

Jeffrey Sachs: Ukraine Peace Proposal vs. NATO Salami Tactics

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#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined again by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to discuss a framework for peace in Ukraine, which you have been drafting, not yet publishing, but nonetheless, I think it's quite an important thing to address. So, well, first, let me welcome you back to the program.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, it's great to be with you always, Glenn. Thank you.

#Glenn

Well, just to get into it, what are the key points, the way you see it, in order to put an end to this horrific war?

#Jeffrey Sachs

I think the key point is the difference between what Russia says and what Europe says right now. Both sides say the fighting should stop, which is interesting. Europe says there should be a ceasefire. Russia says there should be an end of the hostilities based on a political outcome. In other words, Russia subscribes, I think accurately, to von Clausewitz's famous idea that war is the continuation of politics with other means. In other words, that there are political underpinnings to what is happening in Ukraine. And I agree with that Russian assessment. This war didn't just come out of nowhere. It didn't come out of what the West asserts is Putin's fantasy of rebuilding the Russian Empire. It was nothing like that. For those of us, including you, who watch this closely over decades, in fact, this war came out of a political dispute.

The political dispute was simply put. The United States asserted primacy. It said, "We can do what we want, where we want, and we can station our missiles and our troops on your border, Russia." And Russia said, "No, that is a direct threat to our security." The West, meaning the U.S. and Europe, said countries can choose to join NATO if they want. And Russia said, "No, according to the treaties of Europe and the agreements of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, no country can try to enhance its own security at the expense of another country." In other words, this is inclusive or indivisible security. These are real issues. They're the most important issues on the whole planet, actually. Europe has refused to acknowledge that there are political issues on the table.

Europe now sees that Ukraine is in a desperate condition, facing an imminent destruction of its physical infrastructure, its energy systems, with the winter arriving. And Europe is saying, stop the fighting. And Russia is saying, talk politics about this. There are real reasons for this, and our national security is threatened by your actions. Not the least of which, by the way, is that in this war, when Ukraine fights, it is with the direct, immediate involvement—not the cheerleading, not just the finance, not even just the weapons, but the targeting, the intelligence, the strategy, the active participation—of Germany, of France, of the UK, and so forth. And so Russia is saying this is a security issue. Fundamentally, we need to resolve the security issue to resolve this war. I agree with that position entirely.

I want the war to stop. I thought the war should have never happened. I argued with the Biden White House before Russia's special military operation began in February 2022 to simply state that NATO will not enlarge to Ukraine and avoid the war. And, of course, I was told two things. One, no, we will never renounce Ukraine's right to join NATO, which I don't believe is a right at all. But they said we won't renounce that. And I was told, "And don't worry, there won't be a war." So I saw incompetence to my face, which I believe this is. And in Europe, I see incompetence, I'm sorry to say, right now. This is not just a clash of views about this war. This is a kind of European incompetence that I'm seeing everywhere.

I think the Europeans, because they don't speak to the Russians, don't understand. It's strange because the Russians say it every day, but I think they don't understand Russia, what this is about. And for that reason, they have continued to lead Ukraine to disaster. Now, I'll just add before pausing here that some would say, no, they understand perfectly well, and they're ready to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian. There's some truth to that. Another truth is I'm quite sure that the leaders of Palantir and other Silicon Valley companies, and Eric Schmidt and so forth, are just delighted to be testing their AI-backed weapon systems in Ukraine. So this is just seemingly a lot of fun for them, and great opportunities for market testing and for innovation.

This is ghastly, but I think it's true that this is another motivation. But I do think that there is a European blind spot that is very serious. And I feel that, Glenn, because I speak to European officials, and sometimes I just see that it's not posturing; they just don't get it. And it's strange, but it's not impossible that there are these blind spots. When I've said NATO should not enlarge, one European official said to me, "Well, the United States has already said that." And I said, "Yes, but

you haven't said that, and it's not been said publicly, and it's not been made a matter of policy."
"Oh, well, that's interesting." And so you have these bizarre conversations, completely bizarre. Are you kidding? What do you think this is all about? But this is actually how it goes.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, that's a good point, because it can't be implicit. Then you end up with another version of the promise to Gorbachev not to expand, and then in 10 years we can say, "Well, we never promised it. Where's the document?" So, of course, I get it.

#Jeffrey Sachs

And, Glenn, just to add to that, because people need to really understand this, and unless you're sometimes hearing it in your own ears, you cannot imagine. But in December 2021, just before the special military operation, the invasion began, I called the White House to speak to the national security adviser of President Biden. And I said, "Say that NATO will not enlarge and avoid this war." And he said to me, "Don't worry, Jeff, NATO is not going to enlarge Ukraine." He said that to me. I said, "Are you kidding? You're going to have a war. Say it." And he said, "No, no, no, we can't say it. We have an open-door policy."

#Glenn

How bizarre is this?

#Jeffrey Sachs

But this is what I just experienced at the U.N. margins last week. "Oh, it's already been said by the Americans that NATO won't enlarge." I said, "That has been said secretly. It's been said privately. Nothing's been explained to the public. And every day, publicly, NATO officials like Rutte say, and European officials say, NATO will enlarge to Ukraine."

#Glenn

This is...

#Jeffrey Sachs

You know, if this were a high school game, you could understand it. But this is the real-life drama that has brought us to the brink of a full European war. And they are so obtuse and lie for a living, but they can't see the difference between whispering something in private and saying it out loud. Except perhaps if the whole idea is, we cheat when we want, we deny it when we want, we don't want to get into it, we can wink and so forth. But it is all a disaster, the way that this has gone. And

I put a huge responsibility on the Europeans. Of course, it was the Americans that concocted this whole craziness. There's no doubt about it.

This is all about American primacy. Brzezinski explained it all perfectly well in 1997. It's all there in black and white, easy to read, easy to understand. Ukraine is a geopolitical pivot. That means it's a place that is useful for American strategic purposes. All explained. But when Trump, who is admittedly incompetent, inconsistent, difficult to deal with, when he said, "Okay, let's stop this thing. We don't—NATO doesn't have to expand," it was the Europeans that jumped up and down and said, "No, no, no, we must continue to fight." Now they say we must have a ceasefire, must have a ceasefire, but no political issues to be discussed.

#Glenn

That's fascinating. It's not just that they want a ceasefire, but they don't want to even talk to Russia before there's a ceasefire, while Russia wants the political settlement before they stop fighting. So it's a difficult thing to solve. But the issue of NATO membership, it becomes even more complicated because NATO often does this incrementalism, or salami tactics, be it NATO expansion, the missile defense, the war against Russia would gradually move. So it doesn't even become an issue of membership or non-membership, because it gradually increases its presence in Ukraine. Indeed, just a comment on that, you know, the former CIA director for Russian analysis, George Beebe, he warned in December of 2021, two months before the Russian invasion, that the war was becoming almost unavoidable because, in his words, this would be the last chance for the Russians to dislodge the U.S. and NATO from Ukraine because they kept entrenching themselves more and more. So this gradualism occurred.

#Jeffrey Sachs

That's exactly right. And it's interesting. He, from the inside of the CIA, I, from the outside, we were saying the same thing, apparently. I wasn't talking to him about it, but Jake Sullivan was probably hearing from both of us that, "Stop this. This is absolutely getting reckless." But the fact of the matter is, and it was much touted in Trump's first term, they were building a million-man army, the largest army in Europe, in Ukraine, fully interoperable with NATO, under the everyday announcement that Ukraine will join NATO. At some point you say, well, duh, you know, you're building the army, you're making it interoperable, you're sending heavy weapons systems.

It's all announced under the rubric that Ukraine will join NATO. Maybe it is aiming for Ukraine to join NATO. So this is exactly what we faced. And you can see these tactics from the beginning. You know, on January 30th, 1990, Hans-Dietrich Genscher gave his famous Tutzing address, saying that NATO will not operate anywhere eastward of where it is right now, because that is the Soviet Union's core security concern. The following week, the United States and Germany gave repeated explicit assurances to Gorbachev that NATO will not, in the words of James Baker III on February 7th, 1990, move one inch eastward, one inch.

And by the way, they concocted this bullshit that, oh, it was not one inch in GDR, but yes, all the way to Ukraine. This became one of the absolute absurdities of the last 36 years, because they say anything they want to try to get away with anything. But from that point, not one inch eastward, also conveyed by Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor, to President Gorbachev on February 10th, and then repeated endlessly. Then salami tactics. Oh, well, yes, maybe. But in any event, we'll have a Russia-NATO Council.

We'll have an agreement with Russia. Oh yes, NATO's going to expand, but just to the three: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic. This is very far from your borders. Brzezinski, in 1997, as I mentioned, spelled out in a very clear article, not to mention his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, but in a clear article in *Foreign Affairs*, that it would be Ukraine's time for joining NATO between 2005 and 2010. So, salami tactics. 2004, seven more countries come in: Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Okay, we're getting right up there. And then, of course, the Bucharest Summit, where Chancellor Merkel writes in her memoirs that, yes, this was tantamount to a declaration of war with President Putin.

Then, of course, 2002, withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which was of grave concern for Russia at that point, because that meant U.S. missile systems near to Russia's border, the Aegis missile systems. And it meant that the difference, or the time from launch to launch devastation in Russia, was reduced to minutes. And this was a real shock to Russia as well, this unilateral withdrawal from a treaty which was the cornerstone of the whole nuclear arms agreement system. Well, it went on and on, salami tactics, like you say: Serbia in 1999, the Iraq War in 2003, Syria, Libya in 2011, and then the Maidan coup with Victoria Nuland and her cookies and her discussion of who would be the next government in Ukraine, intercepted by the Russians and put online for all of us to hear.

And then Trump building the million-dollar man army in Ukraine. That's the CIA operating over a 30-year period. It's a long, sustained operation with the objective of American primacy. Do the Europeans not understand this? Do they not know what this is about? Well, I know that some of them do, because I know that some of the leaders today who were in the room in Bucharest in 2008 were horrified in 2008 that Bush was pushing Europe to commit to NATO moving all the way to Ukraine. They knew it was extraordinarily dangerous.

Now they're the greatest boosters of this, as if there's no issue, as if there's nothing to talk about. So that's what brings us to this crisis. And that's why I've been urging in recent weeks, I've been urging for years: be explicit on these points. Address the security concerns of Europe, of Ukraine, of Russia, which, interestingly, is exactly what Russia says. That's not being a Russian or Putin apologist. That's what Russia rightly says, which is, we need inclusive security. So let's talk about security for everybody, not just NATO prerogatives or whims.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, on the salami tactics, though, one of the reasons why countries use salami tactics, these incremental changes, is because it removes resistance from our own public, but also from our adversaries. So let's say in 1999, we would have said, "Okay, we're going to NATO expansion. We're going to roll all the way into Ukraine." People would have thought we're insane because everyone knew that meant war. So it couldn't happen. Same as this war against Russia. When Russia invaded Ukraine, if NATO would have said, "Okay, we're going to supply long-range missiles to strike deep inside Russia and target civilian infrastructure," the public would have thought we were insane.

So you do have to take these small steps, but it also prevents the opponent from making any big steps. And once the opponent pushes back, Russia then seems disproportionate, or to use NATO's language, unprovoked. And I just feel this is the problem why we can't have a rational debate, because once they say "unprovoked," that means, well, we're just fighting an expansionist Russia. This is the new Hitler. And then there can't be any compromise. You just have to stop Hitler at the gate.

#Jeffrey Sachs

What's interesting for us, Glenn, is that because it's our job, we read documents and we read statements and plans. And in this case, it's just absolutely fascinating to read Brzezinski's account of all of this in 1997. The Grand Chessboard has the subtitle, "The Strategic Imperatives of American Primacy." So the idea is spelled out, not in the salami tactics way, but in the definition, the purpose, and the results. And what he spells out is that America will have primacy, for as far as we can see, in Eurasia. This is interesting because America is not a Eurasian power, of course. America is in America, in the Americas. But America will have primacy in Eurasia, primacy over Europe, primacy over Russia, primacy over China, primacy over India.

That's the goal. And then he spells out how to achieve that goal. And that means this eastward expansion of power. And he says it will be an eastward expansion of Europe as a... So the European Union will take what it wants. But this will be combined with NATO. And he's explicit that it's both. It's NATO, the military side. It is the political framework. This will be the American-led framework. And so when we have documents like that, and they come almost inevitably in many different places, they came as early as 1992, when Wolfowitz's draft of the American strategy after the demise of the Soviet Union.

There's a similar document that is really a fascinating one by Blackwill and Tellis in March 2015 about America's grand strategy towards China, which spells out almost exactly what happened over the next 10 years. So, because it's necessary to get alignment of a lot of forces on the U.S. side to play this long-term primacy game, they don't hide it from everybody. You just have to be a careful reader. It has to be your job, or you have to understand what Foreign Affairs magazine is telling you, because that's a place where the foreign policy establishment conveys the message to Wall Street, basically, and conveys the message to the, let's say, the New York establishment base of what's coming next.

Lay it out, but not in a newspaper, not in the media, not in a speech. We didn't have a speech by a president that says, "I am going to lay out tonight the blueprint of American primacy." And, of course, it would have been, "Are you kidding?" The virtue of Trump is that he's—since he has no control valve at all, and since he's not very bright—he says a lot of things which expose real aims and real goals in ways that are supposed to be kept hidden from view. For those of us whose job it is to read these documents, we see the strategy actually laid out. It's interesting, it's important for this deep state to put out these doctrines in a very restricted way because they have to organize the interests of Wall Street.

They have to organize the top business community. They have to organize Silicon Valley. They have to get certain elite public opinion on their side. And so they do explain the long-term strategy, not only the salami tactics, but never in a presidential speech, never in a clear policy document of the U. S. government. That is all hidden. That's kept away from view. But there are places to find it, and Brzezinski is one of the most interesting places. When it comes to China, a fascinating paper by Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis in 2015 spelled out the next 10-year strategy vis-à-vis China on how to contain China. RAND document, for example, "Extending Russia" in 2019 laid out all the Russia options, because RAND is essentially a think tank of the U.S. deep state. So it's not impossible to find this.

It's not just guesswork, and it's not just insiders who become outsiders. You do find it in the documentation, but the gap of the documentation in The New York Times, let's say, is so vast, because The New York Times is the public-facing side of the propaganda. That's just narrative. That's the "unprovoked" told repeatedly. That became the meme of The New York Times itself. I once counted after the start of the invasion by Russia in February 2022 that in the next year or so, in the opinion pages of The New York Times, the word "unprovoked," not just the concept but the word, was used 26 times in articles. So it becomes a narrative game. Even if you believed it, you wouldn't use exactly the same word, but it just became the meme for the public-facing narrative. Well, all of this is to say there has been a plan. It has been a plan for American primacy.

It's not especially a hidden plan, but you do have to connect it. And part of American primacy was that America would reach Russia's borders with its military alliance and, specifically, in my view, but pretty much spelled out, would surround Russia in the Black Sea region, maybe even taking the base in Sevastopol, literally, after the 2014 Maidan coup. But the idea: Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Georgia would all be NATO members. Look at Russia on that map. That's basically the strategy of Lord Palmerston and Napoleon III in the Crimean War in 1853 to 1856. Basically the same war fought 150 years later with American weapons instead of British weapons. But essentially the same war: banish Russia from the Black Sea. And then, as Brzezinski said, in essence, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire, the goal of primacy.

#Glenn

Well, I just want to finish off by saying some of these plans are quite, as you said, they're quite open. That is, you have, you know, the U.S. has explicit strategy to restore global primacy. Well, what do you have to do? You have to bring down competing centers of power. So you have, you know, Russia, you have to break it. Iran, you kind of have to destroy it. And the Chinese economy, you have to roll it back. Well, I say this quite openly. I mean, the envoy of Trump, Keith Kellogg, even said, "We can knock out Russia from the ranks of great powers using Ukrainians, then we can focus on China." So they are quite explicit.

Let me just say that what I really like about the proposal is, you know, if you recognize that the Ukraine war is a symptom of a broken European security architecture, then you can fix it. Because if you reform the European security architecture, make it positive, some inclusive or indivisible security, as you write, then it would elevate security for Russia and for the West and for Ukraine. It would take away the dividing lines of a divided Europe, and it would save Ukraine as well. So it's really a pathway which everyone can get on board, where peace doesn't depend on defeating the adversary, which in this case is the world's largest nuclear power, which should concern us. Any last thoughts?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yes, this is the core of the argument. Those who know the arts of peace understand the strategic role of neutrality. To achieve peace, it's important to have neutral or buffer states. You keep the major powers away from each other. And Ukraine is the classic case where neutrality is needed. Glenn, my basic proposition that I've been trying to share with the European diplomats in recent weeks is: return to the issue of inclusive security as the core of what this is all about and the core of how to end this. Ending the fighting is actually not as far away, if this is done, as it might seem right now. If the Europeans would acknowledge that there are real security issues on the table, the same ones that have been on the table for 36 years and that have been discussed nonstop for 36 years, then we could actually get to a conclusion that works.

So my basic point is the ceasefire, the end of hostilities—not just a ceasefire, but a return to Ukraine's neutrality, a very clear definition of NATO: that NATO will not expand, will not intend to expand, will stop its expansion eastward, which never should have happened in the first place. But it should be ended now because it is contrary to commitments and contrary to inclusive security. So it will end vis-à-vis Ukraine. It will end vis-à-vis Georgia. It will end in general, any further eastward expansion. And there will be, of course, an armistice line drawn. And I—let the diplomats discuss that, whether it's all of the Donbas or the current contact line. This is an issue for debate. I don't think we're going to have a de jure settlement of borders in the first instance, because Ukraine may say, "This is our native land," or, "This is a land that belongs to us."

But what an armistice line means is that the fighting stops, that both sides acknowledge whatever territory and whatever line is set, that that's where the administration actually lies in the future, that both sides renounce the use of force to retake territory that they claim and commit to the use of

diplomacy for any territorial swaps or anything else that may ensue in the future. So the point is that we end the war on the basis on which this war actually occurred, which was NATO enlargement would be ended. Ukraine would be neutral. And I remember what I wanted to say earlier, which is that NATO—I'm sorry, Ukraine wanted to be neutral. It was the established policy of the country at the start of independent Ukraine.

It was the policy of President Viktor Yanukovich during his term from 2010 to 2014. It was one of the reasons why the United States wanted to overthrow Yanukovich, is that he wanted neutrality. And the Western U.S. approach, the strategic approach, was, of course, NATO enlargement. The United States hated neutrality. A country looking for primacy hates neutrality, like the Athenians hated the neutrality of Milos in the Peloponnesian War. The United States rejected neutrality in Europe, rejected neutrality of Germany after World War II. Big mistake. It led to a divided Europe for decades. The United States rejected neutrality of Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. Big mistake.

It led us into our current debacle. If they had looked at the success of neutrality of Sweden, of Finland, of Austria, of Switzerland, they would have—basic lesson that unfortunately our diplomats and our deep state, in its hubris, never wanted to learn—which is that neutrality is a tool of peace. And Ukraine should be neutral. NATO should stop enlarging. An armistice should be set. Armistice lines should be the lines on which neither side will resort to the use of force to achieve any further territorial claims that it might have. That can leave lots of issues open for the future. But that means the war could stop now. It could stop before the destruction of the remaining Ukrainian energy system. It could stop before mass suffering.

It could stop before the Europeans stumble into a nuclear war out of their absolute incapacity in recent years to deal straightforwardly with the issues that are at hand. So that's what I have been saying to European senior officials and trying to convey. And I remain of the belief that, as hopeless as the diplomacy seems to be, we should take even the glimmers of hope, like the absolutely frosty 20-minute meeting between Foreign Minister Lavrov and German Foreign Minister Waidephul, at least as a glimmer of hope that it can be diplomacy rather than this idiocy of destruction as the way out of this mess that the United States led Europe into, but now Europe seems determined to double down on.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's the thing that's often left out in this rhetoric of standing with Ukraine or helping Ukraine: the fact that between 1991 and 2014, only about 20% of Ukrainians wanted to join NATO. We knew that in 2019, 73% voted for essentially implementing the Minsk Agreement to make peace with Russia and Donbas, which would have meant neutrality. And, of course, in 2022, with the Istanbul Agreement, which would have restored peace, which was also torpedoed by the U.S. Exactly. And, you know, so yeah, I think neutrality is definitely the answer here. But I've already taken too much of your time, so I want to thank you so much for joining us today.

#Jeffrey Sachs

It's great to be with you, Glenn, and have a good visit. Say hello to friends and colleagues there.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Will do. Thanks again. Thank you. Bye-bye.