

End Of Hegemony In Davos: Live Stream With Michael Rossi

Join me for a live-stream with Prof. Michael Rossi for a breakdown of the Davos (WEF) madness, where we saw several Western leaders announcing the end of the US-led global order.

#Pascal

And I believe we are live. Welcome, everybody, to our first live stream in four years on neutrality studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I am joined today by my friend and colleague, Professor Michael Rossi, who's teaching political science all over the place in the United States at the moment. Michael, welcome.

#Michael Rossi

Pascal, always a pleasure. I'm glad we're doing this live—sort of an impromptu conversation we're having a little late here on the New York side. It's about 9:30 p.m. What is it, about 9:30 a.m. Japan time?

#Pascal

Yeah. No, no, it's actually 11:30 in Japan—very, very reasonable. Thank you for doing this in New York's late evening, and for the rest of the United States, I believe it's a little bit earlier. You know, managing the time zones is chaos.

#Michael Rossi

Yes, yes, it's sub-zero here in New York. We're about to get another whopping amount of snow this coming weekend—nothing like Kamchatka that we saw in Russia. But yes, always glad, always a pleasure to be here. And we've got a lot to talk about.

#Pascal

We've got a lot to talk about. And just as an aside, thank you very much to everyone watching from Norway, and thanks for your comments in the chat. So, Michael, we want to discuss what happened in Davos. A lot was said there. I think the first thing that caught my attention this week was how the Prime Minister of Canada—what's his name again? Mark Carney? Carney—actually said out loud what the game is all about. I don't know if you can see this very well, but let me just try to play it for a second.

#Mark Carney

Yeah. This bargain no longer works. Let me be direct: we are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition. Over the past two decades, a series of crises in finance, health, energy, and geopolitics have laid bare the risks of extreme global integration. But more recently, great powers have begun using economic integration as a weapon—tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited. You cannot live within the lie of mutual benefit through integration when integration becomes the source of your subordination.

#Pascal

Isn't this extremely rich—coming from a Canadian prime minister? But Michael, your thoughts?

#Michael Rossi

Well, it's great—too bad it's 20 years too late. I mean, I think most of these Davos forums kind of come and go over the years. One thing I have to give credit to my country's current administration for is that they make these routine conferences—whether it's Davos, the Munich Security Conference, or the G7—interesting, because they say the most outlandishly provocative things, just bold-faced realizations of where we are in the world today. So, you know, Carney's statement—I have to give him credit. I absolutely need to give him credit. He's not calling out the United States, but he's clearly making a reference to it. But the thing I took away from all of that, aside from its honesty, is how selective this rules-based order happens to be. And it's not something that was ruptured under Trump; it's just that Trump made it so blatantly front and center that it's hard for people within Borrell's "beautiful garden" to ignore it at this point.

#Pascal

Yeah. And you know what? What struck me about this is that he basically said, "Oh, we knew the system was unfair. We knew that we were hypocrites, but it served a purpose." And, you know, the rest is that the U.S. was providing global goods—stability, interconnection, business. So we took it that it wasn't quite fair, but it was fine. But now, now that it's being unfair to us—now that they're turning the weapons against us—well, now it's not working anymore. And we must give him credit: finally, somebody actually says it. On the other hand, it's like, OK, so, you know, bombing Iraq was fine, attacking Iran is fine, invading Venezuela is fine, the Ukraine proxy was fine. We know it's not fair, but the global goods were for us.

#Michael Rossi

Oh, let's not forget turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to war crimes in Gaza and the West Bank. Oh, the general side.

#Pascal

Yeah, the general side.

#Michael Rossi

Don't mention that. You don't want to get on the wrong side of this thing, Pascal. Or how about this one? We don't want Denmark's territorial integrity to be violated, but we absolutely recognize Kosovo as an independent state outside of UN Security Council resolutions. So yeah, I mean, what this points to is something that Mearsheimer, in his work **The Great Delusion**, published in 2014, talked about. And that is: liberalism, as both a theory and a philosophy of international relations, works if and only if two things are present. Number one, everybody participating agrees to play by the rules of the game.

Right. And number two, that the laws, the empirical thought, the philosophical foundations of liberalism are applied across the board—not selectively. Not selectively, because if you do, then congratulations, you're cosplaying as a realist. And this is the reason why Mearsheimer has been taking his "I told you so" victory lap for the last ten years. So the Economic Forum was really, in my opinion—and feel free to agree or disagree with me—but it seemed to have been a wake-up call for everyone in the NATO alliance, sans the United States, about where they find themselves.

And so, for the last couple of weeks—months, let's say the last year or so—Europe, and by extension Canada, has come to the realization that the old transatlantic order is no longer, you know, to be trusted. We're not going back to the status quo. I think even, you know, Chancellor Merz said, we cannot just simply expect the United States to be our permanent ally or something like that, right? He said, you know, the old ways are done. Okay, where do we go from here? And unfortunately, I've been on multiple channels. I've spoken with, you know, Piotr Kurzyn and James Kerlinzy about this—about, you know, whither Europe.

Where is Europe going? Does Europe have a place in all of this? The problem we find is that you can talk about the sanctity of the rules-based order—and look, I get it, I absolutely understand the importance of international law for stability and security—but as you just pointed out, it's only when Europe's own security is put into a dilemma that they start to talk about it. Otherwise, we can absolutely worry that what happens outside the gated community is just, well, that's just the world in and of itself. And so now we're trying to figure out: where do we go, and what do we do?

#Pascal

Yeah, that's the entire accusation of hypocrisy, which is absolutely true. Hypocrisy is to keep speaking in the language of international law—or even, as they recently shifted, to the "rules-based order"—but then, on the other hand, to just break those rules at will whenever you want. That's also the big difference between the rules-based order and international law. International law is actually

written down. We have proper sources and whatnot, we have a proper understanding, and we have hundreds of years of development. And we know, more or less, what these rules are. And they're contested, you know, just like any law—like any national law. You have disagreements about what the law says, and then you go to court and whatnot. So you have contested norms, but you have them.

The rules-based order is, of course, one in which the United States constantly makes rules for everybody else, orders people to follow them, and then exempts itself from all of it. And Europe has been going along with that—and Canada as well—for the longest time, again because it was a beneficial fiction for them. This humanitarian glove over the United States' iron fist, as Ronald Reagan said in the 1980s, right? But now it's coming apart. It's falling apart quickly. And, you know, it's almost comical to see how the Europeans are realizing this, because while all of this is happening, you've also had now Mr. Merz, the chancellor of Germany, on that stage in Davos. I don't have the clip, but you've probably seen it, where he says, like, "We will defend Greenland from Russia."

#Michael Rossi

Excuse me? Excuse me? I'm going to presume—I think you and I can agree on one thing. Friedrich Merz does one thing really, really, really well: look bad. He proved that Olaf Scholz was not the worst that Germany can provide. That's a feat. I mean, that's a feat in and of itself. That is an accomplishment. I have to give Merz this: you'd think we'd reached...

#Pascal

Okay, let's be honest. Olaf Scholz was the one who stood next to Biden when Biden said, you know, if Russia attacks Ukraine, then we're going to—well, Nord Stream's going to be passé, right? It's going to be gone. And he just stood there and took it, just like, blah. That was Olaf Scholz. And now we have Mr. Merz, who's like, well, you know, the only one who actually has a claim on Greenland is the United States. But I'm just going to say we're going to protect it from Russia. I mean, you could just as well stand there and say, "I will protect Greenland from Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea will not get its hands on Greenland." That would make as much sense as saying we'll protect it from Russia.

#Michael Rossi

I mean, you know, if somehow Papua New Guinea manages to pull off a successful amphibious landing and extend the Papua New Guinean Empire into Greenland—man, 2026 is going to be very interesting. Yeah. Look, let's, let's, you know, point out what a lot of this stuff is. Some people might regard it as just complete throwaway talk, but there's a deeply entrenched sense of Russophobia

that's permeating much of the European leadership. And I think we need to explain what that is. Russophobia isn't just "I hate Russia" or "Europe good, Russia bad." It's this knee-jerk, almost automatic scapegoating—everything wrong gets attributed to Russia.

And, you know, I'm drawing from Glenn Diesen's work, **Russophobia**, which is an excellent study of all this. The narratives are often self-contradictory. Because on one level, you look at Russia—or the non-West, or outside the European gated community—and the people are seen as not as civilized, not as intelligent. They're incapable, they're incompetent. You remember Ursula, in the first couple of months of the war in Ukraine, saying that the Russians were stealing washing machine parts to use for interchangeable components.

You know, Russia's on its last legs. And yet, at the same time, Russia is a threat to Western civilization—that if we don't stop Russia in Ukraine, they're going to take the Baltics, then Poland, then Germany, and then Kazakhstan. And, you know, before we know it, we're going to be—so, you know, it's like you need to pick one narrative and stick with it. Either Russia is this barbaric, Asiatic, incompetent horde, or they're a threat to Western civilization. We have something very similar here in the United States.

And it makes no sense except to those who honestly believe it. You know, on one level—and this is particularly true with the MAGA crowd—you have the "Don't Tread on Me" Republicans, you have the "Don't Tread on Me" libertarians, right? It's "my guns, my freedom, my liberty." And yet they'll absolutely say, "Obey the law, do what the cops tell you, obey the security sector, and you won't get shot." So you've got the "Don't Tread on Me" flag on one side of the bumper and the thin blue line on the other. And you think, you've got to pick one.

#Pascal

What does that tell us? I mean, there's a bigger phenomenon behind this, right? This contradictory political messaging. And we've seen it, in my view, most often—most ardently—during corona. You know, do you remember the vaccines and how we were told simultaneously that they're safe and effective, they're the only thing that will save humanity from basically extinction through corona, or that they're the only thing that will stop mass death? Safe and effective—a vaccine you have to take. And at the same time, "nobody is safe until everybody is safe," right? If not everybody takes it, then it won't work. And you have to pick one of those. Either the vaccine actually works and keeps people healthy and from catching this thing, or it doesn't. But you can't claim both.

But it was both claims. And of course, that creates basically an impossible situation for anyone who's not 100% on the narrative. And even for those who are, they have to accept that there's a direct contradiction and then just... pass over it, right? That's the claim of power. Power says, "There's a contradiction. I'll show you the contradiction, but you have to ignore it in order to be a good citizen." And they do the same with Russia, right? The most dangerous thing, the biggest threat to Europe since Hitler, and at the same time incompetent—they can't even win after four years in Ukraine. And

we're asked to accept both at the same time and just follow along anyhow. So I wonder if this is, you know, if this is inherent in power—that power, real power, will create contradictions and order you to just swallow them. Um...

#Michael Rossi

You know, I want to maybe expand this a little bit more—to go beyond European leadership and include U.S. political leadership. Not just the Trump administration, but also, let's say, the upper echelons of the Democratic Party. And I am absolutely amazed at how horrible their propaganda is—how utterly unconvincing they happen to be. So, when you look at members of the Trump administration, you know, there are basically two people who gave memorable speeches at Davos. We mentioned Mark Carney, but we also need to bring up U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who came before Trump, right?

And I mean, in many respects, what Bessette represents is just the absolute, blatant hubris that now defines my country's leadership. The gloves are off. The gaslighting is completely—it's through the roof—or better yet, they just don't care. They just don't care. They absolutely don't. No, they don't care. So, just simply talking about how Greenland is better suited for American security—because if we don't take it, Russia or China will. You know, that whole thing with the settlements in the West Bank: "If I don't steal your home, someone else will." Right? And they say it with such absolute assurance. And so I almost have to wonder—do I respect them for their blatant, bold-faced assertions?

Or am I supposed to be really, really upset and scared about how horrible their propaganda and their narratives are? But the reality is, I don't think they really care. I think what they're trying to do is test the waters—to see what Europe will do and how far they can really go. What we got out of Trump's position at Davos was that he said he would tariff any country in Europe that doesn't support America's acquisition of Greenland. And look, in a way, this kind of shows you his understanding of economics, right? Because a tariff isn't a sanction against another country; it's a self-imposed sanction on us that just raises the price of any imports from that country.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah. But, you know, the way it works is, like, it's a kind of "sanction-lite" system by now for Trump. Because in a world of competition, if the Swiss don't export their cheese to the United States because they get tariffs or can export less, then there are other people—maybe in Kazakhstan—who are able to export cheese from an unsanctioned position. So you basically use this as leverage. And it does hurt the tariffed countries—it does. It also hurts the consumer in the United States, more so the consumer in the United States. That much is certain. Yeah, it does, but they don't care. It also hurts the target tariff countries. This is why the Europeans, and also the Swiss, are so outraged, right?

Everybody wants to get these tariffs down so the Swiss don't lose their milk and cheese export market. Not kidding. So it does hurt. It's just... that's why Carney was saying, like, right, these tools are now used as weapons against us. And of course, while they still do the sanction stuff and everything on other countries like Iran, you know, the way that the recent regime change operation started—with a targeted attack on the economy in order to go where you are—we're just seeing that this whole system is now coming apart. But it's coming apart because they're starting to use these weapons against each other, right?

#Michael Rossi

And, you know, in a way, there's something almost ridiculously noble about Trump's chaotic uncertainties, because they lay bare how utterly fragile this new, you know, "rules-based order" gated community happens to be. So when it hits home, suddenly everybody rallies around—rallies around the flag, rallies around our defenses. We didn't care about the color revolution in Iran. All we cared about was possibly getting rid of what is ostensibly a horrible regime, without any care for the consequences that come after. And if you're somehow against this, you're anti-democratic, you're anti-freedom, and you're in favor of a brutal Islamic regime.

And look, Pascal, you and I—you know, we've studied this—we know the consequences of... I don't know if I can really call what happened in Iran a color revolution, but we can spot color revolutions when we see them. And it's not that I'm, you know, in favor of the Islamic Republic. But I also know that when you suddenly have this puppet, this pretender son of the Shah saying, "I will lead the country into a promised land," and at the same time he's taking his marching orders from Washington and Tel Aviv—well, you know that this is basically a fifth column. When you look at, you know, what's her name, María Machado in Venezuela—well, I've never seen anybody grovel more, not even Zelensky.

But until I saw her just desperately trying to search for some relevance—you know, what legitimacy does she have in Venezuela? What legitimacy does Pahlavi have in Iran? I had a conversation a couple of days ago with Piotr and James about this, and I argued strongly that if there's going to be any reform, any change in Iran, it absolutely has to come from within. But we both know that the major global powers in the West are less interested in internal reform in Iran than they are in having a compliant government that takes marching orders from them—and not from Beijing or Moscow.

#Pascal

Of course. And, you know, the hallmarks of a color revolution—and the hallmarks of Western-instigated chaos—are, of course, when Western media, at the same time, doesn't try to explain what's going on. Instead, you get pieces telling you, "You're either with us or against us." Either you support the Iranian revolution that's going on right now, or you're an enemy, you're evil, and you're part of the problem. And how dare you say anything different? We've seen how that's played out in mainstream media and on X, on social media.

A massive onslaught of people said, like, either you're for the revolution that's going on right now, or you should shut up because it's "with us or against us." This is, you know, the idea that a ragtag group—as the New York Times put it—managed to smuggle in around twenty thousand Starlink panels to keep the internet connection open. They just smuggled it in, which, if you think about it, is an infringement on Iranian import controls, right? And it's also an infringement on U.S. export controls and the sanctions. So a ragtag group supposedly managed to get millions' worth of IT equipment smuggled into Iran—you'd have to be pretty naive to believe that a ragtag group could pull off that kind of grassroots operation on the ground.

So all of these things come together, right? And then, at the same time, the people who do this and orchestrate it tell us that everything is fine and we have a rules-based order. But now it's getting so obvious, so blatant—after two years of genocide—that it's coming apart. But the funny thing is, and I just want to show you this, we still have the same operating system. Here, look at this. This is again from YouTube, right? It's by The Guardian, the video of Carney. And then below, you get a little warning—a YouTube explainer—saying, like, "Oh, be careful."

The "new world order" is a term often used in conspiracy theories, which describe a supposed secret, emerging totalitarian world government. You know, the very leaders who are now telling us that the world order is about to change—this used to be said by the nut jobs, right? And by a few academics who used the term in a proper academic context. And now here we are, where the leader of Canada is saying, no, the world order is changing, we can't close our eyes to this anymore. What else do you think we can learn from the way the Davos crowd seems to be in utter panic about that change?

#Michael Rossi

Well, I mean, the World Economic Forum in Davos has almost always been a very exclusive VIP billionaires' club. You have CEOs, you have entrepreneurs, you have heads of state. It's like every other academic conference that you and I have been to—well, no, no, they get much better food. Yeah, yeah, you're right. In Davos, I'd like to think the food is pretty good. All right, yeah. We usually go to a cafeteria, right? And I usually end up cutting out of the academic conferences early and just heading to some of the bars to drink with my colleagues—and we get much more accomplished there.

#Pascal

And just for your information, academic budgets—at least in Japan—can't be used for alcohol. You can pay for the food for your conference participants, but not for the drinks. I'm pretty sure that's different elsewhere.

#Michael Rossi

I bring petty cash just in case—I need it after a couple of conferences. You know, look, Davos is very much like that. It's an exclusive VIP club. And up until recently, what did they talk about? They talked about high-end global things that only people...

#Pascal

Global integration. I mean, the World Economic Forum was the number one supporter of the way globalization used to work until, let's say, 2021 or so—the, you know, predatory globalization where the...

#Michael Rossi

I believe a little bit earlier. I'd say the real wake-up call was the 2008 and 2009 economic crisis—that was really the first one. And by 2021, I think it was already definitive. You know, people are saying, "Is globalization dead?" No, globalization is not dead, for one very simple reason: globalization is not about world economic integration. It's simply the sharing of ideas and information across countries, across previously demarcated borders. That's it. Globalization has been a phenomenon ever since the Silk Road was completed. So, for people who are saying, "Is globalization dead? Is globalism done for?"—I mean, yes, if you think about it in terms of global neoliberalism, sure.

But I don't want anyone to think that we're suddenly going to resurrect borders, get rid of the euro, go back to hard currency. No, I mean, that's not happening—largely because states today cannot function like that. Their economies absolutely rely on the continuation and expansion of transnational trade. But when we think of, let's say, globalization from the point of view that it is controlled, regulated, and—what can I say—directed by certain Western powers toward the rest of the world, yes, that's one version that's done. Because it's not even that new powers are emerging—they're already here. Right? They're already here. I mean, you know, we talk about whether Western hegemony is coming to an end. It already came to an end.

#Pascal

But not only that—you know, there's a new realization in the West that I think is very important. Because for 30 years—let's say the '90s, 2000s, 2010s—this form of globalization that we've seen was what a very memorable professor of mine at the National Graduate Institute in Tokyo described as the outgrowth of the "smile curve." The production—how goods are produced—used to be that they were made in the United States, with the U.S. as a powerhouse, or in the UK through the industrialization process. And the output of that then became the backbone for the consumer-led economy.

What happened in the '90s and 2000s is that the whole production part was basically outsourced. It started earlier, but then it went into hyperdrive. So production began happening in the developing world. And, you know, on the smile curve, the highest return on investment always comes from the

design and distribution stages, right? That still holds true—Apple is a good example: designed in California, made in China. Because the return on capital is lowest in the actual manufacturing process. And the capitalist class thought, “Oh, we’ve figured it out. We’ll take all the cream, and the developing world gets a little bit while they slave away for us.”

And you know, the sweatshops and so on—we know that. But what’s changing now is that the United States has realized, holy cow, we’re not able to produce things anymore. We actually need the Chinese to make our stuff, including the supply of rare earths, in order to build mission-critical military equipment. This is a huge problem. We can’t produce enough ships. All of our shipyards are smaller than the biggest one in China. So this whole idea, this mentality of profit over production capacity, I think, is coming apart right in front of our eyes.

#Michael Rossi

And, you know, the really ironic thing about this—maybe not even ironic, it’s just bold-faced—is that much of the literature on globalization in the 1990s and early 2000s absolutely predicted this. The writings of Robert Gilpin, Robert Reich, and Richard Wolff, among others, said, “Look, you outsource to a developing country to save on labor costs, to cut prices for John Q. Consumer. Great. It works—until the developing country ends up building a robust economy of its own.” Surprise, surprise: India and China now have consumer classes, a rising middle class. And so, all of a sudden, you’ve got two options here. You either outsource from China to another country, or—well, what ends up happening is that the developing world no longer relies exclusively on what Immanuel Wallerstein referred to as the core.

If you look at world-systems theory, you understand that the core countries rely on the periphery to provide cheap labor, raw materials, and so on. What we’ve seen—and this really becomes apparent by 2006, and without a doubt by ‘08 or ‘09, and then even more so in the 2010s—is that a number of semi-peripheral or semi-core countries like China, Russia, and India suddenly become much more assertive and economically autonomous. They’re no longer reliant on the West. Russia was never really that reliant on the West, but we’re mainly talking about China and India here. This is also seen, although not economically but in terms of power structure, in the writings on the transition from unipolarism to multipolarism.

Mearsheimer writes about this. Christopher Layne is probably, in my opinion, one of the best preeminent scholars on the topic. He wrote, in 1995, an article I still use for my IR class called **The Unipolar Illusion**. His argument, very aptly, is that unipolar powers sow the seeds of their own demise—and they do it either through benign or aggressive means. To make it really simple: eventually, new powers are going to rise. Over time, secondary powers will start thinking about their own sovereign development, their own economic longevity, and they’ll end up creating new emerging markets that aren’t going to directly challenge the existing ones, but will be seen by those existing markets as potential challengers.

The United States absolutely sees this. That's why they always look at China as a rival, not as a partner. They look at India less so—they still see India as more of a subservient, outsourcing country. How dare someone like Modi, or even before him Manmohan Singh, not simply take orders from the West, from the Washington Consensus? And how dare they consider partnerships with an emerging BRICS membership? So, in this regard, the West is going to look at the rest as becoming much more assertive and say, "We're losing our edge." Now, here's where it gets even more interesting—because the United States does a fantastic job of this, and the Trump administration, bar none, was professional in this regard—when declining unipolar powers recognize that they no longer have global hegemony, they tend to do one of two things.

They can take the smart way out and say, "Okay, we're now moving into a multipolar world, and we're part of that multipolar world." Or they can look at this as a declining hegemon and start making a number of irrational, impulsive moves—either as a way of showing the world that they still have power and capability to, if nothing else, control the conversation, or, number two, if they can't be a world hegemon, they'll try to become a regional hegemon. Hence, Greenland. Hence, Venezuela, Cuba, Latin America. This is what I call Monroe Doctrine 2.0. Or, as Trump, I think just off the cuff, referred to it—the "Don Roe Doctrine"—which was the dumbest thing out there.

But it's amazing that this one doctrine—over everything else, even the Constitution—is something American foreign policy still treats as sacrosanct, almost like biblical canon. If it's in the Western Hemisphere, it's our sphere of influence. Who cares what any other country has to say? That's why we've had these statements in the last couple of days saying that other countries within the Western Hemisphere exist only at the pleasure of America's tolerance and acceptance. Who said that? I forget her name, but it was on CNN. Trust me, she got a lot of scoffs and comments afterward. But this is the viewpoint of Trump, Miller, Vandenberg, Vance, Rubio, Hegseth, Bannon—all of them. All of them.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, I think you're right about this. So the question right now is, which school of thought in the United States is going to win the internal debate? And we know that even among the neocons, there are factions, right? We have the Russia-first neocons, and we have the China-first neocons. And they're separate from people like Mearsheimer, of course. Mearsheimer says security competition with China is inevitable, but a war can very much be averted and needs clever management, right? So that's Mearsheimer's kind of offensive realism that gets us there. But within the neocons, there's the faction of people who start with the question, "How do I dominate?"

You have those who would want to strike at either one first. But what unites them is the idea that the United States must be the only global hegemon, right? So the question is one of strategy—how to do that. Now, outside of those, or even within that group, we have a faction saying, no, no, no, the U.S. should be a hemispheric hegemon, right? The Western Hemisphere belongs to us. And then there's Russia, and then there's China. We basically split the world three ways and balance those.

And actually, you know, Rubio said that at the beginning of his tenure, when Trump came into power last January.

He said, like, look, it's a multipolar world, and we have to divide the world properly and then manage it. And that's why a couple of people are actually optimistic that maybe we can avert at least nuclear war. What it still means is that the local hegemons, in that conception, will then dominate supreme over their hemisphere. And the best the hemispheres can hope for is to get a not-too-bad deal, right? That Venezuela gets some of its oil back, that Cuba, once it's taken over, gets a little bit of prosperity back. But that's the mindset, right? And then we've got, of course, the Global South, which now collectively says, guys, no, that's not our vision of multipolarity.

#Michael Rossi

Yeah, I mean, America—let's go with this last one, right? Let's just say that ultimately this is what the Trump administration is gearing up for, and that is regional hegemony. So they've recognized that we are in a multipolar world, but they understand multipolarity very differently from the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians, and basically the Indonesians, Southeast Asia, the Africans—the Indonesians, the Malaysians, everybody else, right? The South Africans, even the Brazilians. Because in that regard, it remains to be seen if BRICS is going to come up with a more definitive ideology about something outside of Western-based foreign policy.

Right now, they rely on the existence of the West. They rely on the liberal, rules-based order just to be able to say, "That's not us." But what they say in turn is that multipolarity requires codependency. It requires cooperation. It requires multilateralism. It seems that the only one within the Trump administration who has some understanding of multipolarity is Rubio—and that's not saying much. Really? Not Vance? Vance is... I'll give him a respectable second. But Vance is much more tongue-in-cheek and much more controversial. Rubio—I'm not a fan of Rubio by any stretch of the imagination—but I think this is his moment to make a name for himself.

But okay, if Rubio is the smartest person in the room, that's really lowering the bar. But fine—Rubio's understanding of multipolarity is that he read **1984** and decided, "Okay, we are Oceania. Russia is Eurasia, and China is East Asia." Right, that's it. So in this regard, it's more or less dividing the world up into regional fiefdoms. As far as Rubio is concerned, everything in the Western Hemisphere operates at the discretion, the behest, and the pleasure of the United States. Do they refer—do they take any of these other countries into consideration? No. But let's be perfectly honest here: American foreign policy has regarded Latin America for more than a century as little more than its backyard. Right? Right.

And every so often there are a couple of governments that rub us the wrong way—whether it's Castro in Cuba, the Bolivarian notion of revolutionary independence, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia. But they come and they go, and eventually an election comes along and we bring in someone who's basically like Javier Milei—an ANCAP who'll do everything for the sake of the U.S.

dollar. And as far as Washington goes, it's not just the Trump administration. The Democratic Party does this as well. American foreign policy tends to be the one area where Republicans and Democrats largely agree.

The only difference is in the rhetoric, right? In the rhetoric. I need to emphasize that, because a lot of people think ICE is now becoming this authoritarian security force in the United States under Trump. ICE has been around since George W. Bush. It's been increasingly funded by every subsequent president. ICE existed under Biden, it existed under Obama. It's just being turned into this sort of visual paramilitary force because it's Trump. And I'm interested to see what would happen if, in three years, the presidential election gives us a Democrat. Will they defund ICE? Will they weaken it? Or will they just tell ICE, "You've got to learn how to arrest people less aggressively," right?

#Pascal

So a lot of what we've seen with the Patriot Act and so on is that successive governments are usually unwilling to throw away the tools developed by the previous one. Right? They start using them differently, but they continue expanding. That's the thing—that's the problem with power. Power begets more power.

#Michael Rossi

And then, you know, sometimes I'm amazed that we actually repealed Prohibition when we did. I think it was the last time we collectively said, "Oh, that was a bad idea." Tells you about the power of booze. Hey, you know what? You're not making money off it, and people outside the federal government are making money off it. That's ultimately what it boils down to.

#Pascal

Can I get back to the spheres? Because it's now clear that Trump thinks in these spheres, right? At the beginning, we weren't quite sure, but by now we know—spheres of interest, spheres of influence, whatever you want to call them. Jeffrey Sachs has a better concept: spheres of security, which is actually a shared concept—shared spheres and so on. Okay, fine, but let's leave that aside. I mean, the thing is, in this conception, wanting to possess Greenland and ultimately also Canada actually makes sense. You understand this purely geographical understanding of what your sphere is.

It leaves out all the other things—the interconnectedness with the world, the global trade, and the dependency on stuff that comes from outside. It also leaves aside ideas like the Non-Proliferation Treaty, right? That you create mechanisms for shared and global management of at least nuclear weapons and such. But it makes sense. Doesn't he run into a problem? Because at some point the

Europeans might say, "Okay, you want to discuss Greenland, which on the map should be part of the United States? Well, maybe we need to talk about Hawaii. Doesn't seem that attached to North America, does it?"

Shall we re-discuss Hawaii and see if we Europeans are going to support Hawaiian independence or whatnot? I mean, we can't think in these terms yet, but I do think they're setting themselves up for pretty big problems going down that route. I mean, look—you know, I hadn't thought about this, but if I wake up one morning and find that some lost relative of the old Hawaiian monarchy decides to make a claim for independence—well, we have people who actually say there's a legal claim that the Hawaiian Kingdom never ceased to exist.

Dr. Keanu Tsai is part of that group, and they say, "Look, we have a very good legal basis to argue that the Hawaiian Kingdom never ceased to exist." And actually, the International Court of Justice—ICJ—no, I think the International Court of Justice actually accepted their case as the Hawaiian Kingdom back in 1998 or something like that. I didn't know that. It's a fascinating story. It's just like, I mean, you might be setting yourself up for something there.

#Michael Rossi

Well, you know, ultimately it gets to the same thing, right? Europe needs to develop a backbone. Europe needs to cut its ties with America. Europe needs to be much more assertive because Europe embraces the last shreds of the rules-based order, right? We hear this all the time. But who in Europe is going to do this? I mean, you know, the current leadership of Europe is a gaggle of mediocrities who fail upwards, especially within the European Union.

#Pascal

I think you're being too nice. Mediocrity is too nice. It's like a kakistocracy—you know, the rule of the dumbest. That's what Europe is going through at the moment. It's really the low point of the last six or seven hundred years.

#Michael Rossi

But what also plays into this is that, you know, when Trump is not in the room, they seem to develop a backbone, right? They seem to be very assertive before Trump arrived in Davos. They talked about the sanctity of international law, the rules-based order—"We cannot allow this to happen." Okay, we allowed this to happen. We turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to that. We applauded, you know, Maduro being arrested, and we hoped that democracy would prevail, and, you know, the Iranian government needs to go, and Ukraine's territory is sacrosanct—but Kosovo is independent. You know, all that kind of good stuff, right? All that kind of good. And yet, as soon as

Trump makes these bombastic statements about taking Greenland—and here's the other thing—we don't even know if he has the capability of doing that. The wonderful thing about the insanity of Trump and...

I just finished my very first seminar this semester in my conflict resolution class. And I always begin with rule number one—it's more of a life lesson than a theory—but reality is dictated by the most insane person in the room, right? That's it. Trump is the most insane person. And how is that the case? Trump has actually made Greenland front-page news. When was the last time anybody cared about Greenland? All of a sudden, all Trump has to do is say that it's in America's strategic interest. It's actually better, he says, that Greenland be controlled by the United States rather than by Denmark. And then some of the most ridiculous things—like, just because you landed there 500 years ago does not give you the right to own the land. Well, thank you very much for effectively destroying the entire reason for Zionism, as well as the colonial phenomenon anywhere else.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty sure there are a couple of Native American tribes listening very carefully when he said that. It's like, really? We know some other people who settled here about 500 years ago and established an entity on North American territory. Obviously...

#Michael Rossi

And right then and there, you'd think that the European leadership—let's be honest—the one that probably carries the most authority right now is Macron. And that's not saying much.

#Pascal

He carries it like his sunglasses, yeah.

#Michael Rossi

The fact that he at least had the wherewithal to wear stylish sunglasses instead of, you know, Olaf Scholz going as a pirate kind of tells me he's a little more forward-thinking.

#Pascal

Do you think somebody beats these people up when they're not in line? I seriously wonder about that at this point.

#Michael Rossi

It doesn't help. It doesn't help with the image. But I'll tell you this much: the minute Trump made this whole thing about Greenland was the moment Mark Rutte should've said, "Article 5. Try it.

Article 5. That's it." Trump can be deterred only through two things—one, full-on military deterrence. That's it. It's the only way to stop him. And it's not just Trump; it's the people behind the scenes who, in my opinion, are really calling the shots through him. We have to understand, you get rid of Trump—he's either impeached, he finishes out his term, or deus ex machina happens—it doesn't mean everything's going to get better. In some cases, it might even get worse, because now we have Vance, we have everyone else in charge.

They are marching in step with Trump, and they're using this as a way to position themselves for future political leverage and power. All of them see this—see it as an opportunity to really embed the MAGA movement within American foreign policy. They can only be deterred through full-on military deterrence. Or the other way is simply some kind of appeasement, focusing his attention elsewhere. You know, Trump—this week it's Venezuela, next week it's Greenland, then he's back to Ukraine and Russia. Then he's creating this peace board for Gaza. Then it's regime change in Iran. Now, all of a sudden, we're back to fighting drug cartels in Mexico. He is a master at agenda setting. He's a master at doing that.

#Pascal

Everybody is off. He throws everybody off, and everyone else, for a whole year, is just running behind Trump. Because the moment you find some sort of way to make sense of what he just said, he moves on to the next thing. And he actually follows these—he now follows the rhetoric up with actions. That's what didn't happen so much during the first Trump administration. You had a lot of words and a lot of bombastic stuff, but not that many concrete interventions. Now you do. You have, like, the president of Venezuela abducted. You had a regime change operation in Iran. You had the twelve-day war that they supported. You have the way the U.S. supports Israel's decapitation strikes, and so on. I mean, this is why people are now taking him seriously when he talks about Greenland. They do believe that he might march in.

#Michael Rossi

Yeah, but this is an interesting point you mentioned here. It's tempting to talk about regime change in Venezuela, but it wasn't. It was just about removing Maduro. It depends on what the deal with Delcy Rodríguez is—we don't know yet. The entire Bolivarian government is still there, right? The United Socialist Party is still there. So Trump is saying, "Oh, we control the oil." Do they? He had this conference about a week or so ago with oil executives, saying, "Here, the oil fields are yours." And the executives said, "We don't want it because of the infrastructure." But it's not that they're rejecting control of Venezuela's oil; they're simply saying the infrastructure is so outdated that it would cost more to upgrade than they'd gain from resource extraction. Yeah.

This is sort of an indirect way of telling Trump, "Listen, you want to give us the oil thing? You've got to put boots on the ground. You're going to have to do a full-scale invasion." So right now, the U.S. Navy is blockading Venezuela, and they're boarding a whole bunch of oil tankers from other

countries flying various flags. I mean, that's all we've been able to accomplish so far in Venezuela. I was very cautious about this in a conversation a couple of weeks ago with Piotr and James. I had likened our adventurism in Venezuela to the first Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974. There was a second one in August. The first basically just brought a small landing of troops onto the shores of northern Cyprus, but the real invasion—the real takeover—didn't happen until about a month later.

We could be in that, you know, interim period. We don't know. That's the thing with the Trump administration—we just don't know. This could be all they have planned, thinking that's all that was needed, or they might have other things in the works. You talk about Iran—there was an attempt last summer. I don't know what that attempt was. You cannot regime-change Iran without a full-scale invasion. Iran is not a country you can simply topple. Yes, the population is largely against the Islamic elements of the regime, but the minute an outside invasion comes in—especially if it's led by Americans and Israelis—suddenly you get a rally-around-the-flag effect.

The Iranian government—Khamenei, absolutely—today needs to realize he got himself a lifeline, because Trump was ready to attack. I remember a couple of days ago, I went to bed thinking I'd wake up the next morning and see headlines that we had launched strikes. And at the last moment, Trump didn't attack. Yeah, the official reason was that he decided against it, but the more likely, the real reason was that the Gulf states, China, and Russia basically said, "Trump, if you do this, my God, you're going to get yourself into a real quagmire." So he pulled back, realizing that he didn't have it.

What I'm trying to get to, Pascal, is that it seems that for all the bluster and rhetoric the Trump administration likes to give, when push comes to shove, they're either pulling their punches for the time being or they just don't have the wherewithal—the capability—to do this. And at some point, this is going to have to be a put-up-or-shut-up moment. I mean, I'm thinking back to 2002, 2003, leading up to the second Gulf War—the invasion of Iraq. Remember the whole weapons of mass destruction thing, whatever it was with George W. Bush?

And, you know, despite all the evidence that there were no weapons of mass destruction—the UN weapons inspectors said they couldn't find anything—Bush was at a point where he had made a commitment. If he pulled back from his rhetoric on Iraq, it would do two things: it would embolden the Hussein government, and it would show that the United States was effectively weak when it was time to actually move. We're going to get to that point with Trump. Either you talk and talk and talk, and you're going to do something, or you're not. And if you're not, then you're either bluffing to get something else, or it shows the limits of what America's current power capabilities truly are.

#Pascal

That is true. However, I do want to point out that for a strategy to work, it doesn't need to be conscious. You can do things in a sequence that, in the end, make sense—even if you didn't know beforehand that they would. The influence and power structures within the U.S. are such that they

may lead to some split or overcommitment to one part. But it's also tied to this idea that you need to be successful in a regime change—and then you need to control Iran, control Iraq, control Syria, and tell them how to direct their investments and whatnot. You know, that's not what's happening in West Asia, right? The whole strategy in West Asia, at least from the Israeli point of view—which, by extension, is also what Washington has been following—is to sow chaos.

If everybody else is in utter chaos, then Israel is more or less free to carry out its settler colonialism—spreading little by little, expanding its borders, taking the Golan Heights, creating security buffer zones, bombing Lebanon and Gaza, and so on, right? You see how, as soon as there's the idea of control and management of West Asia, they actually oppose it. They don't like the order of peace; they don't like the idea of external forces coming in, because it constrains them. What they want is pure chaos. So the strategy with Iran definitely has to be, you know, the destruction of the state and civil war, right? So that Iran is basically taken out the way Iraq was taken out, the way Syria was taken out.

It's very sad. But if you come back to the hemispheric idea, that cannot be the plan for Latin America. There you need a structured economy because you want it to integrate and you want to be autarkic within your sphere of influence, right? So there must be different approaches, but that doesn't mean the U.S. might not. It's actually easier, I believe, from the military's point of view, to just sow chaos and death and destruction than to actually build something. So I would say there must be a difference in approach, probably.

#Michael Rossi

Well, this is a good point to raise, because if we understand that what drives Trump's foreign policy is not democracy, not human rights, not freedom, not any of that, but money.

#Pascal

What is Trump?

#Michael Rossi

You know, the United States is a political entity that goes over and beyond Trump. One of my friends and colleagues mused about this a couple of weeks ago. He said that if Trump does have an agenda, if he does have an ideology, it's what you could call "neoliberalism in one state." Yeah—neoliberalism in one state, which ultimately means we believe in the infallibility of the free market, we rely on raw material extraction from cheap sources and other elements. It's Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, but kind of congealed toward the Western Hemisphere.

So what that means is that the United States looks at the Western Hemisphere—looks at Latin America, and increasingly at Canada, Greenland, and others—as simply areas that feed the empire.

That's ultimately what it is: it just feeds the empire. Trump isn't interested in anything else except making money—not for the American people, but for his donors, for his major benefactors, from which, of course, he's going to take a major cut. That's true. And so it's a kind of, I would almost say, 21st-century mercantilism.

#Pascal

Of course, what the Marxist scholars have been telling us is that this is exactly what a capitalist empire must do. It has to grab more resources to privatize and feed upon, because investment must generate more capital.

#Michael Rossi

When you get rid of much of the manufacturing sector in your own country—when you're a post-industrial country and now largely based on consumerism—yeah, you need the raw materials to effectively feed those markets and to keep the markets going, keep production going, at least up until, you know, the day you die. And then we'll worry about their stuff afterwards. So yeah, to your point, the United States isn't interested in simply sowing chaos in Latin America, because it's bad for business. Right? Because it halts the extraction for fruit companies. But for days after that, it's actually very good. Yes, absolutely—the United Fruit Company from the previous century. That's exactly what it is.

Latin America is not about colonization; it's all about corporatism. It's absolutely about this kind of top-down globalization where it's not fair trade—it's so-called free trade. And if you have an edge over other markets, that's exactly how you're going to dominate. Any country that's had the audacity, in the past century or so, to nationalize a major industry or raw materials—suddenly the CIA cares about human rights. Forget the fact that Chile under Pinochet, or Argentina under Perón, or whatever—forget any of that. Who cares about that? Forget the fact that one of our closest allies in the Middle East, outside of Israel, is Saudi Arabia, one of the most repressive governments on the planet. Let's be perfectly honest here—do we really care?

#Pascal

No, just because you behead people in a public square—does that make you a repressive government?

#Michael Rossi

He probably had it coming. Who knows? You know, this is the—this is the thing—and then suddenly we're supposed to believe that the Iranians are fighting for freedom and liberty in the streets, by the

very same people who have absolutely no problem stamping that stuff out in their own. You know, Israel will do the exact same thing. Any criticism of Netanyahu's actions in Gaza and the West Bank is met with major censorship and repression.

#Pascal

And actually, this is a good way of tying it back to Davos, where it now seems that we're at a point where even the leadership of that ruling class has started to say, "Yeah, let's talk a little more frankly about the way we've been ruling the world, because it's not working anymore." Because, I mean, we're reaching the one-hour mark. And Michael, I know it's late on your end—so is there one more thing you'd like to add to this discussion that we haven't covered yet?

#Michael Rossi

I mean, this whole idea of the realities of a new multipolar world, I think, is now laid bare to the very people who did everything possible to insulate themselves in their gated communities. We hear talk now about reaching out to China from Europe as a way of balancing out the rupture with the United States. You know, China is going to do what China does. China's not interested in suddenly abandoning Russia and becoming more integrated with Europe. I mean, Europe is—I don't know, I could be wrong, but I mean...

#Pascal

I just need to add to this. It's the stupidity that people—the Europeans, and even some of the leadership in the U.S.—don't understand. The rest of the world, the Global South, doesn't think in terms of either/or, like "pick this one or that one." If you want to play with Europe, you've got to give up Russia and so on—that's not how they see it. It's more like, "I'll play with you, and with you, and with you, according to what's good for me." It's a very big thing.

#Michael Rossi

And then take Africa. You know, France and Europe want to re-engage with Africa, and Africa's like, "No, thank you—but remember colonialism?"

#Pascal

Which is still not over, by the way. I mean, fourteen African states still use the French franc. It's insane.

#Michael Rossi

It's insane. But I mean, you know, what I'll effectively say here is—what was I going to say? I mean, look, the realities of a new multipolar world, especially when it comes to Europe, are: where are they going to be? They might be able to play the middle-power strategy that seems to be working for some countries. Or they're going to do what I said before—when Trump's not in the room, they'll lambast him for ruining everything, but when he is in the room, they fight over who can kiss his ass first, and with greater vigor. The fact that he's still making claims to another country's territory and Europe hasn't said, "We will militarize"—I'm sorry, I hate to break it, but no.

#Pascal

And my friends, is it any surprise that, when it comes to the ass-kissing, the people who win are the ones with the lederhosen? Do not compete with the lederhosen on that one, OK?

#Michael Rossi

Oh my God. I mean, you can make your own video about that one, but oh my God. Yeah, but we have to appease Trump on Greenland so we can still have his support for Ukraine. So we'll throw Denmark under the bus to keep a losing battle in Ukraine going, which is just—at some point you have to realize. But as you pointed out before, we rarely, rarely admit that what we did was wrong and backtrack on it. We'll continue to dig our heels in, because I'd rather prolong this and eventually try to be right than abandon something I made false promises on before. Right.

#Pascal

Michael, this was fantastic. Before I let you go, I want to show everybody the little QR code. If you want to support Neutrality Studies, please go and subscribe on Substack. Substack is the one place that's more or less safe from deletion, because I actually get your email addresses, and then there's a mailing list so we can stay in touch. That's pascallottaz.substack.com. If you Google it, you'll find it. Please do subscribe there. Thank you very much. And Michael Rossi—people can find you on your channel, that's The Polsi, right? Michael Rossi Polsi, right there. Find him and please subscribe to him. Michael, thank you for your time today. Thank you.

#Michael Rossi

And before I go, I'm so glad to hear that your page is back—congratulations. Sometimes, you know, we fight the good fight. Thank you.

#Pascal

Thank you. Still, go to Substack—Substack's a good one. Thank you very much, everybody. Good night. Good night.

