATO and the European Union.

This was actually spelled out very clearly by Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1997 in his book **The Grand Chessboard**, and also in his article **A Grand Strategy for Eurasia**. He linked the two—EU membership and NATO membership—and said this was the westward enlargement that Russia would have to accept. Well, Russia did not accept it. Russia objected from basically 1991 onward. When this became a real project in the mid-1990s, Russia objected, and it has objected ever since.

What's also true is that Ukraine was internally divided over this issue all along. Ukraine itself is a mix of Ukrainian nationalist language and ethnicity in the West, and Russian ethnic populations in the South and East, in the Donbas.

And there have been divisions in politics and attitudes toward Western alignment along those lines, again since Ukraine's independence back in 1990–1991. So this issue has divided Ukraine internally, and it's been the cause of conflict between NATO and Russia going back decades. What's changed recently is Trump's view—and this is part of the U.S. security state debate—because the U.S. itself is divided within that security establishment. The view now is that this was a gambit that didn't work. Brzezinski promised back in 1997 that it would be costless and painless, that Russia wouldn't have any ability to resist.

The Biden team, which has led the actual war effort since Russia's escalation in February 2022, thought that Russia would collapse quickly—either on the battlefield, economically, or politically. What Trump and some of those around him have understood is that this 30-year gambit failed because Russia had said repeatedly that this was of existential significance for them. It was a core national security issue, and Russia would not relent in preventing NATO enlargement. So this brings us to today. The realistic view of the Trump group right now is that a gambit that was supposed to be low-cost and a big win has failed.

It failed over the last basically 30 years, but specifically over the last 11 years, because the U.S. installed a pro-NATO regime in Ukraine in February 2014. It was supposed to be a walk in the park after that—that NATO would just enlarge and Russia would back down. So the U.S. is now saying, enough is enough. We have other things to do, other interests in the world. We're not in want of further escalation. Our stockpiles are pretty bare after all these years of war, the wars in the Middle East, and the risks of war in East Asia. It's time to recognize that this was indeed existential for Russia. It was a wannabe for the West—it was a game, I would say, for the United States, that was supposed to be an easy game. Didn't work. So the Trump group wants to end it, cut the losses.

The European leaders say, "No, this war needs to continue." The Ukrainian regime, which is a U.S.-installed regime, maybe even more understandably says, "No, this war needs to continue." The regime depends completely on the war continuing. Zelensky has no political prospects as soon as the war ends. It's been a money-making corruption machine, in addition to all the other issues. The puzzle for many of us is why the Germans, the French, the British—and by that I don't mean the publics, I mean the small leadership group—are so insistent on fighting a losing battle that has cost at least two million Ukrainian casualties. It's been a disaster. Why are they so interested in continuing that battle? I would say a couple of things about that.

One is that their publics are not with them. So Scholz, Starmer, and Macron are among the least popular politicians in the world. They have no public backing in their own countries. Their people do not want World War III. They do not want war with Russia. They'd actually like pensions, social security, continued decent living standards. They don't want this militarization. So this is not a

popular cause in Europe. It's the cause of Scholz, Starmer, Macron, and the small group they represent. Now, what is that cause? I would say most people who look at this closely don't have a convincing answer to that. Is it that their own political futures are wrapped up in a failed project, and they can't admit they were wrong?

Is it that they're pawns of the military-industrial complex, both their own and the United States'? When I look at Merz and listen to him, I feel almost like it's a German wanting revenge on Russia for World War II. That may sound a little harsh, but Merz is vulgar. He's a warmonger. He hasn't said one thing about peace since he became chancellor, and his support in Germany is collapsing. So I'm hardly alone in saying that. I'm aligned with the vast majority of the German people, actually, in saying that. All of this is to say, Glenn, that we're not dealing with a new issue. We're dealing with something that's been going on for 30 years. During the second Trump term, Trump repeatedly said, "Let's stop this war," for the reasons I've been saying. Then the Europeans and Zelensky have run in.

And Trump has changed his tune, reflecting not only his personal mood swings and high volatility, but also the fact that the U.S. security state is divided. There's the military-industrial complex in the U.S., which is happy to fight on—they're making lots of money. This is a very profitable war for the military contractors, and for the senators and congressmen who support them. So when you ask, "Is this the end?"—logically it should be. But Trump has backed down each time he's said to his Russian counterparts, "Let's end this on the basis of Ukrainian neutrality." Whether he'll back down again is the question. I'm hoping the war will end, to save Ukraine from this terrible, mistaken, futile, seemingly perpetual war that has been waged now for well over a decade—and this broader project that's been going on for 30 years.

#Glenn

Well, the post-Cold War objective of NATO appears to have been to develop a collective hegemon in Europe—that is, to push Russia out of the continent, again fitting within the unipolar moment. But some of the split you refer to within the U.S. seems to be that there's a new wing of American politicians who think that the hegemonic aspiration exhausts the United States and also prevents it from adjusting to these multipolar realities. That is, it's getting bogged down in Europe when its priorities in a multipolar world should be to have more influence in the Western Hemisphere, and they also want to confront China in Asia. Not that this is necessarily a great idea, but at least Europe is no longer a priority.

So this seems to be splitting the U.S., but it also seems to be where the Europeans get very uncomfortable because there's not really a clear plan for Europe's role after unipolarity—that is, after the United States deprioritizes Europe and partially leaves the continent. I'm not sure if this is also the reason why we're seeing a revival of German militarism. But given that this war began as a conflict over the European security architecture, with Ukraine being a symptom of that, to what extent do we need some kind of settlement on what European security should look like? We're dealing with this as if it's only an issue about Ukraine, when in fact the war doesn't have that much

to do with Ukraine itself, but rather as one component of a larger problem. And it doesn't really have that much to do with territory either—it doesn't seem like we're dealing with the root of the matter.

#Jeffrey Sachs

That's exactly right. And I think it's important to recognize that this U.S. gambit—the one that Brzezinski spelled out in 1997—was a piece of a larger puzzle. It was the global chessboard, not just a European issue. The belief in the 1990s in the United States was unipolarity: that there was one global hegemon, the United States, and that it was the role of that hegemon to make sure it would never be threatened by any of these rivals in the future. One part of that was to corner Russia, surround it in the Black Sea region, and basically render it a third-rate power or less.

Brzezinski openly talked about Russia breaking into a number of weak countries—separate units that would be joined together as some kind of confederacy, not even a federation, but a confederacy of a European Russia, a Siberian Russia, and a Far East Russia. So they were dreaming that the U.S. would run the world, and this was one part of it. The real dreamers, the delusionists, became known as the neocons. They thought the U.S. would reduce Russia to a third-rate power or completely break it, and that the U.S. would dominate the Middle East. That was a big part of the project, especially with a Zionist orientation, because the U.S. went to war repeatedly for the sake of “greater Israel,” which is strange and almost unimaginable, but it was part of the neoconservative playbook.

And in East Asia, the truth is they didn't have a strategy for China because they weren't very intelligent people. They couldn't look ahead and didn't see that China was going to rise as a major power. If you go back to the late 1990s, China barely figures in any of the discussions. It's not like they were plotting what to do—China was just a place that was going to assemble our toys, automotive components, electronics, phones, and things like that. It wasn't a matter of geopolitical concern at the time. So this unipolar project had its European dimension in NATO enlargement. And this, of course, ran contrary to the fundamental alternative vision of European security, which was ostensibly the one that had ended the Cold War.

Because remember, the end of the Cold War was German reunification in 1990, based on the Two Plus Four framework. The goal of that settlement was indivisible security in Europe—that there would not be blocs. In fact, it was quite explicit from the U.S. and Germany that NATO would not play any kind of strategic bloc role going forward. The U.S. said to Gorbachev, “We will not take advantage of your unilateral ending of the Warsaw Pact military alliance or your economic and financial weakness in the early 1990s. We will have indivisible security.” Several treaties and agreements under the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe defined that kind of indivisible security.

NATO was the opposite of that. NATO is bloc politics. The OSCE was the end of bloc politics. I was there in the Soviet Union in 1990 and in Russia from the end of 1991 onward, and I heard an earful

from Gorbachev, from Yeltsin, and so forth about a common European home, indivisible security, the end of blocs, peace, and cooperation. I believed it then, and I still believe it. I think that's the answer to European security. The Europeans are not having it, by the way. This is so strange to me—they were offered peace, and they've basically rejected it.

First, under pressure from the United States, they said, yes, we prefer U.S. hegemony to a common European home. They made that choice. They had qualms and misgivings. The real showdown came at the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008, when the U.S. said, now's the moment—we're going to push NATO into Ukraine and Georgia. Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande said, not a great idea. George Bush put his foot down and said, we're going to do it. They said, OK, we're going to do it. That's when the U.S. hegemon prevailed, and the idea of any kind of indivisible security disappeared entirely. So when you ask what security for Europe means now, Europe needs a security arrangement not based on blocs.

But Europe can't get its head around that. And by the way, Europe has made this mistake so many times. There's a kind of bloody-mindedness in Europe. I'm just rereading the history of Poland refusing to form a common security agreement with the Soviet Union in 1939, even as Nazi Germany was about to destroy Poland. But Poland hated the Russians so much that it wouldn't even look to the Soviet Union for protection in 1939. If you look back at that, it's completely suicidal. And Europe is just... a difficult place. Everybody hates each other, and so they can't imagine collective security. They can't imagine indivisible security. Now, what do I recommend for this?

I recommend that the Europeans have direct diplomacy with Russia. And by the way, I recommend that you don't put European security literally in the hands of a few Baltic state politicians. That would be putting Europe's politics in the hands of the most rabidly Russophobic people on the whole continent. But if Europe maintains its Russophobia, there is no security for Europe. And if Europe doesn't engage in diplomacy, there is no peace for Europe, whatever the United States does. So when you ask me what the European security arrangement should be, it's that Europeans understand Russia's not going anywhere—Russia is part of Europe.

Uh, it has been, geographically, a part of Europe—at least to the Urals. And militarily, culturally, diplomatically, geopolitically, financially, economically, it is. If the Europeans think the United States is somehow going to make that not the case, well, that was the idea of the Cold War—but that's past. So if Europe is looking to the United States to replay the Cold War, forget it. The U.S. is tired. It's got huge budget deficits. Russia is not viewed—even though it was wrongly viewed then—as some global communist threat. The United States is just not interested in the European hatreds. So they should talk to the Russians and figure out what their indivisible security is really about.

#Glenn

We actually signed agreements in 1990—the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. This was supposed to be the structure for post-Cold War Europe. And as you said, two of the key themes were

indivisible security—so we should not enhance our security at the expense of the other side—and, of course, no dividing lines. This was about overcoming bloc politics. In the spirit of a common European home, that was the idea. But no, it's all gone now. And as you said, with the Baltic states, the Russophobia there now essentially becoming the official policy of the EU is quite extraordinary. We had Kaja Kallas, the EU foreign policy chief, making a speech where she argued how wonderful it would be if Russia were defeated, because then, with many smaller countries, they would be much more peaceful. So this is peace now—expanding a military bloc and balkanizing your opponent. I mean, it's a very far cry from the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

#Jeffrey Sachs

And it is so painful for me because, having been part of Gorbachev's economic strategy group in 1990—having proposed helping the economic transformation from the failed Soviet system to a functional one—and having that turned down by the West, I watched all of that. I sat across from Boris Yeltsin in December 1991, when he told our small group that the Soviet Union was over and that he wanted peace and cooperation with the West, for Russia to be just a normal country alongside the rest of Europe. And with Kaja Kallas—I advised her father, who was the governor of the Central Bank of Estonia in 1992. I helped Estonia design its central bank and its currency. They gave me a high prize for that, actually—a national award for my contribution. And she won't even talk to me. You know, they don't want to talk; they just want more. It's crazy—so self-defeating. But not for the first time in Europe, I'm sorry to say.

#Glenn

Well, that's just my last quick question. Do you see this as—when the European leaders say that Russia's planning to attack once they're done with Ukraine, they'll come for us, and that's why we have to fight them now—do they actually believe this or not? Is it posturing? Given that you've engaged with these people—well, most of the ones in power now—what's your impression? Because on one hand, if they want to keep the war going a bit longer, they have to sell these narratives. But at times, one gets the impression they might actually believe the stuff they're spinning as well. So it's very hard to tell, because at some points they've said the exact opposite. They've recognized that creating a Europe without Russia would unavoidably become a Europe against Russia. I think Angela Merkel once made that comment. So do they believe this, or is it just posturing?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Angela Merkel said about the 2008 Bucharest NATO meeting that she knew if they pushed the roadmap for Ukrainian membership in NATO, it was going to mean war. She said that. So they knew it. I think with the European leaders, it's complicated. First, many of them know, but maybe they've forgotten. Maybe they've talked themselves into a frenzy. And let's remember, they're completely unpopular. Whatever they're saying, they're not carrying their publics with them at all. So I'd say the two most important points are: first, the publics don't believe it; and second, the Europeans—if they

do believe it—the first thing I would do, if I actually believed that, would be to sit down with the Russian counterparts and say, “How do we make sure that doesn’t happen?”

What can you tell us about guarantees for us if we guarantee your security by stopping NATO enlargement? What about our security? That’s a conversation to have. That’s a good question to ask Foreign Minister Lavrov. Fair enough. But they don’t even ask the question—they just presume the answer. That’s a self-fulfilling path to war. So the point is, if they really believe this, either they’re suicidal or homicidal toward their own populations, or they’re so foolish that they don’t understand that if you believe that, you’d better sit down with your counterparts and figure out a way to make sure it doesn’t come to pass. Because there are things you can do in diplomacy—agreements you can reach, neutrality zones, buffer zones, monitoring, and commitments that actually matter. And they don’t even try to explore those.

So again, I’ve said to the European friends I know, what are you doing? Go talk with your counterparts. Then you can make decisions not based on your prejudices, your claims, your phony domestic politics, or your delusions—whatever it is—but at least on the basis of some facts you can discern. But the truth is, European diplomacy is not so impressive in history. The tendency toward war is extraordinary. The failure to talk is absolutely extraordinary. And even when there’s a real risk, they don’t even know how to face it in a realistic way. So, yeah, if Kaja Kallas doesn’t want to speak with the Russians, choose a different external affairs representative for Europe. But go talk and go someplace—go to Abu Dhabi, go to Istanbul, invite a counterpart to Brussels, go to Moscow. But come on, stop just saying that we’re going to war.

#Glenn

Now, as a European, I would like to see Europe represented more in international institutions. But at the same time, I also recognize that Kaja Kallas does not represent Europeans’ interests. So thank you very much for taking the time.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Great to be with you. Thanks a lot.