

# **Jiang Xueqin: Great Power Wars Over a New World Order**

Prof. Xueqin Jiang argues that both historical patterns and game theory can be used to accurately predict future events. Prof. Jiang discusses socio-economic and political challenges of a world undergoing rapid change: the US imperial model becoming more bellicose during decline, Europe's struggle to remain relevant, the internal turmoil that will shake Asia, and the second war on Iran that will be very different as Iran understands this is an existential struggle. Prof. Jiang is the host of the popular educational channel Predictive History: <https://www.youtube.com/@PredictiveHistory> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: [https://x.com/Glenn\\_Diesen](https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen) Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: <https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng> Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## **#Glenn**

Welcome back. We're very privileged today to be joined by Professor Zhang, who has been spot-on in several of his predictions, using historical patterns and game theory to forecast the direction of geopolitics. Thank you, as always, for coming back on.

## **#Jiang Xueqin**

Thanks, Glenn.

## **#Glenn**

We're seeing a massive change in the international system. Usually, big changes in world order come after major wars or other major disruptions, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. But what we're witnessing now is quite remarkable. The spectacular rise of China over the past decades has been unprecedented in human history—especially because it's been peaceful. It has spearheaded a massive shift of power from the West to the East, essentially ending 500 years of Western leadership since the age of exploration. So, the Western dominance of the past centuries has now come to an end. My concern, though—and my question to you—is: how likely is it that such a major shift in the international balance can occur without triggering major wars between the great powers?

## **#Jiang Xueqin**

Right. So let's go to Mark Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos this past week, because it went viral and got a lot of attention. It was a direct response to Donald Trump's argument that, for the longest time, NATO, Europe, and Canada have been free-riding off America's generosity and goodwill. It's America that provides defense for Europe, and it's American consumers who have made Europe wealthy. So Europe has been freeloading on American generosity. In his speech, Mark Carney had a counterargument—a rebuttal to Trump's viewpoint. Basically, what he said was that this rules-based international order was established for the benefit of the American empire. And for the longest time, it was hypocritical and inconsistent, and the Western allies went along with it because they benefited from it.

But now America has changed its attitude. It's no longer focused on consensus; it no longer cares about multilateralism. So now, if middle powers like Canada are to survive, they really need to develop a rules-based international order. I think that's a framework for Europe to merge with BRICS, because the very idea of BRICS is a win-win cooperation where everyone is equal and there's no dominant power. An example, of course, is the Shanghai Gold Exchange—or the so-called Gold Corridor—where gold is distributed among different hubs around the world: in Dubai, in Shanghai, wherever. It's like a blockchain, an open ledger, where gold becomes the basis for a new financial system. And China is very much focused on multilateralism, on genuine cooperation, on reciprocity.

And that's the future that Mark Carney believes the middle powers should strive for. That's the framework that Carney and the other middle powers—the Europeans—would like to implement. The problem, as you say, is that there's no way the American empire will just fade away and let this new multilateral system develop. In the national security strategy, it's very explicit that America will not give up its empire, but it will change the tactics by which it rules that empire. So, no more multilateralism, no more liberal order—just a pure focus on national self-interest. That's number one. Number two is that it will, from now on, perceive its allies as vassals. So all these U.S. Treasuries that Europe holds, Japan holds, South Korea holds—it actually belongs to America.

It's America that controls the resources and the wealth of its allies. So basically, it's the vassalization of the American empire, okay? That's number two. Number three—and this is the most crucial—is that it will challenge China wherever it can. Even though America may pull back its military from East Asia, it will continue to challenge China in Africa, in Europe, in South America. It claims hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, and it will embargo China's economic development from now on. So we're seeing a clash of titans: on one hand, China is leading a new international order that is multilateral, reciprocal, and win-win; and on the other, the Americans want to maintain their empire. That's the conflict we're seeing right now.

## #Glenn

Well, since 1945, this system of consensus and multilateralism was managed under the clear leadership of the United States. I mean, there were no illusions that it wasn't the dominant power—

the hegemon. Once you're the only game in town, with no competitors, it's easier to be a benign hegemon because others will naturally gravitate toward the United States. But now that the U.S. has China as its main rival, it has to use harder tools. The more aggressively the U.S. uses economic coercion to both weaken adversaries and ensure the obedience of allies in this system—or, let's call them vassals, which is probably more accurate—the more it incentivizes allies to decouple or diversify, and for adversaries to collectively balance.

Well, from my impression of the Canadian prime minister, this is part of what he was communicating too—that this is why they have to look more toward China. But is this imperial model of the United States only temporary? Because they can't coerce the whole world under their rule if there are rivals out there, unless they somehow knock out the Chinese. I guess that's what I'm getting at.

## #Jiang Xueqin

Right. So I think that for the longest time, the American empire was able to create the illusion that it was a multilateral consensus because the people in charge were good friends with each other. They went to the same schools, the same universities, where they learned the same manners, the same values, the same ideologies. Their children then went to the same schools. They hung out in the same places, like the Davos World Economic Forum. They summered in the Hamptons, they skied in Aspen. So it was a very small, cozy club, and they made a lot of decisions behind the scenes. They maintained the illusion that it was very multilateral and that everyone had consensus. But you're absolutely right—that was an empire.

Only a few people had the privilege of making the major decisions, but they maintained the illusion of this hypocrisy for public consumption. Now, the problem with Trump is that he's an outsider. He's not part of this club. He went to the wrong schools, he hung out with the wrong people, and he's like a mafioso—he's come in, he wants to wreck things and make them the way he wants them to be. He's very dictatorial; he doesn't understand the manners, the ideologies, the values of this system. And so everyone feels under threat, and the Davos crowd, led by Mark Carney, feels as though they need to find a new protector in China. The problem, though, is that the system we have today is extremely fragile because of the economic instability created by empire.

What I mean by that is the inequality where maybe 1% of the population controls most of the wealth. A classic example is New Year's in St. Barts in the Caribbean, where a few dozen mega-yachts gather for the celebrations. These are people like Miriam Adelson and Jeff Bezos. There are only a few dozen of them, but they control about 80% of the world's wealth. So the massive inequality in this world needs to be addressed—that's number one. Number two is the corruption of the bloc system, where in Washington, D.C., and in Brussels, the bureaucrats are no longer accountable to the electorate. There's this disconnect between the political class and Main Street.

And that's a huge, huge problem. There are problems with the empire, with the way the system works, that need to be addressed right now. And because these politicians, these leaders, are not

able to deal with these issues, that allows for the rise of Trump. So, in theory, yes, if these people were to liberate China, then we could have a new world order. The problem is that even if you have this new world order, the same issues persist. How do you deal with inequality? How do you deal with corruption? How do you deal with the disconnect—the alienation of the people? That's a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed, and it's not being addressed right now.

## #Glenn

Like what you said about the fake consensus—because after the Cold War came to an end, and then two years later the Soviet Union collapsed—the argument by, I think it was the U.S. ambassador to NATO, was that Russia couldn't become part of NATO because it wouldn't fit into the consensus culture we have in NATO. Right, which is a nice way of saying that the Allies do as they're told. And, well, the main thought was, I guess, about power distribution—that the Russians are simply too big, and also that their whole political culture is less likely to subordinate their decisions to the U.S. So they would want to be partners, not vassals. But this kind of begs the question, though, that if the U.S. wants to be hegemon, it does have to divide and rule.

That is, you know, impose this alliance system where you either—well, you weaken your adversaries and make your allies dependent, like with the war in Ukraine. I thought this is good, but it's really a way of weakening the Russians and making Europeans more obedient. And this is, you know, more or less the objective. But how do you make sense, then, of Trump's seeming desire to just throw away NATO as it is? Because it does seem that you need this kind of alliance system if you want to weaken adversaries and make sure your vassals, you know, toe the line. So why this rejection of such an alliance system when this is what you should be pursuing as a hegemonic instrument?

## #Jiang Xueqin

Right, so Trump's ultimate ambition is to create a Trump world order. And what he means by that is he wants to replace the old elite—the established, global elite—with a new elite, okay? So what we're seeing right now in America is a civil war between left and right. And the ground zero for this, of course, is Minneapolis, where a couple of days ago another American citizen was killed by ICE, okay? So the first case was a woman who was shot in the face three times by an ICE agent who claimed self-defense—but if you look at the video, that's debatable. The second incident is a man named Alex Pretty. He's 37 years old and he's a nurse, and he was essentially executed by ICE agents in Minneapolis. And there are thousands of people now converging in Minneapolis.

Tim Walz, the governor of Minnesota, has called up the National Guard. So you have the local police, ICE agents, and the National Guard all converging in Minneapolis. It's almost like a ground zero for a new civil war, okay? The question then is, why is this happening? It's happening because you have two major factions in America fighting for supreme power. You have the old elite—Wall Street, the global financial elite represented by Wall Street. But then you have a new elite that's up and coming. They're new money—Silicon Valley, Palantir, represented by Elon Musk and Peter Thiel. And they're

the ones backing Trump, okay? So Trump's goal is to replace the federal power brokers in Washington and make it obedient and subservient to him.

And that's why you're seeing all this conflict in the United States. But zoom out, and the entire world is like this. Trump's ambition isn't to replace NATO per se, but to change its leadership and make NATO much more subservient to him, right? In his national security strategy, he's talked about backing politicians in Europe who are more amenable to American values—who believe in free speech, who believe in nationalism, who believe in, you know, people's rights. And these states are Poland, Austria, and Hungary, okay? So it's not that Trump is turning away from Europe; it's more that he wants to reshape the political landscape of Europe. And Greenland is a very important, um, point of conflict, right? Because why is Trump so adamant about taking over Greenland?

There are already agreements in place that let Americans use Greenland for whatever military purpose they see fit. So there's really no reason to take over Greenland. Why not just maintain the illusion that NATO is still relevant? The answer is that Trump wants European leaders to lose face. He wants to embarrass them—he wants to show the European people, "Look, your leaders are powerless. Your leaders are useless. So overthrow them and elect leaders who can work with me," okay? In Germany, that's the AfD. In France, that's Le Pen's party. In Spain, that's Vox, okay? What Trump envisions is a radical political restructuring of Europe that's more right-leaning, anti-immigration, and more nativist, okay? Essentially, to overturn the global order. And that's the main conflict in the world today.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, now that's an interesting one. It's not just about loyalty to the U.S. and power, but it also has a civilizational interpretation, because he sees the internal struggle within the West as being of key importance, as you suggest. This also comes through in the new national security strategy. So, is this a struggle in Trump's mind for reviving American and Western civilization? Because he talks about, more or less, saving Europe from the EU.

## **#Jiang Xueqin**

In his mind, he is the messiah. He believes he's come to save America and to save Western civilization from woke politics, from the corruption of the global elite, from the inequality in this world. So he sees himself as a messianic figure. And quite honestly, there are many in the MAGA movement who do see him as a prophet, as someone who can fulfill the prophecy of a renewed America—to make America great again. But ultimately, what this means is that Trump needs to become emperor of America. His ambition is to become king. That means destroying the constitutional values and norms that underpin American society. And we'll know this because he plans to run for a third term, which would be unprecedented in the 20th century. And not only does he plan on a third term—he plans on a fourth term.

Because in his mind, he needs time to revamp American society—to make America great again. And look, if he weren't running for a third term, we couldn't possibly explain the speed and the force with which he's trying to reshape American society. Think about ICE. Now, what's interesting about ICE is that it says it exists to deport immigrants, to get rid of illegal immigration, which is supposedly destroying the American economy. But if you look at the statistics, Obama actually deported more illegal immigrants than Trump did, even though Obama didn't have the budget or the resources that ICE has. And Obama never created conflict with the states—the states worked with him to remove illegal immigrants. So it was clearly about removing illegal immigrants. Then ICE is incompetent.

But if you think that ICE is actually meant to be a Gestapo, a new secret police loyal only to Trump, then that makes a lot of sense. It helps explain the incredible, unprecedented violence happening in the streets of Minneapolis right now. These are extrajudicial executions—there's no other word for what's happening. They're meant to incite a civil war, meant to enrage the people. In the streets of Minnesota, it's not illegal immigrants versus ICE; it's white conservative men in white uniforms versus white liberal Americans. That's the conflict right now. And Trump understands that he needs to spark a civil war so he can declare an insurrection, invoke emergency war powers, and override elections. That is his plan. And look, the evidence is actually pretty clear about what's happening.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah. On the other hand, when I read the National Security Strategy of the United States, the way they refer to Europe—there were some good points there, I thought. That is, Europe is in decline: demographically, economically, in its international relevance, in its ability to reproduce its culture—all the things you'd expect from a declining civilization. So how are you assessing this, though? Because I'm not saying that Trump will rescue or save Europe, as was also suggested in this National Security Strategy by cultivating an acceptable opposition. But surely things aren't going well for Europe.

## **#Jiang Xueqin**

Right, so let's look at why Trump is in power, right? He's in power because Biden really screwed up. Biden was in power for four years, and in those four years the world essentially collapsed because there was a lack of leadership, a lack of strategy, a lack of decision-making. And this is true for the entire global Western elite. You go to Brussels, you go to Washington, D.C., during the Biden years—they had no idea what to do. They were corrupt, they were indifferent, they lived in a bubble. So people were really angry, and people wanted change. And that's what propelled Trump into the presidency.

That's what's allowing him to implement Project 2025, which is meant to radically revamp the federal bureaucracy. This is what's drawing the Pentagon to be loyal to Trump. So there are serious problems that need to be addressed. And Trump is using this opportunity—this moment of discontent and disillusionment—to amass personal power. And that's the great threat, right? So yeah, look, look, I mean, I hate to say this, but Hitler would not have risen to power unless Germany

was really suffering, and Germany really wanted massive political change. So I completely agree with you—Europe is in a lot of trouble.

But the idea that Trump's going to come and be your savior—I think that's a bit deluded. I think Trump's plan is to destroy the world so he can rule over the ashes. I think that's what's going to happen. But you're right that you can make a legitimate argument that he really believes he wants to save the world. You can also make a legitimate argument that his followers are true believers and are trying to make the world a better place. But historically, if you look at the patterns, when a figure like this emerges—and figures like this include Julius Caesar—they end up destroying the world.

## #Glenn

No, of course, all these leaders never appear in a vacuum. So I do see this as one of the consequences of having horrible leadership. I think Biden definitely falls into that category. But how do you explain this, though—the cause of it? Why are there such terrible leaders at the moment, not just in the United States but across Europe as well? I mean, terrible in the sense that there's no vision, no strategy. It's very dishonest; it's all about managing narratives. Yeah, well, overall, we don't see any leaders like those of the past. And again, this is Europe, where you began with the Peace of Westphalia, where modern diplomacy was born. I just don't see any leaders in Europe today who seem able to get the continent back on track. And when that happens, you kind of hand over the mantle to any crazy leader, any strongman who comes along claiming he can fix the system if he just pushes the old order aside.

## #Jiang Xueqin

I think one of the greatest lies in our lives is that meritocracy promotes the best leaders. So if you went to Yale, if you went to Harvard, if you went to Oxbridge, if you went to the Sorbonne, then you're the best and the brightest—and therefore, you should rule. You know, I went to Yale, okay? And I can tell you right now that if you go to a place like Yale, you're not taught how to think critically. You're not taught how to be imaginative, how to have empathy, how to be resilient. You're taught how to speak in a very nice, articulate manner and to conform to the status quo, okay? So if you look at the ruling class in America—the vast majority of people in Washington, D.C., the financial elite on Wall Street, Silicon Valley, the media, the universities—they all went to a few schools.

And as a result, they live in a bubble. They see the world in a very jaded way, and they're unable to empathize with the suffering of ordinary people. They become disconnected from ordinary people, and they can't possibly imagine what life is like for a blue-collar worker. That's one. Number two: the problem with meritocracy is that if you think you deserve what you have because you worked hard, then you also believe that people who are poor deserve what they got because they're lazy. So the

government shouldn't help these people. The government should help immigrants, should help minorities, should help women—because these are historically persecuted groups. But we shouldn't help ordinary white men, because they deserve what they got, because they're stupid.

I worked hard in school, and so I got a deal. You didn't work hard in school, so you should be a guardsman making very little money. You should be unemployed, okay? So there's this contempt—this visible discontent—for ordinary people among the elite that drives a lot of their policies. And then the third thing, the most important, is that when you go to a place like Yale, you've succeeded all your life, and you're not capable of humility. You're not capable of self-reflection, okay? So in 2016, when Trump won, that was a pivotal moment in Western history. At that point, the elite could have said, "Listen, why did Trump win? Well, it was probably because of inequality. It was probably because we bailed out Wall Street in 2008," right?

We should have bailed out the homeowners, but instead we bailed out Wall Street. So it's our fault that the people elected Trump. This is a wake-up call for us. It's time for the elite to start working for the masses again. Instead, what happened? The elite said, "Oh, it's because Trump's a Putin spy. It's because he's a spy. And Russiagate, this hoax, will prove that he's a spy. So it's not our fault. Oh, also, Trump cheated. It's because of Facebook." So they found all these pretexts to disguise the fact that Trump won because of mismanagement by the elite. And so we have this class in America and Europe who are extremely arrogant. They live in their own bubble. They're mediocre, but they think they're superior, and they're incapable of any humility or empathy. And that's why we are where we are.

## #Glenn

Well, when you said this, I just pulled up a quote by Professor Richard Rorty, because he was making a similar point back in the '90s. When economic liberalism and the globalization of the 1990s were gaining speed, he wrote this paragraph in his book, which I thought was great. Essentially, he was predicting that excessive economic liberalism under globalization would produce some political radicalism. So he wrote, and here's the quote: "Members of labor unions and unorganized and unskilled workers will sooner or later realize that their government is not even trying to prevent wages from sinking or to prevent jobs from being exported."

Around the same time, they'll realize that suburban white-collar workers, themselves desperately afraid of being downsized, aren't going to let themselves be taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else. At that point, something will crack. The suburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for strongmen to vote for—someone willing to assure them that once he's elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots. Once the strongman takes office, no one can predict what will happen. Unquote. This is 1998. This is... yep.

## #Jiang Xueqin

Oh, can you describe better what happened? Yep, that's exactly what happened. Exactly.

## #Glenn

So this is rooted in globalization and the excesses of economic liberalism—is that what caused the problems that brought in the strongmen, or how?

## #Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, look, I mean, you go back to the 1970s. If you were living in the West at that time—Australia, Canada, Europe, America—you had the best life, right? You just worked in a factory, and your wife could stay at home and, you know, look after the kids. You had three kids, two cars, you could vacation in the winter and in the summer, you probably had a cottage. All three of your kids could go to university. And we're talking about just a factory worker here, a single household. But then you get the Reagan Revolution, the rise of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and then the rise of neoliberalism, which allowed for the concentration and consolidation of wealth in the top 1%. You also had globalization, so wealth was being transferred from the developing world into the developed world to create these speculative financial products like derivatives. So it all went wrong with the Reagan Revolution and the rise of neoliberalism. And that's the root of all the issues we have today.

## #Glenn

So what are we looking at there, then? Because I think people often get too focused on whatever Trump says today or this week. But what do you see on the wider spectrum? Again, take a step back—are we looking at the meltdown of the existing international order? Both the economic and security aspects, I mean, the political system—what are you seeing here?

## #Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so the idea that Mark Carney has, right—like, you know, we'll just pivot to China—it's not going to work. And the reason why is that China doesn't want to be the hegemon of the world. It doesn't want to be the military superpower. It doesn't want to control the seas the way America does. The American empire was a unique moment in history, and it was really not sustainable. The idea that one country could control the entire planet—for technology, for the military, and for finance—was just not sustainable in the long term. It really hurt America. It caused America to be overextended, to be overleveraged, and that led to a lot of economic issues in the U.S., which allowed for the rise of Trump. So we're just witnessing the breakdown of the multilateral world, and there's no replacement.

And what this means is more conflicts around the world, specifically between Russia and America. But, you know, there's talk of America attacking Iran at any point—that's one thing we might see. The second thing is the breakdown of global trade. More countries will retreat into themselves and

impose tariffs to protect their local economies. You'll also see environmental catastrophes. There was this giant snowstorm that engulfed America, and this is going to be the new normal. We're going to see radical climate change over the next few years that will strain countries' resources, forcing them to become more militaristic—for example, in the case of Japan—but also much more protectionist. So this is the reality we're moving toward.

And it's very similar to the world in the 1930s—the Great Depression, right before the start of World War II. It seems that all sides are moving toward a major global conflict. Right now, it's really a question of who should take which side. You have Russia on one side, America on another. The question is where the other powers will align. Unfortunately, I think what's going to happen is complete chaos, where the sides won't be so clear. Different countries will choose different alliances, and these will be shifting over time. China will try to play both sides. The UK and Europe will try to play both sides. So it'll be a very dynamic geopolitical struggle.

## #Glenn

Well, it reminds me of what Kennan wrote in his Policy Planning Staff memorandum in 1948. He made the point that the U.S. had about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6% of its population. So this would, well, more or less, require some manipulation of the system, because people would be envious and resentful. And again, it's not just that they're resentful, but that maintaining this skewed distribution of power—which was extremely skewed because, again, it was the outcome of World War II—was never meant to endure. But you did say that China wouldn't simply be in a position to replace the United States.

And this is something Brzezinski wrote in the 1990s as well—that the U.S. as a global hegemon is something the world has never seen and will likely never see again after the United States. It's a very unique circumstance in history. The fact that we built a whole ideology around the idea that it would be permanent is just beyond radical, given how unique it was. However, how do you see the rise of China now? Well, not just the rise of China—the rise of Asia, with China spearheading the whole thing. How do you think these Asian economies would behave differently from the European ones? In other words, is there something about Asia that would make it act differently, or would every state behave the same way under the same distribution of power?

## #Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, I'm not too optimistic that the century belongs to East Asia. I know there's a lot of talk about an East Asian century because South Korea, Japan, and China have the most dynamic economies. They certainly have the best and most rigorous education systems, and everyone admires how hardworking and studious East Asian students are. But look, the reality is that Westerners like to argue. Westerners are very open; there's a free media, and people are aware of the issues in the

West. Whereas in East Asia, people are much more shy, much more deferential to authority. The media is more controlled, and East Asians don't like to debate as openly. So Westerners are less aware of the issues in East Asia.

But let me list some issues facing East Asia that are extremely dire, okay? The first is the demographic issue. You have an aging crisis in East Asia, where people are living longer. In fact, East Asians probably have the longest lifespan of any demographic group. So that's one. But the other thing is that East Asians aren't having children. The fertility rate in East Asia is the lowest in the world. In South Korea, it's as low as 0.6—I think it's gone up a bit, but it went as low as 0.6. In Japan, it's around 1. In China, it's about 1 as well. Replacement level, of course, is 2.1. So in 100 years' time—or even 20 years' time—these countries won't have many young people anymore.

So that's a huge, huge problem that needs to be addressed—but really can't be. Think about the amount of money South Korea has thrown at this issue, okay? They're offering tens of thousands of dollars to young couples to get married and have children, and it's still not solving the problem. Young people in South Korea look at society and see a stagnant, corrupt, unequal system that's extremely competitive, hierarchical, and unfair. So they're like, you know, "Okay, if I have children, my child isn't going to have a better life than me. So what's the point of having a child?" And that's true across East Asia.

And I'm sorry, but if young women are not having children, that's a vote of no confidence in society. So for people to say that East Asia is going to dominate the world—explain to me why and how, when young women are not getting married and refuse to have children. So I say that's number one. Number two is that these countries are where they are because of a high savings rate. South Korea, Japan, China—they export more than they consume. But let's just assume that markets in the West—America, Europe—can only afford so many goods from East Asia. What's going to happen to these East Asian economies? Well, they probably won't do very well. And China has been talking for a long, long time about shifting to a consumption-based economy. But look, the Chinese save about 40% of their household income.

Why do they do that? Because they have very little faith in the economy and in the growth of their country. They don't believe in the welfare or pension system. They think, "When I get old, the government's not gonna take care of me—I need to take care of myself." It's a very pessimistic attitude, and that's why they don't spend any money. But if people aren't spending any money, you can't actually grow the economy. And that's an issue the Chinese government has been trying to solve for a long, long time. They can't do it because of cultural values and the political system. The third thing I'll point out is that in a world of global conflict—and we can expect that a lot of global conflict will arise in the Middle East—oil will be cut off to East Asia.

In East Asia, the economy depends on oil from the Middle East, so East Asia is not as wealthy as other parts of the world. The Americas—the Western Hemisphere—are extremely wealthy. But if their economies were to be embargoed, they would face a lot of issues. That's point number three.

Point number four is that South Korea, Japan, and China have never historically gotten along well; they've always been in conflict. So if America were to retreat from Southeast Asia—if there were no major hegemon to maintain peace there—we could expect conflict to arise very quickly between Japan, China, and South Korea. For these reasons, I'm actually not optimistic about Southeast Asia in the next few decades. In fact, I'm very, very pessimistic.

## #Glenn

Yeah, the divisions between the countries are quite interesting. It seems that for the Russians, for example, the most difficult relationship to have in Northeast Asia would be with Japan. But for Japan, the relationship with Russia actually seems to be one of the better ones by comparison. Just look at the differences they have with the South Koreans, North Koreans, and Chinese. However, it's interesting—when you talk with political economists, they often point out that you shouldn't measure the strength of states only by military power; you also have to look at the economy.

But if you bring in some sociology there, it also shows that GDP and economic numbers don't always reflect the health of a country either. That's why South Korea is such an interesting example—it's often hailed as one of the most modern countries in the world if you measure things like robot density, how many robots per individual, and so on. I'd probably put it at number one in terms of modernity, or at least near the top. However, if you look at society, what does that mean? It also means they have one of the lowest birth rates in the world. I think it's around 0.62—something terrible like that.

It might have changed, of course. They're also at the top in suicides. And I think they still have a minister of... of loneliness. You see the media every now and then writing about the crisis and the loss of meaning. So it does beg the question—what does this mean? As you thrive the most, you also begin to end your own existence. It reminds me a bit of the work of people like Émile Durkheim, who wrote about industrialization in France in the 19th century—that in the areas where they industrialized the most, suicides went up. So how do you make peace with this—that the more a human being thrives, the worse it does?

And it goes back a little bit, often, to the argument about whether or not the excesses of modernity show that human beings aren't only rational individuals—that we have instincts as well. We're group animals, essentially, which doesn't always do well under this kind of economic liberalism. Society, in a sense, becomes an appendage to market forces. Is this a key issue for... because, also, look at China—it's stormed ahead from being essentially a peasant country to, in forty years, becoming the leading economy on such a massive scale, extremely modern. I mean, it's quite shocking when you go there and see where they are now. Is it the human component that gets lost under, I guess, such uncontrolled rapid growth?

## #Jiang Xueqin

I completely agree. I think that if we're to survive and thrive as a species, we humans need to abandon these neoliberal values that have made us miserable. You know, today we're seen as consumers—like the more you consume, the more value or status you have in society. And that's completely wrong, okay? Because it's made us miserable. It's made us lonely. It's made us disconnected. It's made us alienated, right? It's made us depressed. Think about the mental health crisis consuming the entire world—especially in China. You mentioned suicide in South Korea, right? The suicide rate among Chinese students is absurd, and the level of depression among Chinese high school students is just off the wall.

So clearly the system is not working. As you say, what we need to do is recalibrate our values and find what is meaningful and purposeful in our lives. That means embracing our spirituality, embracing our community. And that's also what accounts for the rise of Trump, because he's presenting a new vision that gets people excited. Now, you can say it's racist, you can say it's fascist, but ultimately he's addressing fundamental human needs. And quite honestly, if the elite—if the powers that be, the one percent—refuse to engage the people, if the elite refuse to help people reconnect spiritually as a community, then we're doomed as a species. That's the reality we live in.

If things go the way they're going—if things just follow current trends, okay, and we ignore war—then eventually we're going to die off as a species, because no one's going to have children and we're all going to destroy ourselves out of loneliness. So we need, as a society, as a world, as a species, to come together and talk about what gives us meaning and happiness. And quite honestly, the answer is children. How can we construct a society around children, around families, around ensuring that children have a happy childhood and become creative individuals who are resilient and empathetic? That's the conversation we should be having right now.

## #Glenn

Yeah, I often think about Solzhenitsyn, because he was—you've probably seen his Harvard speech in 1978. It was very critical of communism, for very good reasons. He was invited to Harvard essentially to go after the communists, and instead he gave this speech where he made the point that everything is seen as capitalism versus communism, but they're both suffering from the same thing—to some extent, the excesses of the modern and the ignoring of the pre-modern. He pointed out that both capitalism and communism were hollowing out the spirituality in man and essentially treating him as a machine. And by doing so, we're measuring success with all the wrong indicators.

But just as a last question—if the US wants to restore its dominance, it can, of course, go after China, which it does, but also try to reorganize the various regions of the world. A key target then appears to be Iran. How do you see what's happening there at the moment? Because it's quite concerning. If you're in Iran, you see that the United States and Israel kind of attacked you—it didn't work—so they stopped the war. Now they're regrouping and preparing for another attack. The

assumption is they'll just keep coming for you until they can knock you out. And the whole idea that this was simply about a nuclear program—the Americans have kind of pushed that aside, and they're more open now: they want regime change.

But if you look at the different political groups they're supporting, they're quite contradictory. There's no consensus between them, which makes me think there's no realistic opposition they can actually put in power. In other words, any person they put in place will begin to fragment. It would be a failed state; it might even split up. But is that the objective then? Because if the objective is to destroy and break up Iran to make it more manageable, Iran is facing an existential threat, and they should respond very differently—more aggressively—when the next attack comes. They can't just push back the Israelis and Americans, then stop the fighting and let them regroup and come back to do it over and over again until they're able to destroy Iran. So I think we should be more worried about what's happening now with Iran.

## #Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, so the intention of the Israelis and Americans is, I should say, to destroy Iran and break it up into different states, because there's a lot of ethnic diversity in Iran anyway, so it's pretty easy to do so. That's the plan. What they're underestimating is the resilience, the resourcefulness, and the unity of the Iranian people. The attitude of the Iranian government is vastly different from last year. Last year, I think there were a lot of overtures to the Americans and the Israelis—they wanted to sit down and negotiate. Now the attitude coming from Iran is, "We're going to fight. And if you hit us, we're going to fight to the end, okay? No more compromise, no more reciprocity."

If you attack us, we will fight to the end. You know, the Iranian cabinet recently trolled Trump, right? Because when those protests were spreading throughout Iran earlier this month, Trump tweeted that the protesters would be protected because they had the right to protest for freedom and democracy. Now, Khamenei, I think two days ago, because of what happened in Minnesota, tweeted that those protesters also had the right to protest and that Iran would defend them. So he was just showing the hypocrisy of Donald Trump and the Americans. This is trolling. So I think the attitude of the Iranians is, you know, we had these illusions before that peace could be negotiated.

We had these illusions that the Americans didn't really want war. Now we're fully awake. Now we know their intentions, and now we're clearly unified—we'll fight to the end. OK, the twelve-day war. The Israelis really believed that if they decapitated the regime, it would fall like a house of cards, right? So they went after the senior leaders in Tehran, and they were surprised by how resilient the regime was, because those senior figures were quickly replaced. Then the Iranians struck Tel Aviv and Israel really hard—so much so that eventually Israel had to beg the Americans to come in and negotiate a peace.

But in the process, Israel basically destroyed its own intelligence network in Tehran. I mean, after the war, the Iranians very quickly figured out where the intelligence leaks were. Now you have these

protests that were engineered by Mossad. What started these protests earlier this month was currency speculation. Basically, speculators working with foreign intelligence—CIA, Mossad—sank the Iranian currency, which triggered these organic protests. Then Mossad agents infiltrated the protests and started attacking the security services. They killed a lot of police officers, basically.

And Trump was about to launch airstrikes to back up these protests, because this is a classic color-revolution playbook. But what surprised everyone was that the Iranians managed to shut off the internet, locate the Starlink terminals, and then arrest all the Mossad agents—basically shattering the network that Mossad had spent years developing in Iran. So, the last step—the last thing the Americans can do now—is stage a false flag to trigger an attack against Iran. The Iranians are prepared for this, and the Israelis and the Americans are desperate. And you'd be surprised—I think everyone's going to be surprised—by how forceful the Iranians will be this time.

Everyone believes that after decades of sanctions, after decades of embargoes, the Iranians are pretty weak. But if you look at Iranian history, the Persians are a different people. The Persians are not Arabs. The Shia Muslims are different people; they are not Sunni Muslims. These are people who believe in martyrdom, in self-sacrifice, in eschatology. They truly believe this is a war against the Great Satan, a war to save the world. And I think the Americans and the Israelis will be really surprised by what happens when they start to attack Iran.

## #Glenn

I was in Iran back in May, right before the Israelis attacked. And I was also struck by how, when you go to different places, the idea of martyrdom is so celebrated. And that's not something you want to see in an adversary, I guess—you'd rather see some weakness. So this could be a problem for those going after Iran. But overall, what you're describing with Iran is part of a wider problem, I think, because I also hear from Moscow that they no longer believe in any of the peace efforts by the Americans. Even if they put together a peace deal to end the war in Ukraine, most likely the intelligence agencies will never leave. They'll still try to build up and prepare just a sea of missiles for whatever comes next.

And this is a problem, because if the United States and the Europeans, for God's sake, want peace with Iran, with China, with Russia, you'd want to see some diplomatic process—something that tries to chart out a new, mutually acceptable status quo where we can coexist. You'd have to identify where our competing interests can be harmonized and where they can't, but at least manage the competition in a civilized way. I don't see any of that at all. I just see an effort to put a pin in it because we're losing, then regroup and strike later. Do you know if they're seeing it the same way in Beijing? Because in Tehran and Moscow, this is definitely what I'm picking up.

## #Jiang Xueqin

Yeah, because when an empire declines, the defining characteristic is hubris—just blindness to the world as it is, complete confidence in your own capacity to impose your will on it, and a disrespect for your opponents. A refusal to engage them in serious discussion. Just conquests. Um, so, America has become just a blatant mafia state, and everyone says that—even its own allies. Mark Carney, at the World Economic Forum—there's no greater American ally than Canada, really, because Canada's basically a vassal state to America. So for the prime minister of Canada to criticize America as a mafia state in that way, I think the entire world now sees America as hopeless.

## #Glenn

It's almost impressive how Canada, the most loyal—perhaps of all America's allies, also due to geography, which makes sense—but they're still able to alienate the Canadians. This is extraordinary to me. Of course, by threatening to annex their whole country, that seems to be a good reason—or a good approach toward doing so. It does beg the question: if this is deliberate, what exactly is being done? Because I have a hard time believing the U.S. can actually annex Canada. I can't imagine many Canadians being for this. So how exactly is this going to work out, if we recognize the appeal of nationalism in human nature? You can't just shift the country under U.S. rule. I don't know—sorry, just a last question there. You're Canadian. How do you see this? Is this a genuine idea that they can annex Canada, or is this some game I'm not understanding?

## #Jiang Xueqin

Right. So again, for the longest time, the world was run on consensus. It was based on shared assumptions and values, right? And one shared assumption was the idea of national sovereignty—that if it's a country, you need to respect that country's sovereignty. That's the underlying basis of international law. If you don't have the idea of sovereignty, you can't have international law. So for the longest time, that was the idea.

But Trump, being Trump, refuses to acknowledge sovereignty. Okay, so for example, the kidnapping of Maduro—you don't do that, because you're violating a country's national sovereignty. And then to take Maduro, parade him in New York City, and charge him with American crimes—okay, this guy is the president of another state. He's the head of a nation-state. You cannot do this, again, according to international law. But Trump doesn't care. Okay, so Trump doesn't care about international law; he just cares about power. Now, if he doesn't care about international law, it's probably possible for him to go take Greenland. It's not hard. It's easy for him to take Canada as well, because Canada doesn't really have a military.

And the Canadian–U.S. border is the longest border in the world. Plus, you have Alberta, which is the real source of the Canadian economy. The Canadian economy is about to go bankrupt because of real estate speculation, for a variety of reasons. So the Canadian government is in a lot of trouble. Alberta will probably have a referendum for independence, and maybe 20% will vote for it—not to

be annexed by the United States, but for independence. Trump will say, "Ha, you see, the Albertans want to be independent and the Canadians won't let them. So we need to defend Alberta. We need to support the sovereignty and the freedom and democracy of Alberta." Okay?

So it's easy for Trump to do this. He can annex Canada at any point. This has been true for the past 300 years. The reason America doesn't do that is because if you did, the very illusion that America is a force for good in the world would shatter. The entire world would unify against you. South America would start to rebel, Europe would start to unite against you. That's why you don't do it—because if you did, you'd break all international norms, and everyone would see you as the major threat. But at the end of the day, Trump's going to do it, because that's who he is. He wants the façade that he's the emperor—the God Emperor Trump.

### **#Glenn**

So Alberta is the Greenland of Canada—just like Greenland is for the Danes. This is the weak spot. If you can make it secede, or back the secession, then that's how you break it up. So, well, perhaps. Let's see how this plays out. Anyway, Professor Zhang, as always, thank you so much. I know not just me, but all the viewers as well really appreciate your analysis. So thank you very much.

### **#Jiang Xueqin**

There's a lot.