

Collective West Just Declared War On The Global South | Dr. Jeff Rich

Munich was a real mask-off moment. Colonial goals are again official policy in the US and Europe. After a room full of collective westerners applauding the insane speech of Marko Rubio in Munich, one can only expect the worst for the years to come. They want their colonial empires back. I unpack all of this with Jeff Rich, the Australian historian behind "The Burning Archive" on Substack and YouTube. Links: Jeff Rich Substack The Burning Archive: <https://jeffrich.substack.com> Jeff Rich YouTube The Burning Archive: <https://www.youtube.com/@theburningarchive> The Burning Archive podcast on Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3Wg0cDuWZGF7LVm3czaOFc> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic> Merch & Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:01:26 Rubio speech and Western Reconquista frame 00:09:04 Colonialism then and now in practice 00:15:25 UN decolonization norms and armed struggle 00:19:16 Algeria reparations push and African currency control 00:27:52 Europe reactions and the Munich applause debate 00:43:07 Soft power collapse and return to open empire talk 00:55:09 Closing and where to follow Jeff Rich

#Pascal

Welcome everybody back to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and today I'm joined by my friend and colleague Jeff Rich, an Australian historian and the author of **The Burning Archive**, a wonderful Substack and now also a YouTube channel. Actually, I could have put that one here too, but it has both. He writes and makes video content about historical issues and contemporary politics, connecting them with historical themes.

The one we want to talk about today is the—again, the Rubio speech. Not just the speech, but the whole kind of return of the West to this colonial past that we thought was over, right? After decades of decolonization—which he also wrote about, the decolonization of Africa—we now seem to be back, thoroughly, in a moment when the leader of the West, the Foreign Secretary of the United States, thinks it's okay to just blatantly call for more, not neocolonialism, but classic colonialism, and to ratchet up some emotions in Europe to help with that. So, Jeff, with this introduction, welcome back to the show.

#Jeff Rich

It's lovely to be back with you, Pascal.

#Pascal

So, what did you make of this? What's your take on the—not neocolonial, but classic colonial—speech and rhetoric coming out of the United States these days?

#Jeff Rich

Well, in my Substack article, and in the video as well, I described it as the Western Reconquista, referring to the process in Spain by which the Christian powers slowly recaptured the country over time—about 500 years, actually—culminating in 1492, just as Columbus was about to sail the ocean blue to “found and build the Americas,” according to Marco Rubio. That was the year of the capture of Granada and the expulsion of the Muslims and the Jews. So it’s a very significant event, and it’s been sentimentalized quite a lot in Spanish history, particularly by Generalísimo Franco, the leader of the Falangist, fascist government after the Spanish Civil War, who was the dictator of Spain from 1936 to 1975. He explicitly described both his fight against communism and his effort to reclaim Spanish greatness in the ideology of the Reconquista.

And indeed, he was actually the commander of the Spanish-African forces—the Spanish-African colonial forces. That was his power base as well. So I sort of make the comparison between this and that same kind of sentimentalized story of Western and American history, and an explicit praise not just of Western colonialism but also of Western civilization in a very monocultural sort of way. It’s described as, you know, Christian culture—Western European, largely. There’s not a lot of Eastern Europe in there. You know, the classic, kind of 1950s–1960s Western civilization course version of Western civilizational history.

And to me, the United States, through Marco Rubio, is really talking about a reconquista—not just of, you know, the global majority, the former colonized world, reestablishing control over Russia and China and Africa, but also a reconquista of Europe itself. The National Security Strategy explicitly talks about healthy nations in Europe that respect Western civilization, respect traditions, all that sort of stuff, and dislike migration. And they’re the ones who can join the fight with the United States against what’s framed as civilizational erasure. So it’s really very moral, almost religious rhetoric, but also rhetoric justifying empire. And, of course, the other irony is that Columbus didn’t only sail to the Americas immediately after the reconquest.

In many ways, the approach of the Spanish Empire in America was partly inspired by the same kind of religious zeal at times as well. So there are lots of parallels there, but it's also just... I think it's really quite—well, it's frightening, really, that the United States should engage in this kind of rhetoric and so explicitly disavow the last 75 or 80 years of decolonization since 1945, and to dismiss that as, you know, anti-colonial uprisings inspired by godless communism. And the only thing that’s vaguely reassuring about it is that some of that rhetoric isn’t all that new. I mean, that was the rhetoric of the Cold War too, and it’s perhaps a reminder that the United States has always had a very ambivalent relationship to decolonization.

#Pascal

I mean, the United States was very happy to see decolonization in places that were under the control of some of its competitors or potential competitors, right? Especially the UK and France. At the same time, the United States never bothered to decolonize Puerto Rico. It never bothered. It actively fought against decolonization processes elsewhere, especially where those processes went hand in hand with socialist ideas. And those were very, very bloody. Just to remind us of what happened in Indonesia—over a million dead in the U.S.-supported Suharto crackdown on this kind of anti-colonial movement, and on and on and on.

And of course, the Vietnam War was basically a reassertion of colonial dominance by Westerners. In this case, it was kind of handing over the baton from the French to the Americans, which is very reminiscent of how the handover went in the Philippines, right? But 60 or 70 years earlier, when the Spanish were about to be kicked out, they brought in the Americans, and then the Filipinos lost the war—not against the Spanish, but against the militarily superior Americans. So we see that time and again. And in Africa, you had a whole different kind of subversive neocolonialism, also interwoven with the debt trap of the IMF and World Bank.

So, I mean, colonialism never ended. And one of the biggest mistakes in Europe is to believe that colonialism, just like, you know, feudalism, are these terms from the past, from the medieval ages, right? And yes, feudalism in Europe is over. The only feudal remnants we still have are the aristocratic houses and the kings and queens and so on in Europe, but they're not systemically relevant anymore. They're more like rich people from days past. But colonialism is still very much with us, systemically. Can you maybe talk a little bit about the traits or the ways in which we still see colonialism today—maybe also from your native Australia, or looking at it from a Pacific perspective?

#Jeff Rich

Well, look, absolutely. I mean, people often say there's been 500 years of European colonialism, and I think there's an important mistake there that particularly American commentators tend to forget, which is that America was a colonizing power too—not just with Cuba and the Philippines or whatever, but really from the start. Part of the impetus for the 1776 revolution was the frustration of the local elites with the constraints being placed by the British on, um, American expansion to the west, which was also American dispossession of the Native nations. So America colonized the North American continent over a period of, whatever it is, about 100 years or so, which is often described as the closing of the frontier, but it also includes the conquest of half of old Spanish Mexico in the 1840s, and the sort of—well, the genocide, not to put too fine a point on it—of the various Native nations.

And in fact, it's the conflict with the Native nations that in part underpins the original Monroe Doctrine back in 1823. The United States has always been a colonial power, and even today it still is, because there are 17 non-self-governing territories left in the world, controlled by France, Britain,

and the United States. There's not a lot of population there, but they're still there. So the United States' record, in terms of being a colonial power and also being a pretty unprincipled and inconsistent supporter of decolonization, is pretty patchy.

And the other thing is, you know, people talk about 500 years of European colonialism, but colonialism existed both before and after the period of European dominance—post-1492, with Vasco da Gama going to India, Columbus and the conquistadors going to the Americas and taking over those societies. It's had many forms, shapes, and characteristics during that time. The nature of British colonialism within that period itself was different; Spanish colonialism was different. And, you know, the different colonies had very different experiences.

The experience of Australia as, you know, a colony, and then, you know, a dominion, and then a fully fledged nation—and then perhaps a new colony of the United States in more recent times—is very different from the experience of somewhere like Mexico or the African nations, which were largely colonized formally in the 1880s, but had previously been subjected to all forms of imperial power and influence, not least through transatlantic slavery. So I guess there are many forms of colonialism, and although there's very little, if you like, at a political or constitutional level, formal control of one country by another, it still does exist. New Caledonia in the Pacific is still a colony of France, but it's pretty uncommon these days.

But there's this thing that people often refer to as neocolonialism, which is perhaps most simply described as controlling a country without seeming to control it—controlling it through economic practices, political elites, media control, and things like that. That sort of colonialism, I guess, is still persistent. And as you say, the story of decolonization is not over. It's not over formally, in the sense that there are still those 17 self-governing territories, including Guam and places like New Caledonia. I think one of the most scandalous ones is Gibraltar in Spain, which Britain took over in 1707 and still claims. But that process isn't over either, and there's still a UN Committee on Decolonization.

In fact, just a day or two after Marco Rubio gave his speech praising Western colonialism and dismissing all the efforts of decolonization, the UN Secretary-General was actually speaking at the African Union conference at the same time, and struck a very different tone—condemning colonialism and supporting the efforts of, I guess, global majority nations to seek reparations for it. There's been a lot of movement around that in recent times as well. But perhaps we can talk about that, because some of the most interesting responses to Rubio's speech, I think, have come not so much from Europeans or Americans, but from how the speech has gone down in decolonized countries—in India, in Africa, and around the world.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, precisely. I mean, this cannot go down well. And, you know, one of the reasons why in the UN—I want to say in the UN Charter, but I'd need to look that up—but in the UN system, it's generally accepted that decolonization and the anti-colonial struggle are legitimate principles of

modern international law. And, you know, even armed struggle against colonialism is explicitly condoned by the UN system as it exists today. I want to say it's in the UN Charter, but again, I'd have to check if it's actually there or not. Still, it's the general practice. And that's not in the UN system because the enlightened European and North American countries suddenly realized their mistakes and wrote it in there. No—it's in there because it was fought for and defended by what we today call the Global South, or the global majority, who then joined India.

#Jeff Rich

Absolutely. I mean, it was partly given impetus by India's independence in '47, clearly, but then the Bandung Conference in '55 was a very important marker. And in 1960, there was—I'm not sure of the exact title—oh, what was it called? The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which was a resolution of the UN General Assembly.

And that set up the Special Committee on Decolonization, and, you know, there are like a hundred-odd extra countries that have joined the United Nations over that period of time—most of them in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. Portugal, for example, shut down its African empire, but also East Timor, very close to Australia, in 1975, after the sort of, you know, technocratic fascist dictator Salazar was removed from office. So yeah, it's a really integral part of the system. And indeed, the UN has been declaring decades for the eradication of colonialism since 1990. We're now in the fourth decade for the eradication of colonialism. And shamefully, in this decade, we have a speech like Marco Rubio's. I mean, it's just shameful.

#Pascal

We're doing a very, very poor job at that. I mean, there are still 14 African countries that have their currencies printed in Paris—14!—that use the colonial franc. It's quite insane. And it still functions in the same way: it basically gives France leverage over the exchange rate, which means they can manipulate it to extract the resources and wealth of these nations for way, way under market value. It's really quite astonishing. And this is a direct tool of pressure.

And if you look at the French, you know, all their foreign policy speeches—for instance, about Algeria—they're still so bitter about the Algerians and that bloody independence struggle. More than a million dead there as well, having won their independence from the "mothership." And they're still, to this day, bitter about it. It's like... it's surprising that this is the case, and that it's not a topic in the West. It's not. Again, the Europeans are Europeans on the ground—like, I was in Switzerland just a week ago—you know, it's not a topic, it's not an issue, it's not something on anyone's mind. Again, colonialism is long gone in the minds of most people.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, well, it's interesting you should mention Algeria in that regard, because late last year Algeria passed a law basically condemning the crimes of colonialism. Algeria was colonized by France from the 1830s. And just as a curiosity to connect to something many viewers might know about—Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote the famous book **Democracy in America** during his travels in the 1830s—he was an active advocate of colonization in Algeria, explicitly saying, you know, “Sure, we burn villages. Sure, we starve people. Sure, we do all these war crimes. But it’s still in pursuit of French greatness.”

So, you know, even some of the icons of political theory—liberal democratic political theory—have said some pretty appalling things over the years about colonialism. But this Algiers Declaration is significant, as well as the law that was seeking reparations and declaring French colonialism a state crime. It was like the Algerian war between the '50s and the '60s—I think Algeria became independent in '62—which, as you say, was a really vicious war. In many ways, it was an early test case for some of the things we’re seeing going on in West Asia today and around the world.

So, psychological warfare techniques, really brutal media manipulation, but also the championing of violence—the Algerian independence struggle was supported by, you know, the left, like some of the leaders of Algeria photographed with Jean-Paul Sartre and that whole circle. And, you know, sort of Third World champions, I guess, around the world. So it is significant that Algeria has made this change, and there’s a lot of dialogue between France and Algeria right now around this law. There’s also a lot of pressure on Algeria to pull back from the claim for reparations from France over Algeria.

I guess its treatment, both during the long period of colonialism but especially through the Algerian war—which also included forced resettlement and all that sort of thing—was significant. But in addition, Algeria has sponsored what's called the Algiers Declaration against crimes of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid. And it's really notable. I mean, that was a declaration made in December 2025. The president of Ghana said at the UN General Assembly meeting—the September meeting, I think it was—where Donald Trump was complaining about the elevator and the teleprompter and how the UN didn’t take his contract for refurbishing the UN building. The Ghanaian president there also flagged that he would bring in a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly on the crimes of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid, including seeking reparations for that.

And that resolution is due to be brought in in March. And I do wonder—you know, I can only speculate—but the question about Rubio’s speech is, why now? I mean, in many ways, some of his Western civilization rhetoric and the unapologetic pride in Western civilization are very much in line with American conservative thought over a long time, which has been really energized in recent years by people like Douglas Murray and others. But you do wonder why the Secretary of State in particular would make such a big deal of being totally unapologetic about colonialism and not mention the word “slavery” once. And yet slavery, especially for the United States of America, was fundamental to, you know, 500 years of Western expansion.

So I do wonder whether there's a level of—given the speech also had a lot of pretty outrageous dismissal of the United Nations—you know, saying it was only because of American leadership that peace was found in Gaza and peace was found in Russia, or Russia and Ukraine, which is outrageous in itself. But there was a lot of dismissal of the United Nations. I do wonder if, in part, it's a kind of defensive positioning against this more assertive view coming out of the African Union, out of Algeria, and out of a whole range of countries seeking reparations or a response from the former colonizing powers to the unequal distribution of power and resources around the world.

#Pascal

I mean, what we're seeing at the moment is just a level of political violence in the world that I think we haven't seen in this way for a while—like, in this kind of blatant way. And, you know, the most dramatic one, of course, being the genocide in Gaza, right? And we cannot discuss modern colonialism without discussing that genocide and the way that white European settlers and American settlers are displacing the local population, right? And not only displacing them, but now mass exterminating them, with the outspoken, explicit goal of getting rid of them—dead or alive—from Gaza and, in the end, from the West Bank. It's utterly clear that that's what's happening, and that you have an expansionary, European settler-colonialist state spreading and wanting to get bigger.

I mean, we had the Mike Huckabee interview with Tucker Carlson just the other day, right? Where, again, like, the Bible—this kind of story of what somebody once said 3,000 years ago, and then 2,000 years ago, and 1,500 years ago when it was put together—at least the New Testament, as we have it today, was only a compendium, right? It was only put together around 1,600 years ago, at the first council. Yeah, I think that council. Anyhow, this idea that everything goes back to these holy texts—this is such a traditional way, actually, of colonialism justifying itself with holy scripture and whatnot. Not only the conquistador, but the crusader spirit, actually, that's embedded there.

And at the same time, what happened in Venezuela—and how the United States just frames its own right to go in and take out, even kidnap, a president of another state—the Monroe Doctrine, even invoking it. So I suppose we're at a point where the West is just so weak that it can't cushion all its misdeeds anymore in the language of, you know, humanitarianism. So either stop doing it or double down. And it seems the current leadership of the United States went for doubling down. My question to you is: what did you make of the Europeans? Because a lot of people, me included, interpreted the standing ovations they gave to Rubio as approval of what he said. But you actually, in your article, point out it's not that simple—they didn't take it as well as it might seem on the surface.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, yeah. See, I've been looking at the range of media analyses of the Rubio speech. In America, including the White House press coverage, they explicitly point out that Europeans don't usually clap for Americans, but they all gave Trump—or Rubio—a standing ovation. Also, Rubio's speech has been widely interpreted in the U.S. as positioning himself ahead of Vance, like he managed to do

what Vance was rather incompetent at doing last year: delivering a tough message to Europe that they actually clapped for. But I do think the standing ovation thing is a bit of a misreading of the situation, and that's partly just from having watched the event—there were a lot of Americans in that room.

There were about forty U.S. Congress members attending the Munich Security Dialogue, almost all of whom performed disgracefully. They did get up and stand at the end, but to me it was more of a pretty lukewarm version of "stormy applause," you know—the old phrase people used to describe how audiences reacted to Stalin's speeches in the Soviet Union. Everyone was terrified to be the last person to sit down and stop clapping. So yes, they got up and applauded, but not in a very enthusiastic way. And when there was applause earlier in the speech, it was pretty lukewarm too, with a lot of people just sitting there like that.

But more significantly, a lot of the commentary afterward—from various ministers, officials, and commentators—was basically, "Well, you know, yes, we're reassured that there's someone who doesn't come to Munich and grunt at us, but actually talks in reasonably civil language. Still, we're not entirely convinced by the argument." And in fact, the Munich Security Conference—which I keep wanting to call the Munich Security Dialogue, and I really don't know why I keep doing that—actually put out a record of the meeting, a sort of summary of the discussion, on their official website. And this is what it says there.

It says that for many, the speech given by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio only confirmed that Europeans could no longer rely on the U.S. and had to substantially ramp up investments in their own resources. While surprisingly conciliatory in tone, the speech did not close the gulf that J.D. Vance's speech opened up last year. So there are definitely, I think, different responses across Europe. Some people are saying, "Yep, this helps support our argument to increase expenditure on defense issues." There are a few sensible people like yourself, Pascal, who are saying, "Yes, told you so—the U.S. is unreliable, let's pursue a different foreign policy." And there are, I think, probably a lot of people who are also just quietly de-risking. You could see this in some of the conversations that the German foreign minister had, for example, with the Indian external affairs minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, at the conference.

They all sort of said, "Yes, yes, yes, Marco Rubio said that, that's very nice, but we're also pursuing other partners in the world. We're not one civilization. We're not all unified under the new Rome. We're pursuing our own course in the world." So I actually think, although there will be people who—well, you know, there's been a lot of focus, especially in the alternative media, on the Europeans clapping and just following along—I mean, obviously, I'm far, far away here in Australia, but I suspect that behind closed doors there's a lot of discussion about pursuing other partnerships. And to me, perhaps the biggest action there was the EU-India Free Trade Agreement from a couple of weeks ago, which was a pretty large sort of response to this kind of thing.

#Pascal

True. But, you know, when we discussed the reactions of Europe, one thing is not being happy with the attitude of the United States. But let's remember, the J.D. Vance speech last year was scolding the Europeans for not being pro-free speech, for cracking down on dissent, for being actually racist, going down the wrong path internally. It was not a criticism of them for being anti-colonial or something like that. So Rubio kind of brought in another aspect, which is the colonial aspect—and that's, in my view, not something the Europeans oppose very much.

On the contrary, right after recording this video with you, the next person I'll be talking to is my compatriot, Nathalie Jamp. "Countryman" is a weird expression, but yes, my compatriot Nathalie Jamp, who is Swiss on her mother's side and Cameroonian on her father's side. She's been a pan-Africanist and pan-African advocate all her life, saying, "Look, what France is doing to Africa, and what the colonial powers in Europe are doing to Africans, is still pretty much despicable. And actually, we Africans have been living under EU sanctions for the longest time."

And now, of course, she too has been sanctioned by France. She's been put on the Russian sanctions list, the EU sanctions list, and she now cannot go back home to Switzerland. She very much interprets that as just another version of old colonial Europe cracking down on any form of dissent—on its supposed legitimate right to, you know, be a garden and steward and shepherd the jungle, as Josep Borrell once put it. It's still ingrained very much in this European mindset, to the point where it's not even conscious, but it's very much omnipresent.

#Jeff Rich

Look, I agree, but I also think it's variable. And I guess there are two aspects to it. One, there are the sanctions against your compatriot and Jacques Baud. I saw an interview with Jacques Baud the other day, and it's just awful to think what he's going through. All of that is really bad and concerning. There just doesn't seem to be a strong enough constituency for a more decent political culture within Europe—one that's more respectful of dissent and multiple viewpoints. On the other hand, I think the United States' criticisms of Europe are deeply hypocritical. I mean, J.D. Vance's speech—well, the United States is currently sanctioning a minister or senior official of the European Union because they're implementing various policies around AI or media and digital services regulation.

#Pascal

And sanctioning four judges of the International Criminal Court—and the U.S. is sanctioning Francesca Albanese, the U.N. rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, right?

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

#Pascal

It goes on and on with these kinds of tools of colonial power, just cracking down on anti-colonial principles.

#Jeff Rich

And to some degree, it's also very much in the business interests of the tech oligarchs around Trump—the sort of AI industry, the Peter Thiel crowd, Elon Musk, and so on. So, a lot of this, you know, when Vance gave his speech in Munich last year, it was like two days after there'd been an international conference on the regulation of AI. And the United States was the one country in the world that said, "We're not going to cooperate with anyone on AI," controlling this out-of-control beast. So, the other aspect of it is the part of the Marco Rubios or the U.S. government's "Western Reconquista." It's a kind of reconquista in Europe—it's the prosecution of a conservative, nationalist, Western-civilizational view of Europe within Europe, including describing in the national security strategy some countries—Hungary, Italy, and so on—as, I think the actual term is, "the healthy nations of Europe." So it's all this sort of anti-migration rhetoric.

So it is—and not that I would endorse Jake Sullivan's general viewpoint on the world—but I heard a discussion with him the other day that said one of the distinctive things about this most recent national security strategy is that it so explicitly expresses a preference for one political side within the European community, in the foreign policy of the United States. And the national security strategy does that. And it's been supported by various interventions, like Rubio's, to potentially give Orbán money for his election, just as they had with Milei in Argentina.

It's supported—you know, there's been documentation of the State Department, USAID money being redirected into various pro—well, I don't want to say populist or nationalist, but sort of ethno-nationalist, pro-right-wing groups that are more sympathetic to the MAGA agenda in the United States. The sort of anti-migration agenda, the pro-Western civilization, conservative agenda within the United States. So the United States is, um, acting as a kind of imperial power within Europe. And this is part of the hidden message of the speech too—in a way, it was a plea for Europe to come back into the fold by saying, "We belong together." But the premise of it is that we, the United States and Europe, are one civilization.

And by implication, it's the United States that is leading that civilization. The United States very much sees itself as the heir of Western civilization. And, yeah, that is a kind of new imperial vision, I guess—a vision of one big Western civilization-state in which America is dominant and Europe is subordinate. But I just can't see how Europe's leaders—and, you know, several of them have said in more or less explicit ways—can really buy that. Even, you know, the entire chaos is pretty pro-America generally, right? Yet they've said they don't really support that sort of approach to things.

They're clearly constrained and limited in what they can do. But I just can't see that such a coercive, regressive, imperialistic, colonialistic sort of vision really being accepted in Europe or the rest of the world. And if Europe looks up from its current problems and asks anyone around the rest of the world, they'll say, "You don't have to follow along with this nonsense that you're one civilization with the United States." Europe contains many civilizations and many traditions, and it's more than capable of gradually getting out from under the thumb of the United States if it makes a few smart decisions.

#Pascal

I'm not sure they want to. I really think they're pretty happy under the thumb, pretty happy being part of that colonial project. It's more a question of flavor, right? While the United States serves you the Coke, Europe serves you the Pepsi—maybe a Fanta, right? Yeah, you get a different physical flavor on your tongue, but at the end of the road, it's still obesity waiting if you down all of that, chug it down. But the question to me is, is this an expression of the United States—and by extension, Europe—asserting a new dominance and trying to be more dominant? Or is it an admission that the implicit version of this, the neocolonial version—the IMF and World Bank version, the kind where we just infiltrate your countries and run them anyway—that that one has failed and is done and over?

And that, you know, framing Gaza as this glorious war of self-defense by this beaten-down people, the only democracy in the Middle East—that whole BS narrative has failed. It has terminally failed and is over, even if some still cling to it. So basically, okay, we need something new. Again, either we stop it or we double down. And basically, this is an admission of the failure of that implicit version of colonialism. So, back to the explicit version of it. But that means you're actually structurally at a weaker point. The moment you need to use weapons to assert that you're right is the moment when the soft power has failed to deliver.

#Jeff Rich

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Look, I do think it's, in a way, an admission—or a statement—from weakness. It's a statement from defeat, if you like. And in a way, that's similar to what, you know, Franco's vision of the Reconquista was as well. I mean, he had this dream of reviving the Spanish Empire forever, including in Latin America, etc., and it never really went anywhere. I suspect this new—what did he say?—the new Western century, the new American Western century, might suffer the same kind of fate, because they're speaking from a position of weakness. And even just that statement in the Munich meeting, the outcome of the Munich Security Dialogue—that, you know, yeah, we're not convinced. Nice speech, well-crafted, but we're not convinced; you're going to have to do better than that. And since then, you know, Macron's been to India.

Merck's going to China or India—I can't remember which one. When the EU-India free trade deal was struck, there was a lot of pride in Europe about that. At the same time, they did the big Latin American deal, Mercosur or whatever it is. But one of the striking things at the EU-India Free Trade Deal event was that there was Modi, there was Ursula von der Leyen, and there was the Council President—I can't remember his name—but he made a big thing of pointing out that he's Indian, you know, got out his Indian abroad passport because that's his heritage. So, I just think it's going to be a very difficult path for Europe to navigate, because the United States is, as you say, so violent, so brutalist, so preoccupied with itself, and so unpredictable at the moment.

And it might just be wishful thinking on my part, but I do think there are at least signs that people want to break out and are fed up with it. I think it would be a real tragedy for Europe—and a tragedy for the world—if they just said, "OK, let's just vote for whoever the next Democratic president will be, and that'll be fine." But I've heard in the rhetoric they've used, including around the time of Carney's speech, Ursula von der Leyen said, you know, this is a permanent change, and the change toward pursuing European independence needs to be permanent. Now, that's just rhetoric, but I suspect there's a lot of under-the-hood, boring stuff going on as well—like the India-EU free trade agreement—that will create more space for Europe to act independently.

And I certainly hope so, because it would be a tragedy for the world if Europe just submits to this kind of nonsense from the United States for much longer. But I might be too optimistic, because I'm also very persuaded by, you know, Neil Benilla's and others' arguments about the extent of interpenetration of the transatlantic elite. I guess my feeling is that the bunker, as Neil says, that's been created by that system isn't so solid. There are a lot of gaps and cracks, and it's not so well constructed. And there are a lot of things about it that people are a bit annoyed about, that they'll wriggle against over time. I can't be certain, but that's certainly my hope.

#Pascal

But, you know, if you look at the mindset—on the one hand, you can make the argument, as she does, as Neil Benilla does, that Europe is so thoroughly captured that even when it tries, or when it looks as if it's opposing the U.S. colonial approach, it's actually just following along in a different way. Right? And that goes hand in hand with these arguments by, um, by Brian Berletic, for instance, saying, like, look, whenever Europe says, "Oh, we're unhappy with the United States," actually what they end up doing is exactly what the United States wants. Once they increase the defense budget from one to two percent, then from two to five, and then buy more weapons—where do they buy them? Well, of course, in the United States. And where do they give the money to? Well, of course, to the proxy war in Ukraine.

So basically, the division of labor is just being implemented, just as Rubio said and told the Europeans a year earlier to do, right? You have to take more responsibility. The Ukraine war is your war now. We're directing it, but you've got to fight it—just as the Ukrainians are being used as

cannon fodder to physically fight it. And you get the okay for that. And then, when it comes to this colonial aspect—right?—I mean, just look at the reaction last year during the 12-day war in June against Iran, with Mr. Mertz calling it “the dirty work,” right? “Oh, they’re doing our dirty work.” All these ideas, these ideals of being against wars of aggression, of keeping to the UN Charter, and blah, blah, blah—everything that was a holy cow when it came to Russia invading Ukraine is suddenly out the window when it comes to the United States attacking Iran.

And right now, you know, the largest U.S. force is being built up in the Gulf against Iran again. And the Europeans... surprisingly quiet. Not only quiet—the most anti-imperialist thing they did was the Brits saying, “Maybe we’re thinking about you not being able to use Diego Garcia.” And we all know that, of course, the United States will, in the end, use Diego Garcia. Of course, there’s going to be an agreement, and of course, in the end, the Europeans—even if they don’t send their own troops—are going to support the United States with the rhetoric, come what may, and say, like, “It’s time to end the vile regime in Iran,” right? As they’ve been doing. So they’re signed up for it, at least mentally, it seems to me. Yeah, yeah, look, uh...

#Jeff Rich

I mean, yes and no. I think there’s absolute truth in that. But I was—and maybe it’s because, you know, for thirty-odd years I was a bureaucrat—so I’m very attuned to the way you can say, “Yes, yes, yes, of course, Minister, of course, Minister,” while also thinking, “This guy’s a fucking idiot.” Oh, sorry—yeah, I shouldn’t say that. Anyway, I was just reading this book about the conquistadors and the Spanish Empire, and there was this kind of legal doctrine used by a lot of people within the empire that went broadly along the lines of, “We obey, but we don’t implement laws.” It was basically a way of saying, “Yes, of course, we respect your imperial authority, Emperor Charles V, but we’re actually on the ground, and we know the local circumstances.”

And in your interests, we’re not going to do this silly thing you’ve asked us to do, because we know it’s actually not in your ultimate best interest. This doctrine was invoked by Cortés and all sorts of people to do some pretty dreadful things, but also by some who resisted the worst practices of the Spanish Empire. I do wonder whether there’s an element of seeming to go along with things while also, over time, putting sand in the wheels—slowing it down and sort of redirecting things. And indeed, just with, say, defence spending—Europe’s made its commitment to increase it, but it’s also defined defence spending in a way that can direct a fair bit of it into public infrastructure investment, which is partly military but also partly of civil benefit.

And there’s just been a huge argument in the last day or two between one of the U.S. ministers and Europe, saying, you know, what do you mean you’re going to spend this money on European weapons systems rather than American ones? You’re not allowed to do that. But that’s what Europe is actually doing. So they’ve sort of said, “Yes, yes, yes.” Or, you know, take the trade—the tariff fiasco with the United States. “Yes, we’ve agreed with your tariff arrangement,” but maybe we had a sneaking feeling it would all collapse in six months because you didn’t have constitutional authority.

So I do feel that when it comes to the way big issues between major states are conducted, there's often a lot more wiggle room behind what look like uniform positions than there really is. But maybe I'm just an old bureaucrat speaking.

#Pascal

I don't know. No, I'm also optimistic. And, you know, it's true. I mean, we take these bits and pieces of speeches and actions and try to put them into a coherent whole and read the great arc of history into it—which, especially in current affairs, is always a dangerous thing to do, because we tend to take the wrong arc, right? There tends to be one, but usually when we look back, we agree it wasn't that one. Anyhow, this was highly interesting, Jeff. Thank you very much for this. And maybe just let me remind everyone: if you want to find Jeff, please go to **The Burning Archive** on Substack or on YouTube. Jeff, is there any other place where people should follow you, find you, or where you'd want to direct them?

#Jeff Rich

There are two main places. The Substack—it's jeffrich.substack.com—but it's called **The Burning Archive**, which has been my old sort of, you know, internet name. I also, generally, with my articles on Substack—which can sometimes be a bit long—do voiceovers, and you can usually find those on Spotify or whatever podcast platform you like, and have a listen while you're out for an afternoon walk.

#Pascal

Everybody, go out to the platforms, find Jeff Rich, find **The Burning Archive** and his many contributions. Jeff, thank you very much for your time today. Thank you, Pascal.