

How To Defeat an Empire: The Post-Hegemonic World Is Shaping Up | Dr. Jeff Rich

In Istanbul, historian Jeff Rich joins Pascal to discuss what a peaceful multipolar world could look like. They debate civilisation states, China–India relations, and the tension between sovereignty and global interdependence. Rich argues that states must challenge US unilateralism while strengthening practical cooperation under the UN Charter. The conversation explores BRICS, regional diplomacy around the Strait of Hormuz, Ukraine's reconstruction, and the limits of military power, ending with reflections on Václav Havel and ordinary people's capacity to create change. Jeff's Links: The Burning Archive Substack: <https://jeffrich.substack.com> The Burning Archive YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzmI2CEnbKq0yswTpqdQfyg> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Istanbul: Imagining a multipolar future 04:10 China, India and civilisation states 13:01 Interdependence, sovereignty and globalism 20:07 A new order rooted in the UN Charter 29:21 BRICS and regional alternatives 34:53 Ukraine: Reconstruction and reconciliation 42:26 Empire and the limits of US power 48:53 Building peace and the power of the powerless

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today again with an in-person interview with my friend and colleague, Jeff Rich. Jeff, welcome to the channel. Thank you. And welcome to Istanbul, to both of us. Thank you. We are just finishing the East-West Forum here. Cheers to that. Yes. And Jeff is, of course, the host of The Burning Archive, and you also write a Substack, The Burning Archive. And he's an Australian thinker about, well, the international world. You also look a lot at history, of course. But here in Istanbul, we were thinking actually about the future of the multipolar world. What do you make out of the discussions here and where, especially, like what you heard from our Chinese colleagues and Indian colleagues, like where do you think the, let's say, the intelligentsia of the Global South is imagining the future to be?

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, well, that's a great question. And my sense is there's still a lot of differing views around how things might develop. But what was great about the East-West Forum was we had people from Iran, from the USA, from Britain, from Russia, from many places around the world, China and India as well, reflecting those sort of different points of view. But one of the interesting, I guess, conflicts in

the discussion was around this idea of a civilization state, where I think we heard from Zhang Weiwei, who wrote the book China Rising a dozen years or so ago, which advocated the idea of China as a civilization state. And he had quite an interesting dialogue with, I think it was Dr. Jagannath Panda from India, but based at a Swedish university, around both India-China relations, but also the concept of the civilization state, which I think reflected some different perspectives on just what that was. So, yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, it was kind of interesting to see that the Chinese colleague and the Indian colleague, that they didn't agree, basically, especially on the question of, like, Chinese sphere of influence and so on. Yes. The Chinese, Professor Tang's point was like, no, China's not building a sphere of influence. The Indian colleague was skeptical about that. But where they did agree upon is that this is a relevant discussion to have, right? Not necessarily what to do just with the Americans, but also how to organize things amongst the Global South.

#Jeff Rich

And in many ways, I think the India-China relationship—I mean, people talk about the U.S.-China relationship being the most consequential in the world, but the India-China relationship, in many ways, is the most consequential relationship in the world.

#Pascal

The two largest states on Earth, yeah, they have fought wars and, you know, and there is...

#Jeff Rich

I'm not going to say bitterness, but there are negative sentiments on both sides as a result of their different development paths, their different political paths, and also the military conflicts, including the one, you know, really quite recently in 2020, but also, I guess, Operation Sindoor two years ago, I think, as well.

#Pascal

The interesting thing to me, of course, is that if you look at the Chinese-Indian relationship, it's not one of just peace and harmony, not at all. They do have very active border disputes, but they're kind of managed. And I mean, Professor Tang actually made that point: look, the worst thing we do is kind of fist fighting. We don't have deaths among us. So it's kind of conflict, yes, but managed. On the other hand, there is a lot of cooperation. I mean, they're both BRICS states, so the BRICS future is not necessarily a future without conflict, but it seems to be a future that wants to manage its conflicts differently.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, I think so. Although I've certainly heard many Indian voices express a little bit more scepticism about the Chinese point of view. And, you know, especially China's relationship with Pakistan and its involvement in Operation Sindoor, etc. So, you know, there are definite significant tensions which also come out in, you know, people-to-people ties and trade relationships, you know, various limitations on the trade relationship, tensions around the Dalai Lama and Tibet and so on. All that sort of stuff, which is not unrelated to the border dispute as well. So there are some significant issues there. But also, intellectuals in both countries have expressed different ideas of a civilization state. So Zhang Weiwei's sort of idea was... Well, really, his initial idea was China was the one and only civilization state. It was, you know, it may be a slight exaggeration to say this, but it was a little bit of a Chinese supremacism, I would say.

#Pascal

I'm not sure. Wasn't that the discussion? He argued that China is a civilization. And actually, one of the questions was, isn't it true that any civilization will always look at itself as the civilization? Well, that's true.

#Jeff Rich

I think Zhang pushed back a little bit against it. Yeah, he did. He did. And I mean, I wrote a piece on the civilization state earlier in the year on my Substack, including looking at Zhang's book. And the argument is that China has had a continuous civilization for 5,000 years now. That's a big claim because there's a lot of cultural change and political change and social change that's happened over those 5,000 years, but also that it's a unique combination of the oldest continuous civilization in the world, which is an interesting statement, and a modern state. And it's that combination which he originally articulated as the civilization state.

Now, there have been other thinkers in India, like J. Sai Deepak, who articulated the idea of India as a civilisation state, but it's more of a, I guess, an anti-colonial sort of statement. It's a sort of reclamation of the Indic civilisation or traditions against, you know, colonial sort of mentalities. So there are these quite different ideas of civilisation state. But I'm a bit sceptical of the idea of the civilisation state in general because at some level it's a status game. It's saying we're something more significant than just a nation. We're a civilisation state. And there's a select few, or it's one, or there's a couple of us. And I ultimately think that's not a great way to take the argument about how to give, you know, good multilateralism and good commentary between lots of different countries in the world.

#Pascal

Yeah, but I think it's a fair question though, right? If we use the expression of a civilization state not necessarily as a status symbol, but as an analytical category to say, like, look, there's just something that's different between, let's say, something like Switzerland and China. It's just something that the societies, the systems probably work differently. And we somehow need to put labels on that in order to be able to differentiate and then analyze them differently.

And then my argument will be Switzerland is, of course, only one tiny part of Europe, if we want to call it a civilization of the West, right? What we view in Australia, I would say we're actually part of the same thing, right? Because we are an outgrowth of colonialism, all of us. Whereas on the other end, you have people that didn't do that, like the Chinese, like the Indians. Although you might argue, well, they did it within their own spheres and so on, and they expanded it. Okay, fine, but we need a way to articulate that. And now we live in a world of nation-state systems, 193 at the UN, a couple of ones that are not there but are still around.

#Jeff Rich

You see, my argument would be that it's a bit like your discussion of the one West, that the first undeclared civilization state was the West. It was the American West. And, you know, there was a heavy emphasis after 1945 on, you know, Western civilization and all that, and Westernization, right? As in the Turkey of Atatürk, Westernizing, modernization, all that sort of thing.

The one true path of modernization, that's through Western-style development. And in a way, I see some of the Global South—excuse me—articulation of the civilization state as a sort of a, kind of a response to that claim from the West to be the universal civilization. They're saying, as you say, rightly, we've got this proud cultural tradition that defines how we do statecraft and defines our relationships, people to people, and defines our way of life in many ways differently. And so that is a sort of a valid claim. But I think where it gets less valid is where you get these assertions of continuity and sort of this idea that civilizations are sort of sealed off from each other, because the history of world history of interaction between civilizations is—the interaction and exchange between them has been as important as anything. And that's true of India and China.

You know, like Buddhism, why not sort of migrate it from India to China? And it's also true of the West. The West is—we're here in Istanbul, which used to be Constantinople, which was the primary city of Europe for, I don't know, a thousand years—and brings together multiple cultures and civilizations that are often actually not seen as part of the West or of Europe. Like, the Ottoman Empire was part of Europe. Orthodox Christianity was part of Europe, part of the West as well. So the West itself is as much an amalgam of things rather than these sort of set-up, you know, sealed-off cultural categories in the way in which they're described, say, in Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, where you have the West, the sort of liberal Protestant sort of West, and you have a so-called Orthodox civilizational world, and Ukraine is the cleft state between those now.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. I just wonder if it helps us to kind of wrap our minds around, you know, the groups of people, the societies that, if you cut off the others, they would still be able to live on their own. Like, you know, if you cut off Switzerland from the rest of Europe, it will die. It will just wither away and die. We will literally starve. Yeah. The argument would be like, if you try to do that with China and you cut off everything, the Chinese civilization or the Chinese realm would still be able to run itself because it's self-contained.

And the way that Russia is proving that now in this war, and the way that they were cut off. And yes, the links are not separate, right? I mean, Russia is able to trade with the whole Global South, with China, with India, and so on. But they're kind of proving the point that they can run themselves, whereas each and every state in the West, maybe with the exception of the United States, if you cut us off from the others, I mean, we would wither away and die. Australia, I'm not entirely sure. But whether that, you know, the economic dimension, whether that's a way to say, like, oh, look here, we have systems within the eight-billion-people planet that can run more or less on their own if they were forced to. Yeah.

#Jeff Rich

Yes, I mean, civilization is a way of describing a way of life, or the biggest category of society that people can fit into. And people have argued many, many different definitions of civilization. The one I find most compelling is to describe civilization as a process of adapting nature to human needs. So the metaphor to think of is a garden, and there's many different varieties and types of a garden, rather than these sort of sealed-off cultures of grand achievement, which I guess is another sort of way of saying civilization. But it connects to another issue that came up for me during the East-West Forum, which, because you're saying, you know, China maybe would be able to be cut off and work on its own. And I think the history of the last 100, 200 years is of, you know, intense, growing interdependence between the countries of the world in ways that we simply cannot escape from now.

And we can't sort of seal off either as separate sovereign nation-states or separate civilization-states, that we all have to find a way to manage that interdependence with energy systems and food systems and our trading systems and cultural systems, and the way in which we are so close and entangled with people who we are interdependent on, but they're far, far away, like, you know, Australia here and Europe, through the internet and through photography and imagery. So that the actual proximity of interdependence is both very strong, but also sometimes troubling for people. And so people want to, at times, pull back from that and say, "No, no, no, I want to do things on my own and exist within my separate nation, my separate civilization-state." But it's an impossible task. And so we need to find a way to be more open to that interdependence without being predatory about it.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, that also brings us to this issue of globalism, right? This tendency that we're seeing right now, and we've had that at the conference. A lot of people are very worried about that. And even people like Ulrike Guérot, who once were great supporters of the European Union and the EU project, who completely turned around and said, like, no, this thing is toxic by now because it dissolves the individual nations, which are still important to all of us, right? We feel like Swiss and Australian and German and French and whatnot.

They dissolve them up into something that's then a bureaucratic monster and just governs top-down. But it is this kind of globalist trend, right, towards technocratic bureaucratization of everyday life for people. And a lot of us don't like that. But at the same time, we need to sketch out visions for the future that wouldn't mean that we cut ourselves off. So what do you think emerges from this, like a positive vision of an international future with nation-state characteristics? How do you see it from what we saw?

#Jeff Rich

I do think it reminds us that since 1945 especially, with all its failings, the UN has accumulated both a set of processes, institutions, cultures, projects of cooperative interdependence across national boundaries. I mean, you know, perhaps a contentious example is the World Health Organization, which dates back to like about 1920 or so and was set up after the Spanish pandemic. But it's a classic case of how pandemics don't know, don't respect national borders, and disease doesn't respect national borders, and you need to find forms of international cooperation across those national borders. Now, some of the practices are coercive and technocratic and, you know, predatory at times. And I think the system has been deeply skewed by the way in which the United States has chosen to effectively, I think, undermine the UN systems since the 1970s.

But I think if we think about all those sorts of things and the way they generate practical responses to refugees, to migration, to policing, to drugs, to a squillion sort of things, it reminds us that we do have the capacity to cooperate across national borders effectively. And we just need to find more effective ways to do it on the most difficult issues, such as conflicts and maybe some of the critical issues of economic sovereignty that are affecting people's lives. But also, like, AI. Like, I mean, what are we going to do about AI? Like, I read overnight that there was a breakout of, you know, one of these sort of AI doing its own thing, yeah, which broke into the Australian Medicare system. So the entire national health database, where I have all my patient data and all the rest of it.

And this is a serious, serious issue. And the private company, which I can't remember which one it was, basically sort of didn't do enough, didn't really tell people. And so people are going to have to find ways of developing protocols for these companies to actually act responsibly within an international interdependent system, to notify, you know, to tell the Australian government straight

away, "Well, our AI system has gone and, you know, hacked into every citizen's patient records. You know, sorry about that. We'll rectify it as quickly as possible," rather than just sit on their hands and hope no one notices. So there's this constantly evolving set of problems that we need to find ways of managing interdependence with.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, the whole technological aspects, or also pandemics and so on, I mean, are one more set of questions. But one of the things that was interesting to me is what we see on the international stage and also what we saw now in the forum is that while everybody, everybody criticizes the United Nations and everybody says this thing isn't running the way it should, actually, I haven't heard fundamental criticism of the UN Charter. Everybody, and interestingly, even the United States, pays lip service to the UN Charter.

So it seems that within the Charter, there is something that everybody somehow attaches a value to, or at least can find in it. So this is actually something that Richard Sakwa came up with in the talk yesterday that I filmed with him: whether we should just call what is being built now the Charter order. The liberal international order is dying, but what kind of order is coming? What's next? And the proposal was calling it the Charter order, or whether that could be the aspiration. The aspiration of having an actual international law-based order, not this hypocritical BS that we currently have. Do you also see that as a possible route forward?

#Jeff Rich

Look, I do, and it's a lot easier to use an existing system that, yeah, is 95% fair than to create a whole new one. So, and, you know, the UN Charter no doubt has weaknesses and could probably be revised 80 years later. But it largely works. Perhaps the most important thing is to deal with the states that are grossly violating it. And I would say the United States is, I mean, grossly, flagrantly, shamelessly violating it and not actually paying it—I mean, the national security strategy of the United States has a sentence which basically says something along the lines of, "The purpose of the United Nations is to serve U.S. national interests."

#Pascal

Yeah, but, you know, it all boils down to, again, to this realist paradigm that we unfortunately live in an anarchic system, a.k.a. there is no policeman. And the one who tries to pretend to be the policeman is just the biggest bully with the biggest stick, who's then going to beat up the little guys and kidnap Maduro and whatnot. And so it boils down to this issue of how do we regulate a system that has no higher power structures on top? And, you know, the proposition of people who then talk about Pax Romana or Pax Americana and whatnot is like, okay, the biggest bully is then the peacemaker. But actually, it's never peace. It is insane levels of violence against everybody else. So the question is, how do we remedy that? Yeah, yeah.

#Jeff Rich

Well, I think at some level, there's a saying in family violence prevention that the standard you walk by is the standard you accept. And I think at some level, it's up to the other states of the United Nations, particularly the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

#Pascal

Yeah, but they can't. They block.

#Jeff Rich

They block each other. Well, they can, but, I mean, they always have words, and words are important and fundamental, and symbolic acts are important in diplomacy and government as well. So at some level, I think some of the... And I'll point to China particularly, because China is emphasizing at the moment its, you know, strategic stability with the United States. It's the great ship of U.S.-China relations going calmly forward. It's global governance initiative. And yet it says nothing about Donald Trump's latest speech at the UN General Assembly, which is an outrageous speech, breach of, dare I say, all civilized norms. And it could say something.

I mean, it's not going to start a world war for Xi Jinping to say, "Donald Trump, what you said is utterly unacceptable and should not be said by a president of the United States," or something. I don't know what the form of words is, but I feel unless, at some point, the people who are institutionally powerful within the system don't just accept these sort of violations but actually push back against those violations, not in a violent way but in an assertive legal way, we won't get change. But if we keep just turning the other cheek and saying, "Oh, we don't want to rock the boat," then the U.S. will continue to do this. And it's just gone on for way too long.

#Pascal

It might also come from below, right? If enough people within the United States seriously disapprove of this kind of stuff. I mean, there is a public outcry about this kind of communication, but it just takes a long, long time to kind of manifest on the political level.

#Jeff Rich

I guess, speaking as a global citizen, I've waited too long for the United States to do something about its behaviour in the United Nations. Earlier in the year, I read Mark Mazower's book about antisemitism, which really emphasised how the Arab-Israeli wars, '67 to '73, were really critical in terms of changing the United States' attitudes towards Israel and the current conflict. I mean, that issue ends up in the United States' policies towards Gaza, et cetera, but also its relationship to the United Nations, because that conflict, together with the sort of decolonisation movement and the

New International Economic Order movement and South Africa and all the rest of it, really, the world was pushing back against those sort of policies and the United States' involvement at that time.

And there was a very senior United States diplomat or politician who was quoted saying in the early 1970s, "We need to go into opposition in the United Nations." Basically, there's a consistent policy from the 1970s to sort of subvert, undermine, push back, make life difficult for the United Nations. And after 50 years or so, that's led to this appalling situation where the President of the United States acts like a fool and a violent thug at the United Nations General Assembly. And a couple of states walk out, but not many do. And I just think that's appalling.

And, you know, people can talk about realism and all that sort of stuff, but unless people—government is so much a people-to-people business—unless people actually find different ways of interacting together, diplomatically, institutionally, all the rest of it, we won't have a different approach to things. We're not locked into some model where we all have to wait on the United States' assessment of its national interests and, you know, we react to that. I think we need to sort of get on the front foot and sort of say, we want to lay down some standards of behaviour for you, the United States.

And unless the world can actually find a way to curb the violence, the aggression, the breaches of international law, the domineering attitudes, the supremacism, all the rest of it, we won't get a significant change towards peace. So I just think that's... I can't see how that can be delivered institutionally at the moment. But unless people have a change of heart, and the people who are in the positions who can actually design and craft an effective way of doing that... But they're the ones who have to come up with the specific solution for how to do that. But people have got to set a standard that the United States adheres to.

#Pascal

Yeah, and by extension, the political West. Yes, Richard Sakwa calls them, right? Because Europe too, Europe acts—and we've heard that also in the forum, right?—it acts like it's still the colonial power of the 19th century, which it clearly isn't, but it still has the speech acts. And you see that, like, all of these crazy statements that are coming out of Germany, and like, Iran must do this, China has to do that. Yeah, Russia must never—it's like, hey, come on. I mean, you're Germany. I mean, who do you think you are? But they still act like that, right? And most of Europe acts like that. And that's just this colonial mentality that hasn't subsided yet. But the interesting thing, or maybe the hopeful thing to me, is that we see how the Global South, and including Russia and China, you know, the non-West, is forging ahead with building alternatives, right? And Richard Sakwa makes that point time and time again.

They're not building an anti-West; they're building a non-West, and they just build alternative structures. So one of the hopes we could have is that BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Non-Aligned Movement and so on, that they all, over the next decade or two,

will work on structures and alternatives that, in the end, are going to be so nice and so tempting that even the United States and, down the line, at some point, Europe is going to apply for membership. And once that happens, you know, you would have the leverage to say, "Yeah, sure, come and join. But these are the rules of the actual game, and you got to play along. And we have institutional mechanisms to make sure that if you don't play along, then, well, maybe what's happening to Russia now is going to happen to you," right? And then, so maybe that's the way it's going to go.

#Jeff Rich

And one of the interesting things I found in the forum discussion too was how some of those solutions might emerge in unexpected and quite nasty circumstances. So there was a comment by Professor Baabood—I don't know what his name was. Yeah, Abdullah. Abdullah Baabood—who was saying that with the Hormuz Strait situation, there is emerging a regional cooperation arrangement that will provide perhaps a starting point for both better security in the narrow sense, but also, you know, cooperation, economic, social development, all that sort of stuff, perhaps with less involvement of the United States but also less, you know, less conflict-ridden sort of approach to things.

And, you know, I mean, that only happened because a terrible thing—you know, the United States started the war with Iran, and the situation developed and it's forced the issue. And yet, it's not like a systemic, complete, universal solution that's, you know, all worked out. It's sort of been improvised and developed through goodwill and good principles at a sort of local level, if you like. And I do wonder if we just need to create some space for more things like that to happen, including in Europe or including in the West Pacific, including in Australia. Yeah.

#Pascal

That was a very good point, actually, of his. And, you know, he is Omani, right? I mean, and he is one of the more important, like, not only Omani thinkers, but he's also in these circles that discuss these kinds of things. And his point was, like, there's already now, you know, a discussion forum, nothing institutionalized, but between Iran and Oman, right? They're cooperating on actually discussing how to regulate the Strait of Hormuz, which is new. And his idea, like, how about we open that and we add the other Gulf states into this? And yes, I mean, this wouldn't be a harmonious management. It would be very much conflicting.

But the point is, if that kind of conflict, as there is a conflict between China and India, you make it possible to have that kind of conflict and that kind of exchange that is below the level of kinetic war, then you would get to something already, even if it is not perfect. And that's a stark contrast from the idea of the West, which is like, oh, we're going to set up a World Bank or an IMF, and that thing is then going to be used as a hammer in order to hammer in the nails. It's like this kind of, again, managed conflict kind of approach. And if you look at it, BRICS actually works like that, right? They

constantly, every round of expansion, they try to integrate states that are in conflict also with each other. In the same round, they added Iran and Saudi Arabia. Yes. Yeah, exactly.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, and I guess they don't riot or do too much. They know their limitations, I guess, as well. So it's a good thing. But I do think that model of using some good-hearted principles, improvising your way through a difficult situation, and coming up with a lateral conflict resolution as a result is something that, you know, I think we can learn from Oman's role in the Hormuz Strait situation. And perhaps it's also something that could be applied to the Ukraine situation because, at some point, that war is going to end, and Ukraine is going to be, or whatever territory, you know, that is the current state of, you know, whatever state that is going to be in, is going to be in a terrible social state. You know, degraded infrastructure, traumatized people. Yeah. Millions of people have fled the country, a million or more died as a result of the conflict.

And that country or set of states, whatever they end up being, will have to be rebuilt in some way. And in some ways, the rebuilding of Ukraine is an opportunity for positive cooperation between Europe, Russia, and particularly the sort of bordering, you know, neighboring states of Ukraine as well. To put aside all the security issues, to put aside all the big system international security architecture-type issues, and say, well, let's work together for a few years to solve this huge humanitarian crisis, which is what it will be, and to come to some sort of reconciliation and maybe then, you know, find ways in which we can practically work together and then let some of the bigger international relations system issues sort of bed down a little bit through some of that practical cooperation.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, this is a very practical thing, right? You need local—local action, like local knowledge, in order to build the systems to remedy local wounds, right? And, yeah, so in a sense, like, always trying to escalate everything to the United Nations level might actually be, like, counterproductive. Instead of saying, like, if we can solve it on the most local level, that would be good. The problem is there's always actors that act against this, right? I mean, right now, the biggest spoilers in the entire game when it comes to Ukraine are the Europeans, right? They're continuously trying to undermine any kind of peace process that might be going on.

John Mearsheimer just came back from Russia and reported that the Russians were counting on the Americans in Anchorage to then actually come through on the promise that they made that if the Russians freeze the conflict, then they would put pressure on Ukraine. And they couldn't. I don't know how much of that is then actually true or not. We will only find that out in the future. But it seems that at the moment, the forces of war within the United States, the neocons and so on, are working against it. And they are on the same page with the Europeans, and that keeps the conflict actually going on the way it is, and it's just bleeding out both sides.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, I think there's no structured peace process to pull people together and to resolve the different aspects of the conflict, you know, piece by piece, so to speak. And so I do think there needs to be that sort of practical local cooperation sort of thing, or that reconciliation process and reconstruction and reconciliation process. But there does also need to be, I think, a sort of UN-mandated overall peace process that says, you know, get your act together, United States and Europe. You know, you have been part of this all along. It's time to stop, you know, defining yourselves as brokers or defining yourselves as whatever you think you're doing. You need to accept that you're involved in this multi-state conflict, and you need to work to, in a way agreed to by the international community, along some sort of sensible conflict management process, which I think needs to deal with the USA-Russia conflict. And the USA could have extracted itself from the war in Ukraine a long time ago.

#Pascal

Yes, but that's the— I mean, yes. The problem with what you're suggesting is, of course, that it would take somebody who sits on top, right? An actual UN kind of power to say, like, "United States, you're part and parcel of the problem." And the United States says, like, constantly, "No, we are not." And the interesting thing is, the Russians actually give it to the United States. They actually hand over the U.S. demand that they say, like, "Oh, we want to just be a neutral broker." And the Russians actually give it to them. They're like, "Okay, we're going to play along in this charade. We're going to play along in this make-believe that you are the mediator," which is fascinating, isn't it?

#Jeff Rich

And I've always felt that was a strategic mistake, or a policy mistake, let's say, that Russia made. And I can understand perhaps why, because I think they were probably calculating, well, maybe they can get the USA to unilaterally withdraw from the war, and then they've got one less party to deal with.

#Pascal

Or even just a multi-level kind of understanding of the conflict. It's like, yes, we have a hot shooting war with a proxy war in Ukraine with the Americans. But on the other hand, as superpowers, we still need communication with each other. And that requires us to accept some of their narratives. Therefore, we play along on the superpower level, even though on the lower level, we all know what this is all about. But it's just...

#Jeff Rich

And, you know, I guess since Trump came to power, he's basically been trying to unilaterally solve the conflict without regard to Europe's interests, or Ukraine's interests, or Russia's interests, or Britain's.

#Pascal

But what we don't know is if he really tried or if it's just part of the make-believe, right? Brian Berletic, Neil Bonilla, and a couple of others would argue that, no, no, this is just part and parcel of how the empire works. It works with deception and so on. Whether the people who do the deception know it or not, it doesn't really matter.

#Jeff Rich

Well, one of the historic practices of the United States has been unilateralism.

#Pascal

And deception.

#Jeff Rich

So, I mean, I don't think it's charades or make-believe. I think it's just the way the USA does business. It thinks it can decide how every country should operate from the Situation Room and the White House.

#Pascal

I mean, if you think about it, it has been extremely successful with that, right? With this constant, like, kind of making a treaty with a native tribe, then go back on it, break it, eradicate them. Then the next one, make a treaty and then break it, eradicate them. And they worked all the way to Hawaii and then to the Philippines. And then there it kind of stopped. But, I mean, the system of doing business, I mean, it is insanely successful. I mean, 13 goddamn colonies.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

#Pascal

To, like, a world, a global empire. I mean, I understand why the system, from the system's logic, wouldn't feel the need to change, because—yeah, yeah, yeah. Question is, did it reach its outer boundaries and is now being pushed back in?

#Jeff Rich

It has. And I mean, the traditional way of telling the story of the 20th century is, you know, two European civil wars.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Jeff Rich

But I do think, I mean, I think I mentioned this recent book by Jeremy Adelman called, I think it's called *The Capitalist Era: The Making of the Global Mind*. It's just—he's a very distinguished global historian, and it's his idea about reinterpreting globalization as interdependence. But he also has a term to describe the conflicts really around the world between the 1890s and 1945, which he describes as the global civil war. So it's one rolling conflict which involves both internal and interstate conflicts. And the United States was a very active and, you know, proactive participant in that. In the 1890s, you know, it attacks the Spanish Empire and gets the Philippines and Cuba.

#Pascal

It attacks Hawaii.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, it takes Hawaii in the 1880s or something. Hawaii doesn't become a state until 1954 or something. '59. '59. Yeah, indeed, when Kissinger went to Beijing in '71 or whatever it was, Zhou Enlai said to him, you know, if you don't recognize Taiwan as part of China, we won't recognize Hawaii as part of the United States. And he was saying that ten years after Hawaii became a state. So, you know, it conquered Mexico. It, you know, it was months before the start of World War I, Woodrow Wilson was bombing Veracruz in Mexico. So...

#Pascal

And just a tiny little footnote, just for everybody: there are actually a couple of activists and people in Hawaii who are working on the legal argument that since the United States never legally incorporated Hawaii into the system, everything else is moot, and everything since the occupation of 1893, the coup in 1893, everything has been illegal. Therefore, Hawaii actually, as an independent nation-state, still exists, but under occupation, and they're working on that. But yeah, just as a footnote. Keanu Sai is the leader of that. But the question, just to round it up, I think, is whether or

not we see that the multipolar world and a new way of doing business, is that forming? Yes or no? And if it is forming, does it have chances of going forward? Or is the United States already working and succeeding in smothering that?

#Jeff Rich

I think it is forming, but I do think sometimes we need to maybe step back and think what we mean by a multipolar world, because you can see that as a very neat thing of four or five poles of power and a kind of concept of the world of five great powers running the world. Or you can see it as a very entangled world. And the image I almost have in mind is, it's not so much a multipolar world as a multithreaded world in which there's all these different, you know, transnational networks and cultures and countries that are all bundled up together in a very tight little web that it's just absolutely impossible to disentangle.

Yeah, I feel it's something a bit more like that—an entangled world that we can't really fully control and shape in a particular direction, or describe as a neat system, but is absolutely demanding that we sort of respond to all the plurality and the interconnection in a very different way. And I think, in a way, the Iran war has been a very crucial moment in that, because it has been a demonstration of the... I mean, you can have a distribution of power, but what really matters is how you use the power that you have in the situation that you're in. Like, you can have all the resources in the world and all the authority and the position, but if you actually can't sit down with someone and persuade them to change their mind about it, you don't have all that much power.

And what Iran has shown is, in a very difficult situation—it's been under siege for 47 years—it's been able to deploy its power situationally in a way that's made a real difference and exposed some limitations of the power that, on paper, has all the cards, but in reality didn't play those cards very well. So, yeah, I think in a way we maybe need to think about multipolarity not just in terms of distribution of power, but how people, given a distribution of power, actually use the powers that they have in different situations, and perhaps start to realise they've got more power than they even realise.

And, you know, I'd say maybe China perhaps, you know, maybe might want to use some of its situational power slightly differently. But that might be a pipe dream because I'm not a Chinese citizen. But I do feel that's perhaps the thing I think could actually really make a difference, to start to push back against the unilateralism, to say, "You've realised it with Iran, that you've got limitations. Now we're going to emphasise the point that you really do have limitations, and that the other players in the system—there may not be a hierarchy—but the other players in the system have a stake in how this game plays out, with limited stakes."

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah. And the question is, will it sink in or not in the US and in Europe soon enough to turn things around? But we will see about that. I mean, we're going to meet here again, and the good news to everybody is that one of the outcomes is that everybody who was here agreed we need to continue. We need to continue working on a multipolar world. We need to continue on the forums. We need to continue on the discussions. We need to continue on the networks that might carry us forward. That's what we discussed today.

And right now, things are popping up left and right. So that gives me a lot of hope because a lot of people understand that actually we have problems, and nobody's going to solve them for us. But if we take action. So, in a sense, if you have any ideas for taking action in order to work towards a peaceful multipolar world, please put them into action. Let us know about them. Jeff, if people want to find you, where should they go? And any kind of final words of encouragement for working towards a peaceful multipolar world?

#Jeff Rich

Well, yes, people can go to my YouTube channel, the Burning Archive YouTube channel, or to my Substack, jeffrich.substack.com. I write weekly there on world affairs. In fact, I've just written a piece about Istanbul, the crossroads of civilization, and on lots of history and, I guess, geopolitical topics. And, I mean, my note of hope is I've always been very inspired by Václav Havel's "Power of the Powerless" essay, that the powerless do have some power. And he concludes that essay by saying that the greatest paradox of all is that the better future that we want may just be there, and we just haven't noticed it all along. That it's not necessarily about creating a more peaceful world, forcing things into a peaceful world, but noticing how we can make those changes ourselves, and we can all do aspects of that.

#Pascal

Brilliant ideas of how to integrate and make work towards a peaceful, multipolar world. I like that very much. And with that, Jeff Rich, thank you so much for your time today. Thank you, Pascal.