

Jiang Xueqin: Predictions for 2026 - Empire, Rivalry & Collapse

Prof. Xueqin Jiang argues that both historical patterns and game theory can be used to accurately predict future events. Prof. Jiang outlines his predictions for 2026: Great power rivalry, economic competition and collapse, civil war etc. Prof. Jiang is the host of the popular educational channel Predictive History: <https://www.youtube.com/@PredictiveHistory> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.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 Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined today by Professor Zhang to discuss 2026 and what to expect. Thank you very much for coming back on.

#Jiang Xueqin

Thanks, Karen.

#Glenn

So, you're renowned for using historical patterns and game theory to predict the direction of geopolitics. From the election of Trump to the invasion of Iran, you've been pretty much spot on. So I thought, who better to ask about what to expect for this year, 2026? And we've certainly had a very rough start. But before we—looking to 2026, can I ask, what is it that makes your geopolitical predictions more accurate? Do you rely on the economic structure, the elite politics, ideology, or the military balance when you assess 2026?

#Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so I use game theory, and I basically see geopolitics as a game played by different players trying to maximize their own self-interest. So I don't really look at ideology; I basically focus on self-interest.

#Glenn

So for 2026, what are, I guess, the main things you're looking at?

#Jiang Xueqin

Right. So for me, I think the big event of 2026 will be this April, when Trump visits China on a state visit — his first in his second term. The U.S.–China relationship will be the big question for 2026. Russia and the war in Ukraine are basically pretty settled; it's stabilized. What will happen between Europe, NATO, and Russia we can more or less forecast easily. But what's really up in the air is the U.S.–China relationship. What Trump wants to do is go to China and negotiate a grand bargain between China and the United States. Remember that in 1971, Nixon removed the U.S. dollar from the gold standard, and the dollar became free-floating. To stabilize it and give it value, he did two things.

The first thing he did was establish the petrodollar, meaning Saudi Arabia would only allow its oil to be purchased with U.S. dollars. The second thing he did was visit China to open it up. So what America did in the 1980s was transfer technology and expertise to China and open its market so that China would become dependent on the U.S. dollar. For a few decades, that relationship worked really well. But then the United States started to abuse its "exorbitant privilege." It began printing too many U.S. dollars and engaging in wars in the Middle East that caused the debt to balloon. Then came the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, and China became much more worried about the value and stability of the U.S. dollar.

So then it began to try to internationalize the yuan. It created something called the "gold corridor," the Shanghai Gold Exchange. So it's trying to recalibrate the financial market to become much more stable, and China would have much more sovereignty in the global trade system. And this is now destabilizing the U.S. dollar. What Trump wants to do is force China to continue buying U.S. dollars. Because remember, if China were to dump all of its U.S. Treasuries, there would be a sovereign debt crisis in the United States. So Trump needs to figure out how to liberalize the Chinese financial markets and get the Chinese to keep buying more U.S. dollars. And that's what we're seeing right now. By invading Venezuela, what Trump hopes to do is force China to buy oil using U.S. dollars.

So where does China get most of its oil? It gets most of its oil from the Middle East. So if Trump were to attack Iran and destabilize the Middle East, then China would be forced to rely more on the Western Hemisphere for its oil supply. But not just for oil—also for silver, gold, lithium, copper, basically all the minerals China needs to power its EV industry and its AI industry. So this is the grand strategy being played out, where Trump is conducting all these wars around the world to strangle the Chinese economy so that China becomes reliant on the Western Hemisphere for its supply. And then China will be forced to buy more U.S. dollars. That's the great game we're witnessing right now in 2026.

#Glenn

But it looks like this can go both ways, because if the United States really wanted China to use the U.S. dollar—and again, there are a lot of benefits for China to use the U.S. dollar—then they would want to do, I guess to some extent, the exact opposite. That is, to create trust in an open, predictable international economic system in which the rule of law comes first. The problem with forcing it is that it suggests all the rules have been cast aside. If you look at the efforts to cut off China from semiconductors, to crush its tech industry—all of these things would have the opposite effect. They would convince the Chinese to go in a different direction, because if they now bow to U.S. pressure, they would essentially be owned by the United States.

And I guess, well, if you take the Venezuelan case, instead of being forced to trade oil in U.S. dollars, they could go the other way. They could make themselves more dependent on Russian energy, given that they share a common border, and bring these two great powers even closer. So how do you assess which direction the U.S. will go? Because at the moment, there seems to be a bit of a strategic vacuum. They want to build trust, but at the same time, they want to force China and coerce it to do exactly what they want. You can't have it both ways. You have to pick one path and stick with it. Otherwise, everything falls apart.

#Jiang Xueqin

You're absolutely right. I completely agree. If the United States were to perceive China as a peer and treat it with respect—as a sovereign nation worthy of respect—then we would have no issues. China would probably be happy to trade as an equal with the United States. The problem is that the United States is the global hegemon and insists on maintaining its dominance, so China must be subordinate to the American empire. But China refuses to do that. China is a sovereign nation and wants to be respected on the world stage. As you point out, these two nations are codependent. If China were to lose access to oil in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere, it could turn to Russian oil—but Russia could not meet all of China's energy needs.

China imports about three-quarters of all its oil from overseas. Half of that comes from the Middle East, and around 20% comes from Russia. If China could import all its oil from Russia tomorrow, it would do so—but Russia simply doesn't have the capacity. They'd still need to build those pipelines, which would take years and cost tens of billions of dollars. So China is kind of stuck right now. But, as you point out, China does have a lot of tools, a lot of leverage. For example, it could continue to destabilize the U.S. dollar. We saw that with the silver markets, right?

So what China did at the start of this year was announce that it would restrict exports of its silver. China dominates the silver market, and this caused the price of silver to skyrocket on COMEX—the commodities exchange in the United States. That destabilized the U.S. financial markets. So what we're seeing is almost mutually assured destruction, right? If the United States were to cut off China's oil, if it were to embargo China, then China could just dump all its U.S. Treasuries, cause financial havoc, and both nations would be destroyed. So what we're seeing—and here's a metaphor, okay?—imagine a ladder over an abyss.

Both China and the United States are trying to climb this ladder, and it would be in their best interest to climb it together, at the same time. The United States, for whatever reason, insists on being higher than China. Now, if the United States goes too far and leaves China behind, the ladder destabilizes and they both fall into the abyss. If China overtakes the United States and climbs too far, they also both fall into the abyss. So this is a really dangerous—and really stupid—game they're both playing. And again, we wouldn't be in this situation if the United States showed some humility and started to treat China as an equal. But unfortunately, we are in this situation.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's why I initially asked about ideology, because often, at least for political realists, the assumption is that states are rational. But over the past 30 years, we've seen a whole political class raised on the notion that peace in the world requires the hegemony of the West—because then we'll elevate these liberal democratic values. So it's the idea that they can't imagine a world that isn't based on dominance. And I think this is fueling a lot of irrational behavior. I mean, if it's a problem in the U.S., it's definitely a problem in Europe.

I like, though, that you pulled China into the Venezuela issue, because many people missed that Venezuela did offer to accommodate all these American energy companies. But it's not only about the U.S. getting access—it's also about denying or conditioning the access of rival great powers. So I think, yeah, that's an important aspect there. But also, in terms of accommodating China, Kissinger made a similar comment back in 2014 regarding Russia. He said, if they are a great power, then we should treat them as such—accommodate their interests so they can be integrated into the U.S.-led order. If not, we're going to end up with stupid policies, like trying to defeat or destroy them. And that's what he warned against. I fear that's the direction they're going with China as well. How do you see it?

#Jiang Xueqin

Sorry, sorry, sorry. You know, I love what you said. So let me make two points to reinforce it. First of all, I don't think it's ideology—I think it's hubris and racism. I think Americans believe they're the best, and they hate the fact that China is catching up to them. So yeah, it's hubris, and you could also say it's racism. That's what's happening in this geopolitical order. That's number one. Number two, we saw what happened in Venezuela—Maduro being kidnapped.

A lot of people are saying that America did this to capture Venezuela's oil resources. That's not true. What America did was to spite China, because it's going to go in and build up Venezuela's oil infrastructure. That'll cost tens of billions of dollars and take many, many years before the U.S. can really bring the Venezuelan oil industry up to modern standards. What it's doing is cutting off access to China—that's the entire goal, right? So it's not to clean the oil, and it's not to benefit U.S. oil companies. It's just to spite China. That's all it is.

#Glenn

Well, no, I agree. I think this is the main issue. This is why they keep referring to the Monroe Doctrine. And obviously, China is the main concern there, because you want to control your own hemisphere. Seeing China as the main trade partner for all of Latin America is something they think has to be reversed. But how do you factor in the unknown variables? For example, if I were to predict one thing for 2026, it would be an economic crisis in the United States. And once an economic crisis kicks in, it manifests itself in political and social instability. The rationality of states tends to wither away when things at home go poorly, and they start seeking quick fixes and easy solutions—like these tariff policies—or they allow economic conflicts to escalate into war. So how do you see an economic crisis playing into 2026, especially in the U.S.-China rivalry?

#Jiang Xueqin

Right. So, America—the American economy—has some major weaknesses. And you're right, it's possible that America could face a major financial crisis this year. So let's go over some of the main problem areas in the U.S. economy. The first is artificial intelligence, where right now much of American GDP growth is driven by investment in AI—basically building data centers that consume a lot of water and electricity in local communities. The problem is that these data centers cost tens of billions of dollars, and it's really unclear how they'll make money. Because right now, most people use AI to generate videos or to cheat in school—to get ChatGPT to write their essays.

It's unclear how this will be beneficial to the economy, and whether AI can even be profitable. This could cause millions of jobs to be lost, so it seems as though the AI bubble is about to burst. The problem, though, is that right now the U.S. economy doesn't make any sense. Right? So there's Michael Burry, who's very famous for predicting that in 2008 the subprime market—the CDO market—would collapse. He took out billions of dollars in bets against it and made a lot of money. Then he made a bet against AI because he was certain that none of the fundamentals in the industry made any sense. And then he suddenly announced that he was actually leaving the industry. And the reason was, OK, the AI industry doesn't make any sense—but guess what? The entire American financial industry doesn't make any sense anymore either.

Meaning that right now, the American financial industry is controlled by a few oligarchs—a small group of people who can dictate the market to their will. So the average investor, and market fundamentals in general, no longer apply to what's happening. Yes, in theory, the AI market could collapse, but because there are so few players—basically seven companies controlling it—they can do whatever they want. The American government has something called Operation Stargate, or Project Stargate, and Trump has promised hundreds of billions of dollars to invest in AI infrastructure. So it's possible that this bubble just keeps going on and on. That means the American financial industry right now lacks the capacity to self-correct. And if the market collapses, it's probably going to take the entire economy down with it.

And so that's a major problem facing the U.S. financial industry. That's problem number one. Problem number two is over-financialization. This goes back to the silver example: when China announced it was going to limit its exports of silver—and China controls about 60% of the world's silver market—the price of silver went crazy. The reason is that in China, silver is used for manufacturing needs. It goes into AI, EVs, batteries, all that. So China really needs silver. But in the United States, silver is used for speculation.

So silver is really just paper silver. A lot of these companies, like J.P. Morgan, are over-leveraged 300 to 1. For every ounce of silver they actually have, they've promised 300 on paper. So it's a huge bubble that's going to burst. What we saw in silver was almost like a small bank run. But it's not just silver—it's almost all these commodities. They're not used for manufacturing needs; they're used for speculation. The American financial industry is basically one big Ponzi scheme that could explode at any moment.

And the third great weakness of the U.S. economy, of course, is cryptocurrency—where, you know, Bitcoin, it's all just speculation. It actually brings no benefit to society. So you have all these major weaknesses in the American economy. But because, first of all, you have a few oligarchs who control the resources; second, the American government can print as much money as it wants—there's something called quantitative easing; and third, there's really no challenger to the U.S. dollar—this bubble can sustain itself past 2026. But when it collapses, the entire society collapses. So you're basically looking at civil war. Civil war in America.

#Glenn

Yes, okay. So, in terms of gold and silver, you'd assume this rally will continue then, given that paper gold and paper silver have been inflated so far beyond what actually exists in hard assets?

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, the reality is that demand exceeds supply, right? Silver goes into AI, into EVs, into batteries, because it's the best metal conductor in the world—and there's no second. Copper is second, but it's far behind silver. So you need silver, and the world just can't produce enough of it. That's been true for the past five years. China and the United States are both investing heavily in AI, so right now there's a major fight for access to silver. And this goes back again to Venezuela, because Latin America and South America are actually the world's greatest producers of silver. So whoever controls Latin America and South America basically controls the AI future.

#Glenn

Well, things look a bit grim for the United States, with all these bubbles you mentioned. Once that starts to fall apart, civil war becomes a real possibility. But how do you see this affecting the current rivalry with China? What are China's strategic priorities, and how do you see them pursuing those?

One would assume that China will become more assertive as it grows more confident, but also as pressure builds on the United States to essentially break China and try to restore the 1990s, so to speak.

#Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so, you know, the greatest strength and the greatest vulnerability of the United States is the U. S. dollar, right? But the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of China is its reliance on exports. China is an export-oriented economy, and to feed that economy, it focuses on exports. Sometimes its export strategies are counterproductive and even self-defeating. For example, it dumps commodities onto the world market, which hurts the trade system. So China also has a lot of fundamental issues. Right now, the problem is that the United States is threatening to strangle, embargo, or blockade China, right? One thing that will flare up in 2026—and it's already starting now—is the rivalry between China and Japan. Prime Minister Takeuchi has said she believes Taiwan is part of Japan's strategic interests.

And what does she mean by that? What she means is that if China were to take control of Taiwan, Taiwan could blockade Japan's access to the Strait of Malacca and therefore to oil from the Middle East, which Japan depends on. So Japan believes that if China were to invade Taiwan, Japan would have to step in. Okay, so—Taiwan is key. But, you know, the opposite is also true: if Taiwan were aligned with Japan, then the first island chain could embargo China, could block China's trade. So I think in 2026 you'll see much more heated rhetoric between China and Japan, because both economies depend on Middle Eastern oil. Whoever controls the Strait of Malacca can basically strangle the other's economy.

#Glenn

Yeah. Well, this is the classic problem. Again, I think we talked before about how it looks a bit like pre-World War I. That is, China has kind of outgrown this security architecture—or economic architecture as well—which was more or less designed to contain China. So if there's no diplomatic path to this, it does look like conflict becomes unavoidable. But if we shift a bit toward Europe, which includes Russia, you said that the Ukraine war has been more or less settled, stabilized. I assume you're not referring to stable front lines.

I'm assuming that the future of the conflict has been determined now, which seems correct. But on the other hand, the reason I focus on the rationality of states is because you can see from the Europeans' increasing rhetoric that, well, we can't afford peace. If the war ends, then Russia would focus its resources on us. So one after another, you see different European leaders and media outlets saying, well, war may be better than peace now. So are we prepared to end this war, or how do you see this playing out?

#Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so I think the future is obvious. Europe is going to militarize against Russia, even though it's against the best interests of its people. People will be very upset with re-militarization. You're already seeing massive protests in Germany. A lot of this will be irrational, meaning Europe actually has no path to victory in Ukraine. But Europe's going to send men to their deaths in Ukraine anyway, because it doesn't know what else to do. What Europe is really saying is that it banked on Russia losing this war, then imposing an indemnity on Russia to solve all its fiscal problems. Now that Russia is winning, Europe is facing economic collapse at home, and it doesn't want to face that, so it's going to continue the war and hope for the best. There's no strategy here. It's suicidal. It's irrational. But Europe is stuck where it is.

#Glenn

Whenever I ask different experts about the likelihood of a direct war between Russia and the Europeans, they usually say it's very low, because the Europeans don't have the troops—it would be suicidal. But that assumes all wars are calculated and deliberate. I think an accidental war, a war by miscalculation, would come from this belief in escalation control. You know, the Europeans can't afford to see Russia lose—or win—so they'll send a few more long-range missiles, try to target the political leadership, maybe blow up some Russian tankers. So they escalate, even as pressure mounts on Moscow to stop letting the Europeans cross all the red lines.

So why should the Russians accept Europeans carrying out direct attacks, killing Russians? They'll retaliate. I don't think the Europeans want that—a direct war. They'd just like to kill Russians through Ukraine and then claim their hands are clean. But I don't think this is coming to an end. From what I hear coming out of Moscow, we're reaching the end of the line, and the Germans especially should be hit hard if they keep going down this path. But if you open any—sorry—European or German newspaper, they don't seem to realize this at all. If they acknowledge the possibility of war, it's because they think Russia wants to restore the Soviet Union or march on Paris, something like that. Do you think that's a real prospect?

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, I think the leadership of Europe—the European elite—they live in their own reality. You know, like on YouTube and social media, there are different bubbles. And I think the European elite literally believe that Russia will collapse tomorrow. Just wait another day, they think, and the Russian economy will collapse, the people of Russia will revolt again, and Putin will be overthrown, and then Russia will sue for peace. If you watch their media, they repeat this over and over, and it becomes a self-reinforcing bubble. The EU is this sprawling, self-reinforcing bureaucracy, and they're not capable of imagining defeat or different possibilities. They're certain—absolutely certain—that if they just wait one more day, the war will be over and they'll have won.

And, you know, if you talk about irrationality, go back to World War I. For those four or five years, millions of people were dying for no reason, and the reason was that these leaders just couldn't accept the possibility that they'd made a mistake. Okay, I mean, I understand this is all silly—why would you sacrifice so many men just because you can't afford to admit a mistake? They can't admit that maybe sending Boris Johnson to sabotage peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow was wrong, maybe blowing up the Nord Stream pipeline was wrong, maybe antagonizing Russia for twenty years by expanding NATO to its borders was wrong. These people absolutely refuse to admit they're wrong, and they're willing to sacrifice their own nations just to avoid admitting it.

#Glenn

Yeah, even now that the loss—NATO losing Ukraine—is starting to become obvious, the new goal seems to be, well, let's lose slower. Let's keep the Ukrainians in the fight a little bit longer, even though it'll be a humanitarian disaster for Ukraine and a strategic disaster for Europe, because this isn't good for them. But how do you see this playing out in the European security architecture? Because, again, the EU and NATO are the two main pillars of how Europe has been structured in the post-Cold War era.

They were supposed to be the hegemonic order of Europe, the foundation of U.S. unipolarity—especially NATO. Do you see them being able to survive? Well, maybe they'll hold on until 2026, but how do you see this playing out? What would you expect by 2026? A complete collapse isn't necessarily in the cards, but it does seem to be deteriorating fast. I mean, as we speak, Trump is laying claim to Greenland, and the Danish prime minister is trying to invoke Article 5—but I'm not sure America would come to the defense of Greenland if America itself went after Greenland. I mean, this is kind of absurd stuff.

#Jiang Xueqin

Um, look, the reality is that Trump hates Europe. He's hated Europe ever since 2016, when Europe basically insulted him during his first presidency. Europe thought he was a joke, a charlatan, and Europe conspired with Obama to overthrow him in 2020. So, um, Trump hates Europe. And you can tell because, you know, what was the first thing that happened after Trump won the election? He sent J.D. Vance to Europe to scold Europe for failing Western civilization—for letting in too many immigrants, for embracing woke ideology, for betraying Christian values. And so Trump would be more than happy to see the entire NATO system collapse, right? You could argue that Trump is forcing NATO to collapse because he's forcing NATO to fight a war it possibly cannot win against Russia.

So I think what's going to happen is that NATO will sleepwalk into disaster in Ukraine. The reason is that it's this lumbering bureaucracy that can't possibly imagine its own demise. These are just bureaucrats who want to collect their paychecks and look after their pensions, so they don't really

care what happens. They'll just do what they're told. And this war will be settled in Odessa. I think NATO will collapse in Odessa because it will commit to defending the city. Russia will encircle it, blockade it, and NATO won't be able to hold on. NATO will force—uh, Europeans—to be conscripted into the army to die in Odessa. They'll refuse, and you'll have civil war throughout Europe. But this is, like, a five- to ten-year timeframe. It's not going to happen this year—it'll be another five to ten years. It's a slow death for Europe.

#Glenn

So Odessa would be the end of the Ukraine war then? Yes. No, that makes sense. The Russians have set their eyes on Odessa, as this is to a large extent about the Black Sea. And of course, this is where NATO attacks Russia from—primarily from Odessa. I think the British and French would never accept giving up Odessa. This is, I think, the key prize in this war. So you're probably spot on there. How about Europe's goal of strategic autonomy? For many years we heard about strategic autonomy, European sovereignty—these were the slogans of the EU. It's a very stark contrast to the subservience to the US, which hates Europe. But how do you see the internal cohesion holding in place? Because I think Europe succeeded when it was able to deliver economic benefits to its member states through collective bargaining power. I don't see that anymore.

#Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so after 1945, Europe was forced to adopt the ideas of the open society, right? This is Karl Popper, who argued that World War II was caused by fascism—by this excessive embrace of nationalism. So, to prevent another great war, societies became much more open, multicultural, tolerant. And that was the strategy of the EU bureaucracy for the past few decades. That's why they let in some of the immigrants, that's why they embraced woke ideology. And it's basically made these societies, you know, much more vulnerable. So you have the real possibility of civil war in Britain and in France, because they let in all these immigrants, and the natives see them as a threat to their cultural identity. And so, you know, wars are fought because people want to fight to protect the ones they love, and they fight for their homeland.

But right now, if you go to Britain and ask people, "What does Britain mean to you?" I think most British people would find it hard to answer. If you interview immigrants in Britain and ask, "Hey, are you willing to go fight a war in Ukraine to defend Britain?" they'll say, "Hell no." And the natives are like, "Why would I leave this land to go die in Ukraine so that these immigrants can take it over after I'm dead?" So the idea of getting Europeans to go fight anywhere is just ridiculous now. And yeah, I mean, you will conscript quite a few, because these European nations have become authoritarian—but it's going to destroy their societies. Europe is no longer capable of fighting a full-scale conflict with Russia.

#Glenn

Sometimes I get a sense of similarity with the Soviets after the Bolshevik Revolution, when they were fighting even though the Russians were deeply religious. So when they were essentially going to fight under a Bolshevik regime, or a Soviet flag, the problem was: what exactly were they fighting for? They kind of had to allow the church to come back in, because that's what people were willing to fight for. And I get the same impression now—that Europeans are being told we have to go and die to fight Russia. And if you ask why, they'll refer to the nation and the usual things people are supposed to die for.

But they spent the past years, if not decades, expressing their contempt for our faith, our traditions, our culture—and now we're supposed to die for it? I mean, what are we dying for? It doesn't really make any sense. I mean, this is what people... Nationalism is—people kill for it, but they're also willing to die for it. I think the smearing of nationalism, even though it was introduced in the French Revolution with democratization, has been another flaw. But yeah... so how does this play into the United States?

Because the Europeans were a key partner of the U.S. in the past—during the Cold War and the hegemonic era. But what do you see the Americans doing now? If they're drifting further away from the Europeans, will they abandon bloc politics, or will they simply demand obedience? How will the U. S. build its power moving forward? This is what perplexes many European politicians. Every time America scolds them or threatens Greenland, they all go on Twitter saying, "Well, you know, we're good allies. You need us to be great." But it doesn't appear that this sentiment is shared in Washington. So what will the U.S. build its power on?

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, the United States is now transactional. It's an empire, and it's going to exploit its vassals. If it can't exploit them, it'll just abandon them. Right now, the United States is uncertain what it can derive from Europe. Europe has an aging population, it's not willing to fight wars, it doesn't have many able-bodied men, and it has very few resources. So the United States doesn't really know what to do with Europe. In fact, it believes that Europe has been stealing from and exploiting the United States for the past few decades.

It's the American security infrastructure that has protected Europe, that has allowed Europe to create its welfare state, that has allowed Europe to—basically, the Americans think the Europeans are just lazy, um, and decadent and corrupt. So the United States is going to throw Europe overboard, right? Just abandon Europe to Russia and forget about it. And so, uh, Europe—uh, the United States' national security strategy is very clear: it's going to use the Western Hemisphere to project its power overseas. So the example goes after China, where—listen, in the future, China, if you want resources, don't think about the Middle East, because it's on fire. The entire place is at war.

Don't think about Europe, because Europe is dead. Don't think about Africa, because we're going to challenge you there as well. You're going to have to come and buy resources from the Western

Hemisphere, and therefore, you're going to have to buy from us. So I think that's the national security strategy going forward. The United States is intent on maintaining its hegemony through the U.S. dollar, and it needs to make China subordinate to, and dependent on, the U.S. dollar.

#Glenn

Yeah, this idea that in this new imperial phase of the United States, they will either exploit or abandon. I don't think the Europeans appreciate this, because I heard the same from Americans as well. We were trying to decide whether we should make an exclusive sphere of influence for the United States or just extract the wealth. If it's a choice between exploiting or abandoning, the Europeans can't envision a future without U.S. leadership. So they're allowing, I think, the U.S. to extract wealth at the moment through all this—putting companies across the Atlantic, or these trade deals, which are so horrible, but they still signed them on Trump's golf course. But of course, this is a temporary fix. Once America has extracted everything it needs, Europe will be even weaker, more irrelevant, and it will be abandoned anyway. But again, there's no discussion in the political class about what to do. It's just the assumption that Trump is a bad man, and if we just wait him out, things will go back to normal.

#Jiang Xueqin

That's literally what they're doing. They believe that in 2028, the Democrats will come in and reverse all of Trump's policies, just as Biden did in 2020. What the Europeans don't realize is that this is a new reality—we're not going back to 2020. Even if the Democrats come in in 2028, they're going to maintain Trump's imperial policies because that's in America's best interest. America has no benefit from helping Europe in any way.

#Glenn

Especially if it becomes even more irrelevant. But they don't see it in terms of national interest or the value of an alliance. They talk about friendship and values, which is kind of a... But that's where the ideology comes in again. I mean, they've convinced themselves that this is what holds us together, rather than having a common strategic interest. But for the United States, do you see its power retrenching overall? Will they overextend, or will there just be a complete absence of a coherent strategy?

#Jiang Xueqin

So what we're seeing is an acceleration of the demise of the American empire. Let's go back to Venezuela. I'm sure everyone saw what happened—these Chinook helicopters carrying Delta Force special operators flew into Caracas, killed basically Maduro's Cuban security team, and then escorted

him to New York, where he was perp-walked. It seemed like a triumph of the Romans, right? When they brought in captured kings and paraded them through the streets of Rome. In America, everyone's ecstatic about this. Everyone thinks it's tremendous.

But what people don't recognize is that, you know, the reason America didn't do this in the past is because it's stupid to do this sort of thing, right? I mean, why would you insult a nation like that? So not only did the Americans go and kidnap a head of state—a sovereign head of state who represented the state itself—they also destroyed the monument to Hugo Chávez, who's the spiritual hero of the Chavismo movement in Venezuela, which is the current regime there. So Trump has made it impossible now for the United States to seek any kind of arrangement with Venezuela. Even if some negotiation takes place, it's going to end up in bad faith because the Venezuelans have lost trust in the United States.

But not only that—South America right now is going to rally against the United States. Trump has threatened both Mexico and Colombia. He's got his eyes on Cuba, on Nicaragua. So now the South Americans are like, you know, we can't trust the Americans, we need to stick together. And they're going to resist American power. And then Africa, Europe—the entire world—is going to see America for the bully that it is. So listen, America had the greatest military for the past fifty, sixty years. It didn't really want to use it, because once you start using your military, you're stuck using it forever, right? You're better off using soft power.

You're better off using covert ops—propaganda, you know, infiltration. And that's what America did really well for these fifty, sixty years. It could have done the same thing in Venezuela, where they could have basically bribed Maduro, bribed the elite to seek an economic treaty with the United States, where all the oil belonged to the United States. And Venezuela would have agreed to this. All of South America wasn't happy with that kind of deal, but instead, it chose to do what it did because it wanted to project strength and power. So it sacrificed strategy for optics. And this is a sign of an empire in decline—where it's no longer capable of grand strategy, no longer capable of foresight.

It's not only incapable of restraint and humility—it's complete hubris. We see this all the time when empires are in decline, where not only do they antagonize their enemies, but they also antagonize their own allies and exploit their vassals. So what the United States is doing is short-term. It's stupid. And look, in the short term—say, the next two to three years—it'll look great in that, you know, America is able to control the entire Western Hemisphere. The whole world bows to America. But in the long term, you've sown the seeds for global discontent, for a global revolution against American power. And basically, I think the American empire is done for.

#Glenn

Yeah, the French philosopher Emmanuel Todd calls this "micro-militarism." He sees it as a common trait, as you suggest, of a declining empire—that is, seeking military solutions against minor states, easy targets, to project strength and cover up a declining status in the world. But no, I think you're

right. Of course, this is the extraordinary thing: Maduro was, you know, resented in many places in Latin America, especially by the Brazilians. But none of the Latin Americans want to see this kind of thing—the U.S. restoring its empire and hegemony across the Americas through military force. It's so counterproductive, it seems.

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, Maduro—regardless of his faults, and he has lots of faults—he was the head of state of Venezuela. He represented the nation-state. So when you kidnap Maduro in this manner and humiliate him like this in New York City, you're humiliating the entire Venezuelan people, and by proxy, the South American people as well. This can only end in disaster for America.

#Glenn

Well, in the U.S., a lot of people fiercely hate Donald Trump, especially the Democrats. But if China or Russia were to kidnap Donald Trump and parade him down the streets, you know, that would be a national humiliation. Even the biggest haters of Trump would see it as an attack on America. But again, this is the problem when you only focus on leaders—the assumption that if you take this guy out, put someone else in, then everything will be fine. Even this time, they didn't even put in someone new; they just took the leader and hoped everything would fall apart. I think this is the issue whenever we call our adversaries "dictators." The assumption is that you just remove the head of state and then everything will fall apart, which is—

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, that's how Donald Trump thinks. He thinks, "Oh, I've captured Maduro, therefore now Venezuela belongs to me. And Venezuela must obey what I tell them because I've captured their head of state." He lives in his own reality. You know, he spent too much time doing reality TV—*The Apprentice*—and so he thinks that if he can just make people believe something, it will become reality. He doesn't recognize that there are these fundamental laws of geopolitics. An example is, when Trump was doing *The Apprentice*, it had the best ratings on TV. But whenever Trump ran a business, he ran it into the ground. He destroyed every single business he touched. That's the man he is—he's going to get great TV ratings, but he's going to destroy America in the process.

#Glenn

I often refer to that scene with Zelensky in the Oval Office. After scolding Zelensky, he just looked toward the camera like, "Well, this is great TV." I think he forgets the actual role he's in.

#Jiang Xueqin

He doesn't live in our world. He lives in his own world—Trump world—and it's all make-believe. In his world, he thinks, "Hey, if I can manifest this idea, if I can make enough people believe it, it'll become reality." He thinks he's making America great again by resurrecting the American empire. He believes that by, you know, capturing Maduro or bombing Iran, he's projecting force. And if people understand how powerful America is, everyone will bow to America and just obey. Then all the problems will vanish—the debt will vanish, the polarization will vanish, all this discontent will vanish.

#Glenn

Well, it's possible he's able to topple the government there, but I did think it was a bit premature when he kidnaps Maduro and then says, "Well, we're going to run Venezuela now like a colony until we find someone to take over, like a puppet regime." But I thought, well, don't sell the fur on our skin before we kill the bear. The government is still in place. I thought it was a bit premature—but again, maybe they have a plan, or maybe it's just complete delusion. Who knows?

#Jiang Xueqin

In Trump world, because he was able to kidnap Maduro—which was a feat of spectacular television, looked great on TV—he thinks he's won the war. And now the people of Venezuela must obey him because he's proving himself to be God Emperor Trump. In his mind, he literally believes he now controls Venezuela because he has Maduro in his hands. That's what he truly believes.

#Glenn

Well, in the Global South, do you see any other developments or predictions for 2026? Given that you predicted the attack on Iran, do you see another attack in 2026? Because it seems the Israelis are selling this very hard to Trump.

#Jiang Xueqin

Look, Trump is going to continue his attacks everywhere, okay? So expect land strikes against cartels in Mexico. Expect land strikes in Colombia. There's a massive American Navy assembled in the Caribbean—it's not going away. It's still going to, you know, attack, um, fishing boats; it's still going to do what it's going to do. So the American military presence in the Caribbean is only going to increase, because what Trump wants to do is win the entire globe under his control. And then in April, when he goes to China, he'll have leverage over China, okay? Everything is leading to April, where Trump wants to sit down with China and negotiate a grand bargain. An example would be: "Okay, you know what, you're the subordinate to the empire, China. So what's going to happen is this—we control Venezuela, but we'll allow you to go into Venezuela and build the oil infrastructure so you can extract it and buy from us with U.S. dollars." That's literally what Trump has planned for April. And how will the Chinese respond to this, though? That's a great question.

And how China responds will determine the next five years. So, I'm based in China—I know China very well. And I'll tell you, right now there's a lot of debate within China. There are many different factions proposing different strategies. Some are very pro-Russian and say, "Listen, in the long term, we're better off with Russia." But there are also factions saying, "You know what, we shouldn't become too reliant on Russia. If we get 100% of our oil supply from Russia, that's going to be a problem. So maybe it's better to get 50% from America and 50% from Russia."

So you have a whole spectrum of views. What China decides in April will depend on how these different factions come together. They'll also have to look at the geopolitical environment, and then there are domestic concerns as well. So I couldn't tell you right now what will happen in April. But my thinking is, if I were a betting man, I'd say China and the United States will come to a grand bargain. But this grand bargain won't actually alter the geopolitical landscape, meaning the empire will still collapse and you'll still have wars raging around the world.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I think the three main rules of energy security are: diversify, diversify, diversify. So it's probably a good move for China not to become excessively dependent on Russia. So, yeah, main partner—good—but any country wouldn't want to put itself in that position where all the eggs are in one basket. But again, back to Iran, because I think you're right—there are many countries that could be next: Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Panama. Well, de facto, Denmark taking Greenland. Could we go back to Gaza, Lebanon? They could lose Syria, go back in there. Russia—intensify. China, of course—intensify. In Nigeria, maybe they're not done bombing there. So there seems to be a lot of countries on Trump's war list. But in terms of Iran, how likely do you think it is that there will be a do-over? Because it didn't go as well as they hoped last time, obviously.

#Jiang Xueqin

So I think that Trump was elected—the Israelis helped to elect Trump—because, remember, Miriam Adelson gave \$100 million to Trump. Right. And a lot of it was that Trump agreed he would resolve the Iran issue. We saw that in June with Operation May Hammer. But, you know, Trump is transactional, so he's going to invade Iran at some point, but he wants to maximize his own personal benefit. What this means is he's looking for as much as possible from the Israelis. So what's happened is that Elon Musk has promised Trump \$200 million for the midterms in November.

Miriam Adelson has promised Trump \$250 million if he were to run for a third term. So Trump is just trying to maximize as many benefits as possible before he pulls the trigger and orders an American attack on Iran. But all the seeds are in place, right? Because we're seeing all these protests in Iran. We can never know for sure the extent of these protests, but we do know that, listen, you have these Mossad agents in there, you've got all these American special forces in there, and a lot of money is being spent on bribing criminal networks, minorities, and dissidents to cause as much havoc as possible in Iran.

And quite honestly, Iran itself is facing a lot of economic issues because of the American embargo. So Iran is in a lot of trouble in 2026. But whether or not Trump pulls the trigger in 2026, I can't tell you. It's possible he launches more strikes. But the real issue is, will Trump launch a ground invasion of Iran? Because Israel wants regime change in Iran, and the only way to do that is with ground troops. Air strikes won't do it, and Israel itself can't do it alone. So it needs the United States to send in ground troops. I think in 2026 we'll see an acceleration of events, but maybe 2027 is when we'll have the full climax.

#Glenn

But with this great power rivalry—with the Chinese, the Russians—reasserting dominance over the Western Hemisphere during an economic crisis, it just seems like going after a ground invasion of Iran would really be... This is not going to be Iraq. This is a very different animal. I mean, Iran has huge territory, a much larger population, and it's much more powerful militarily. This could be a—this would be a disaster. Okay.

#Jiang Xueqin

Sorry, facts don't matter to Trump, okay? They've never mattered to Trump. You know, they tried for the longest time to give him press briefings—daily briefings where he was updated on geopolitics. At first it was a page, and they realized he doesn't even have the attention span for a page. So they made it a paragraph, and then they realized, oh my God, he can't even read a paragraph. So what they figured out was that this guy watches TV all the time. So if you want Trump's attention, if you want him to notice certain aspects of foreign policy, you need to go on Fox News and tell it to him there.

So this guy's brain is a TV set. He doesn't recognize the fundamental rules of geopolitics. He doesn't understand what it means to be overextended, what it means to have enough resources to fight wars. All he sees is optics, right? So he thinks that what happened in Venezuela was a huge success. Why can't we do the same thing in Mexico? Why can't we do the same thing in Cuba? And why can't we do the same thing in Iran? For Trump, it's all about optics—about visuals. He sees these teleforce operators flying into Tehran and blowing things up, and that's how his mind works.

#Glenn

There's a lot of focus on the United States overextending its hard power, but I think it's also overextending its diplomatic capital, because Trump only speaks in this language of, "Oh, this is my dear friend, we're best friends," in order to play the good cop—or, "He's going to destroy you," which is his bad cop. It was always either-or, and he tends to switch back and forth. To the point, at least from what I hear from the Russians, that they don't take him that seriously anymore, because nothing he says lasts for more than a week before he switches again. I mean, now it's, "Oh,

Vladimir, my good friend,” and then, “I will destroy their economy and, you know, we'll kill some more Russians.” I mean, there's just no consistency. It's either—yeah, but that was my point with the Chinese as well. Either you build trust—trust in America's economic infrastructure—or you try to coerce something, but you can't do both.

#Jiang Xueqin

Well, I think he is consistent. He's a mafia boss, and that's what people don't really understand about him. You know, he's not the President of the United States—he's the mafia boss. And once you appreciate that, he's easy to deal with. Just don't trust him. Just don't believe anything he says. He's going to do what's in his own personal best interest—not necessarily in the best interest of the United States, but his own best interest. He's going to do what makes him look good. This Maduro raid was counterproductive for the United States. It really hurt America's standing around the world. It made America look like a criminal enterprise, but he doesn't care because it made him look good on TV.

#Glenn

Do you have any final thoughts on 2026 before we wrap up?

#Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so I would say that this event in April, when Trump visits China—Trump needs to figure out a lot of things before April. What we're seeing in South America is the United States establishing military hegemony throughout the region, and we'll see an escalation of that over the next few months, especially with regard to Colombia and Mexico—possibly Brazil as well—where Trump might get into an argument with Lula for whatever reason. Trump likes that; it shows he's the boss. We can also expect to see more conflict in Africa, because in his national security strategy, Trump said very clearly that he will not cede Africa to China—that America and its allies will challenge China wherever they can. And the last area would be China and Japan.

I would say that as time goes by, the conflict between Japan and China will just increase, because Trump needs to exert as much leverage over China as possible. And then you'll have this meeting in April. I think there are actually four meetings scheduled for 2026, so Trump needs to resolve the China issue. The reason is that the endgame is Iran—he needs to resolve the China issue before launching a full-scale invasion of Iran. Russia will come to Iran's defense; there's nothing Trump can do about that. The wild card right now is China—what China will do in response to an Iran invasion. So the endgame is Iran, and China is maybe the penultimate boss before Iran. But if I were a betting man—and I think people would be surprised by this—I'd say China and the United States will come to an arrangement.

#Glenn

Well, I think everyone should keep an eye on April then. And I like the idea that if these two major powers—the US and China—can work out a deal, then other pieces can fall into place. On the other hand, if they do work out a deal, it could also be about the US asserting its dominance in its sphere abroad. The Arabs have a nice expression, I think. It's something like, when the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled—but when the elephants make love, it also gets flattened. So, you know... right, they're screwed either way. That's my point. Anyway, thank you so much for taking the time. Thank you.