US Retreats. Multipolar War Escalates. | Prof. Saul Takahashi

US alliances now look less like protection and more like danger. Pascal Lottaz speaks with international human rights lawyer Saul Takahashi about living through the UAE missile alerts, the Gaza genocide, US bases turning allies into targets, Japan’s risks, failed deterrence, and the breakdown of the old order. Links: Saul Takahashi Researchmap: https://researchmap.jp /saul_takahashi Neutrality Studies substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic) Merch: https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com Donation: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Timestamps: 00:00:00 Saul Takahashi and UAE experience 00:07:36 Gaza genocide and Gulf fallout 00:12:13 Neutrality law and legal gray zones 00:17:40 US bases as magnets in Gulf and Japan 00:26: 08 Takaichi Trump and Japan China ties 00:37:44 Proxy war risk and old order collapse 00:44:18 Regional security and multipolar shift 00:49:14 Colonialism clarity and public pressure

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today I'm joined again by my colleague, the international lawyer and human rights lawyer Saul Takahashi, a U.S.-Japanese dual national who's been practicing international and human rights law for a very, very long time. Saul, welcome.

#Saul Takahashi

Yes, hi. Thanks, Pascal. It's great to see you again, and thanks very much for having me.

#Pascal

It's great that we can do this again, because when we first met, you were actually in Japan, but then you changed track and moved to the UAE. You were in the United Arab Emirates until just a couple of days ago, and today we’re speaking on April 3rd. You were actually caught in the UAE when everything happened. Can you maybe give us a very short overview of your background, how you came to work in the UAE, what you did there, and we’ll take it from there?

#Saul Takahashi

Right. Okay, well, thank you. So, like you mentioned, I'm an international human rights lawyer. That's my specialty—international human rights law and international humanitarian law. I started my career working for Amnesty International in Tokyo, and then I went on to work for Amnesty International’s international secretariat—the international headquarters, if you like—in London. From

there, it was a natural career progression to the UN, where I held several posts. My last position was as deputy head of office of the UN Human Rights Agency in occupied Palestine.

That was from 2009 to mid-2014. I lived in Jerusalem, and my main office was in Ramallah. But of course, we had offices all over the West Bank and also in Gaza, so I traveled quite extensively throughout Palestine. Our main job was to document and report on human rights violations and provide those reports to bodies like the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, and so on. We also did some capacity building for Palestinian civil society and the PA. I left the UN in 2014 and came back to Japan.

#Saul Takahashi

I went back to NGO work for a little bit, but then from 2019 I was teaching full-time at a very small women's university in central Osaka. That continued until last August, when I moved to the UAE, like you mentioned, and took up a position as a visiting professor at New York University Abu Dhabi. It was a one-year position, and there was talk of an extension—it looked like it would be extended. Unfortunately, my job has become a victim of the war, I'm afraid. I was just told the other day that, with everything happening, they're going to have to cut back quite drastically on the visiting positions. So, unfortunately, I'm sort of out of a job. That's kind of bad news for me, but of course, it' s really nothing—it's a first-world problem.

And I can't compare it with what's going on in Gaza, of course, and Lebanon and the like. But like you mentioned—yes, I was caught, I was caught, if you like, in the UAE when all of this started. I think, like most people, I sort of expected it to end in a few days. And boy, was I wrong. I really do want to stress that I didn't feel unsafe in the UAE in any way. I mean, people react to these kinds of situations differently. I do feel some people were panicking, but, you know, people react to these situations in different ways. Of course, I was in Palestine; I've had these kinds of experiences—missiles flying over my head and having to evacuate. I mean, when you're in the UN in these kinds of places, this is just part and parcel of the whole thing.

So I wasn't—you know—I certainly didn't feel unsafe. Every now and then, maybe a couple of times a day, we'd get these deafening alerts on our phones. And then, after a few minutes, there'd be sounds of explosions in the air—those were the missiles being intercepted. So, you know, it was fine. I don't mean to belittle the tragedies, of course, because if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, the debris from those intercepted missiles comes down, obviously. It falls to the ground, and you can get hit. I think a few—I can't remember the exact number—but a small number of people have actually been killed because of that.

So, you know, that kind of thing can happen if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. But all in all, people were pretty much going about their normal lives. I mean, the shops were all open when I was there. There was plenty of food. You know, we're talking about a very wealthy country, obviously, and one that has a lot of logistical capacity—making sure there's a supply of everything

you need, from water to food to everything. So it was really quite normal. The malls were open, everything was fine.

It's just that, you know, NYUAD made the decision relatively early on that classes were going to go online for the rest of the term. And then, a few days later, the campus was closed out of an abundance of caution. I was living on campus, so that meant we had to evacuate. They put us in a hotel. And again—first-world problems—it was a disaster: a five-star hotel in the Gulf. I mean, there was a pool and a gym, and, you know, it was very nice. Again, we weren't lacking for anything, but it wasn't the kind of place you wanted to stay for months, doing your classes and that kind of thing. So we made the decision to leave.

And that was actually a little bit—again, I don't mean to make a big deal out of it—but there was some stress around that. Within the UAE it was fine, but the airport was very unpredictable. So, you know, leaving was a bit stressful. We weren't sure what was going to happen. There was a Japanese evacuation flight, but we couldn't get on it at first. And it was, you know, this kind of every few hours, "What's going to happen? What's going to happen?" kind of thing. But we were pretty fortunate in that we already had tickets to Europe that we'd booked way back in December because it was the midterm break.

So we had kept those tickets, and by the time our travel dates came around, the airport was more or less functioning okay. There were some scares until the very last minute, but we did manage to get on. And, you know, again, I don't mean to over-dramatize any of this. I don't mean to act like we were refugees with just the shirts on our backs, fleeing from Beirut. I mean, I spent a week in Paris living it up, and then I had the resources to come back to Japan. So, you know, I'm very lucky, and everything was fine.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this could happen again anytime. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack. That's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link's going to be in the description below. And now, back to the video. So, luckily, things worked out. And luckily, I mean also for the people still living in Abu Dhabi and Dubai and so on—it's not a humanitarian catastrophe. And as you said, the level of destruction and even the level of threat is infinitely smaller than what people in the genocide in Gaza are going through, right? The first time we spoke online was actually when the genocide was in its third or fourth month. We're now two years in, and we know that hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Gaza.

I mean, nobody who still has any kind of sense left would dispute that it's a genocide at this point. And if you then compare this to the level of warfare we're seeing right now—on the one hand, you have the US-Israeli attack on Iran; on the other hand, you have Iran striking back at targets in these allied nations, right? Yeah. They themselves host these US bases, they help the United States

logistically, but they don't send their own army or missiles into Iran. So we have this weird situation where the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain are basically acting as shock absorbers for the war the United States started. I mean, what was the sense on the ground from the people you talked to? Are they blaming Iran for what's happening, or are they blaming the United States for pushing the region over the brink?

#Saul Takahashi

Well, I think the general sense in the region—and I'm talking about the Gulf—is basically blaming both sides. I mean, that's certainly my impression of it. You know, getting into the international law aspect of this, the Gulf nations have stated repeatedly that they've prohibited the U.S. from launching attacks from bases in their countries. So their argument from the beginning has been that, yes, there are U.S. bases, but they serve different functions—they're defensive bases or whatever. So, you know, they're saying, "We, the Gulf nations, are not complicit in these attacks." And for sure, they're unhappy with the attacks on the Gulf.

I mean, excuse me—the attacks on Iran. And, you know, they tried to forge a diplomatic way forward, and they tried to discourage the U.S., and perhaps indirectly in many cases Israel, from launching these attacks. But the U.S. and Israel just went ahead without, it seems, even telling them. So they're very unhappy about that, for sure. But getting back to the international legal aspect, it's true that the international definition of aggression doesn't include just hosting bases. So as long as the U.S. isn't launching attacks from those bases, the Gulf nations certainly do have a point—that, legally speaking, they're not complicit in the attacks on Iran.

Now, I, as an international lawyer, you know, just sort of taking one step back from the situation in the Gulf—but as a lawyer, I have to say I'm a little bit uncomfortable with this. Because, you know, it is true when you look at the General Assembly resolution on the international definition of aggression, and you see that it was basically copied and pasted into the work of the ICC and all that. So when you look at those, it's true: hosting bases, in and of itself, is not an act of aggression. But, you know, you are freeing up resources from the country that hosts the bases.

You know, you're basically hosting American bases. You're freeing up American military resources that they might otherwise have spent. So I would certainly argue there's a certain element of indirect complicity. And, you know, I'm a little bit unhappy with this definition as we have it now. I mean, the Gulf nations—legally, they're correct. This is the definition we have. But I think this is something the Gulf nations are certainly rethinking in terms of their hosting of the bases. And I think we have to rethink this whole thing.

#Pascal

Yeah, this is a very, very theoretical point I wanted to make, but I still want to make it, because this situation opens up a new kind of challenge in international law. What happens when war breaks out?

Historically, the way international law—especially before ’45—was crafted is that when war is a fact, the warring parties, the belligerents, are of course governed by the law of war, which today we call international humanitarian law, right? That’s the governing framework. The ones who don’t go to war are then automatically governed by the law of neutrality.

But the law of neutrality, especially after the Hague rules, mandates that you cannot host foreign troops—or that if you do, you need to intern them. Right. So basically, after the Hague rules, or under the Hague rules, the Gulf countries cannot really claim that kind of traditional neutrality. Which then means, if they still say, “We are not a belligerent,” that would put them in a space that’s undefined under international law. Or Iran could legally argue, “No, you are a co-belligerent. Therefore, we are fair game.” It’s highly theoretical, but still, that’s how international law has developed over the centuries, isn’t it?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, it's a very sort of gray area. I mean, this whole space between, like you say, the law of neutrality and the law of, you know, the definition of aggression and all these kinds of things. But in fact, one of the points I think should be made is that Japan, right, is no longer a neutral country—I would certainly argue that. I wrote something to this effect in a Japanese magazine; it just got published the other day. I really hope people here look at this, read it, and realize what's going on.

Because, you know, American warships that are, you know, lobbing missiles into Iran—many of them, or at least several of them, are based in Yokosuka. Also, this Marine battalion, or whatever it is, this unit of a couple of thousand Marines that have, I think, already arrived in the Gulf—they’re based in Japan, in Okinawa. So bases in Japan are being used to launch attacks on Iran. And this is a level of complicity that goes even further, you know, than the Gulf nations. The Gulf nations, like I said, have a very valid—legally speaking, a very valid—point that they have prohibited the U.S. from launching attacks from these bases.

You know, we could argue, like you mentioned, the law of neutrality, and there are other arguments. But with Japan, I mean, there’s no room to argue that anymore. These bases are being used. And that’s really important, I think, because, as you’re very aware—since you also live here in Japan—the discourse is always, the narrative is always, “Yeah, the Americans are here to protect us.” So we can’t do anything that would upset the Americans. We can’t do anything that would make them rethink this alliance.

And we can’t do anything that would make them rethink this relationship of, I would say, real—um—reliance that we have, that Japan has on the U.S. in terms of security. But the fact of the matter is, these U.S. bases—yes, there are treaty obligations, and God knows whether somebody like Trump or any other subsequent president would ever honor those—but there are treaty obligations about protecting Japan. The point is, these are part of the U.S. global military strategy. And these bases have been, and are being, used to launch these escapades into various regions—not just our region,

but the Middle East and, God knows, where else. So this is something that really needs to be rethought and understood, I think.

#Pascal

Yeah, very, very much so. And you know, Japan, of all countries, actually has an interest in having a good relationship with Iran, because it wants the energy—not just from Iran, but from the Gulf, right? And Japan has historically had a good relationship with Iran. During the last crisis in 2019, then–Prime Minister Abe actually rushed to Iran, to my big surprise, taking a big political risk in trying to broker some form of understanding.

It kind of failed, but the fact that he tried, and that he was received in Iran at the time, right? That tells you a lot—that they were trying to have a good relationship. But if you do that now, with the U. S. having these bases over here, that changes the equation. Until now, I must say, these bases were always seen as a security guarantee by the United States—making sure they would come to help us, to help the Japanese, right? But now, I mean, these bases in the Gulf, the Gulf states, are proving they're no security—they're a magnet.

#Saul Takahashi

The bases are magnets—for the radar systems and so on.

#Pascal

I mean, one of the first things the Iranians took out was the radar systems. And of course, the UAE can say, "Oh, they're only defensive." It's like, yeah, yeah, sure—I mean, radar. A lot of these systems make it illusory to differentiate between defense and offense. So maybe two questions: how does this now impact the thinking in the UAE and the Gulf states about their security relationship with the United States? And have you heard, read, or seen anything about Japan—people starting to say, "Oh, we might also have a problem"? Or is it just you and me who kind of noticed this?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, sure. I mean, about the UAE and the Gulf nations in general, I don't have any great insight into their internal political deliberations or what's going on there, but you hear reports about these things. And for sure, there's a lot of rethinking going on—the whole strategy, the whole deal, really. You know, like in Japan, these bases were supposed to be a security guarantee. These bases were there so that, should something happen, the U.S. would help defend them. And as you say, it's actually acted as a magnet.

In a way, it's sort of similar to the old adage—when people talk about Israel, when Americans talk about Israel, and they say, "Well, you know, Israel's our only ally in the Middle East." Then the

answer to that is, "Yeah, well, we didn't have any enemies until we started this blind support of Israel." So it's almost the same, if you step back and look at it—it's that kind of thing. So for sure, there's a lot of rethinking. I don't think tomorrow the Gulf nations are going to demand that the bases depart, or that they're going to halt all their massive investment in the U.S. economy. That's just not how they operate.

And I think it will be a little more gradual, a little slower. But, you know, these are very—uh—strategic countries, in particular the UAE. They have a long-term view, and they're very strategic in how they spend their resources. And for sure, I think there's very little doubt that the policymakers are really rethinking all of this—rethinking, you know, what this is all about. And you can already see it, for example, with the Saudis forging a defense alliance with the Pakistanis, and this kind of bloc of four countries—I think it was Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan—trying to forge some sort of bloc to coordinate their security policy.

So, you know, for sure there's a lot of rethinking going on. I think, you know, the changes—we'll see. I mean, I could be proven wrong, but I think the changes will probably not be as dramatic as a lot of us like to think or talk about. It's not going to be, you know, tomorrow there's a big announcement from the GCC that all the U.S. bases have to leave. I kind of doubt that. But for sure, there will be a gradual decoupling, if you like, from the U.S. and from this kind of security umbrella. And, you know, Pax Americana is really in the toilet. It's just—it's really pathetic. You asked me another question.

#Pascal

In Japan, people talk about the same thing—like, oh, these bases are a problem. I mean, we know that in the Japanese parliament right now, there's one lawmaker, one of the leaders of an opposition party, who keeps saying Japan is a colony. It's a colony as long as we have these bases. He's gotten a little bit popular with that, but he's still kind of a lone voice in parliament, I think. Yeah.

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, I mean, look, the political elite in Japan have invested so much for so long. When I say so long, we're not talking centuries, obviously—but 80 years. Yeah, 80 years. I mean, it's something. And they've, you know, completely gone all in with investment in the military alliance with the United States, and with fealty to the U.S. being basically an end in itself. So, you know, there isn't too much open talk, let's put it that way—at least, you know, within the political elite. But for sure, discussions are taking place. People aren't stupid, and they see this. And I think, you know...

I think also with Trump, you know, being president of the United States and being so overtly obnoxious, dismissive of allied countries, so belligerent, so basically stupid—it's just like every single quality that's really repulsive not only to the policymaking circle but to Japanese people in general, and to decent people everywhere. This has really turned people off, and it's really pushing them to

understand, look, the Americans aren't reliable anymore. This is the thing. During the first Trump—Trump 1.0, as it's often called, the first Trump administration—it was bad.

It was, you know, there were very bad messages being sent around the world, but let's face it, he didn't accomplish that much. I mean, very negative messages were sent—domestically, of course, and internationally. But at the end of the day, he was so incompetent, and there was still what people call the "axis of adults," the grownups in the room, who somehow managed to stop his more negative impulses. So, you know, there's a sense—and maybe it's not correct—but there's a sense that somehow America and the old global order emerged relatively unscathed from it. And he wasn't that belligerent during his first term.

#Pascal

And secondly, the Japanese—at least in my observation—they all thought, "It's four years, and then it'll be over, and we'll go back." And Biden was kind of the reaffirmer: "Ah, it's fine." And now, second Trump is like, "Ah, no, no, no." And even after Trump—even if he died tomorrow—this thing isn't going to go away. So that kind of reconceptualizing is happening in Japan, isn't it?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I completely agree. I mean, people are finally realizing that this is not a short-term thing. This is not—Donald Trump is obviously a negative force, and obviously we want him to get out of the picture as soon as possible. I dream of him being led away in handcuffs and an orange jumpsuit. But, you know, the point is, even if he were gone tomorrow, there are plenty of guys to take his place. And this was already clear in Trump 1.0, but still, you know, millions—almost 80 million Americans—thought he was the guy for the job. Yeah. You know, this is not going to go away. And if you look at it, I mean, there are plenty of guys in the queue to take his place.

I mean, there's Vance and Rubio, and, you know, Hegseth—God willing—will be out of the picture as soon as Trump disappears. He's going to crawl back under whatever rock he came from. Yeah, but there are plenty of these guys, and this is not going to go away. So I think I completely agree. The Japanese policymakers, though they're not open about it, are not stupid, and they see that this is not going to go away. The Americans, in the long term, are not the reliable rock—they're not the reliable partner the Japanese had assumed them to be for 80 years. And the same goes for the Europeans. They've realized that just hunkering down and waiting for the four years to pass is not going to work anymore. And I think, finally, the Europeans are also trying to figure out what sort of way forward they can forge.

#Pascal

Yeah, I agree. I would just point out that Japan is often looked at as an Asian version of Europe, and I would say that's not the case. One thing that's really different is that Japan is not, I would say, as

ideologically captured as the Europeans are. There's pragmatism here, and a relatively healthy form of nationalism, in the sense that they don't want Japan to be attacked. I mean, that's the last thing they would want, right? And what this really drives home is that not only can the U.S. launch such a war, but it also can't protect these countries. I mean, if the United States can't protect the UAE from Iran, how the hell is it going to protect Japan from China? Just—how would that work? This one is dropping now, isn't it?

And I don't know if you've had the time or space in the last couple of weeks to follow Prime Minister Takaichi's visit to Washington, or what happened in December with her fallout with China. Do you have any observations about that? Also, Takaichi tries to portray herself as a really good ally of Donald Trump. But I feel, looking at the media and how she sold the trip over here, that she's proud—the proudest thing for her is that there was no fallout. She managed to convey that there are things Japan can do and things it cannot do. And she actually used Article 9, the pacifist article—which she herself wants to change—to tell him, "Look, we can't help you as much as you'd like us to. We'd love to, but we have a constitution." Do you have any observations about that?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, sure. I mean, look, I'm not a fan of Takaichi by any means. Of course, you know, she comes from the extreme right wing of the party. Um, I've always had the sense that she herself is a firm believer in xenophobia and racism, and it's just not great that she's prime minister. It's not great that she's the leader. But, um, I have to say she's done a good job with regards to this. I mean, you know, when she went to D.C.—I think it was the 19th of March—it was just a couple of days after Trump dropped another one of his latest bombshells, saying that we expect all the other countries that rely on oil through the Strait of Hormuz to do their share in patrolling and protecting the oil tankers through the straits, and, you know, we'll continue on with bombing Iran into kingdom come, but everybody else has to play their part.

He even mentioned China, which was, you know, kind of hilarious. But, you know, she did a good job, I have to say. I mean, she was, of course, very obsequious—at least, certainly in front of the cameras. She was very obsequious, and it was kind of disgusting, but she did a good job. Everybody was afraid that she was going to go and that Trump was really going to come down hard on her, insisting, demanding that Japan send warships. But she did a good job fobbing him off. So I have to say, that was good.

#Pascal

Saying no to him without him exploding in her face, right? That's actually not easy to do.

#Saul Takahashi

It's not easy for her to do. And, you know, she's—well, I hate to say this, but, you know, let's call a spade a spade—being a woman in Japanese politics, it ain't easy. I'm sure she has a lot of experience in, you know, being obsequious and sort of getting her way, maneuvering around powerful men. And she did a good job. I mean, I have to admit it. I have to hand it to her—she did a good job with this. So, you know, let's see. I think that's good. But, you know, she's not—again, I'm not a fan of her.

She's, you know, she's from the very extremist, xenophobic wing of the party. But she's... At the beginning, I felt she had very little to say or do aside from xenophobic and racist statements. But she's not stupid, and she seems to realize that she has to maneuver around this, that there has to be some sort of long-term way forward—which doesn't, you know, not saying exclude the Americans totally, but that, you know, doesn't involve complete and utter reliance on the Americans for everything.

#Pascal

That kind of thing, even in these circles, must be pretty clear by now—which also means they're probably, again, like, the Japanese are more pragmatic than one might give them credit for, in my observation. It's interesting you say that. You know, they must be thinking that something needs to be done with China, right? As in, we have to have a strategy going forward. Because there was this huge fallout in December when she basically said, yeah, a Chinese military vessel sailing toward Taiwan would be an existential threat to Japan. And China took that so badly, because it evoked so many memories of Japanese militarism. She kind of reinforced the already existing Chinese perception that Japan is going militarist again, right? So, do you also think that she probably—this was probably not a planned announcement, and it was probably regrettable even for her government that it went that way? Or how do you interpret that scene in December?

#Saul Takahashi

Well, again, her December remarks were really stupid. That was a big faux pas, and she really stepped into it. One of the main criticisms of her has been that she's a foreign policy novice and knows nothing about diplomacy. And certainly, that statement about China kind of proved her critics right. I mean, that was really dumb. I remember very clearly—the Chinese government reacted, and all of a sudden Chinese tourists disappeared from Japan, and the Japanese economy started to tank just because of that. It was really dumb.

But I think she's more than made up for that with how she's handled Trump. I mean, you know, looking back at the first Trump administration, that was very interesting because that was still under Abe. Abe was prime minister. And I don't mean to speak ill of the dead, but I loathed Abe. He was a fascist and an ideologue, and I really felt that him being prime minister was harmful to Japan in many ways. But during the first Trump administration, it was very interesting seeing how Abe and

the political elite were maneuvering, because you could tell there were outreaches made to the Chinese. They weren't, you know, they weren't widely reported in the headlines. They weren't real.

They weren't headline-grabbing things, but they were very informal, almost back-channel. You know, there were sort of peace branches being offered to the Chinese. And you could tell there was already a realization during the first Trump administration among the political elite that, hey, things are not going as we thought. Things are not going as planned here. Maybe we need a better long-term strategy. Then, of course, Biden came in, and we all remember the first thing he said was, you know, "America is back," and everything's back to normal. So the extremist right wing of the party seemed ascendant—they seemed happy, and everything sort of felt like it was going back to normal.

But with what's going on now, for sure, I mean, there's definitely a realization that there has to be a longer-term strategy with China. We have to figure out some way to coexist with China in a peaceful way so that we both prosper. And, you know, there's no question in my mind that we can do this. I mean, one thing that really shocked me after I came back to Japan in 2014, after living 20 years abroad, was just the sheer bullish nationalism that I saw in the public discourse—the media, the politicians. Anything and everything was China's fault. Anything and everything was the "Chinese threat." It was, you know, a Chinese threat to this, a Chinese threat to that. You know, hey, it's terrible weather we've had lately.

No, yes, the Chinese fault. Yeah, I mean, it was really over the top. And every time I had Chinese students in my classes, I would start off by apologizing to them because it was really terrible. You know, I'm old enough to remember that it wasn't like this before. I mean, there was trepidation, there was concern about China—China was corrupt, rising, and they were going to take our place. But really, since 2010, I think it was, when China overtook Japan as the second-biggest economy, that's when things really started to go wrong. That's when this kind of bullish nationalism started coming to the forefront, and the really extremist wing of the LDP started gaining power.

And then, you know, Abe became premier, and it was all sort of downhill from there. But, you know, there's no question—we can do this. We can have a perfectly peaceful and prosperous coexistence with China. There's no doubt in my mind that we can do this, and we have to do this. You know, the thing is—just, sorry, in closing—the thing about the United States, and this is one thing that a lot of the rest of the world, I mean, they understand it in an intellectual way, but it's difficult to really grasp and conceptualize: Americans don't understand what it means to fight a war in your own country, because it's never happened. It hasn't happened since the Civil War. Americans have not been attacked on the mainland.

It didn't happen until 9/11. That's why 9/11 was such a huge shock to them. And, you know, there are all these theories about what really happened and everything. But I do, you know, I can honestly understand how Americans just—it's like they couldn't conceive it. To Americans, fighting a war means we go off to a country far, far away that nobody's heard of, that nobody can point to on a map. And, you know, we beat the bad guys with overwhelming force, then we come back to the big

PX and everything is normal again. And, you know, this is something that Japan and Europe, through two world wars—especially Japan in the Second World War—just understand in a completely different way.

And, you know, now what's happening in the Gulf—it's the same thing. The Americans start off just, you know, moving fast and breaking things, right? And when Trump gets tired of it, it's like, "You know what, this is too difficult for me. I can't understand it anymore. I'm kind of tired of it. We're just going to pack up and go home. We're going to declare victory and go." I don't know what's going to happen, but there's always that danger. And then they pack up and go home. And the rest of the world—especially the Gulf nations—they're left holding the bag. So this is why it's very, very dangerous to rely on the Americans for this kind of thing, because they have a completely different way of seeing the world in this area.

#Pascal

I mean, it's good that you're talking about this, because I do think this is probably one of the lessons that Japan, even in LDP circles, is actually kind of learning. Although I would, of course, argue that the case is even much worse. I mean, holding the bag is one thing, but being used as a staging ground for growth—yeah, absolutely.

#Pascal

Actually, I think they're going to try to do it through the Philippines. But, you know, if they manage to provoke a war with China over Taiwan or the Philippines, then Japan will almost automatically, like clockwork, be drawn into it because of the bases, right? Yes, yes. So this proxy war thing is probably not something that's at the forefront of people's minds here in Japan. But I wonder if it is one of the lessons that at least some people are starting to think about.

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, yeah, you have a really good point there. And I think you're right. People are still grappling with the realization that the United States is not a reliable partner and that, when things hit the fan, they're not going to protect us. But what you're saying goes even further, because you're basically saying there's a chance they might actively provoke a war, and then Japan would be dragged into it. And like you mentioned, the neocons in Washington will stop at nothing.

And, you know, the Christian evangelists, the Christian fundamentalist wing of Washington, and the whole MAGA movement—these people are just, they really are crazy. This is the biggest threat to world peace that I think we've ever seen. You know, in English we have this expression, "It's not the end of the world," or, "Whatever happens, it's not the end of the world." But a lot of these people actually want to bring about the end of the world. I mean, it's like, "Oh, please, Armageddon now." Yeah.

It's hard to come up—you know, it's hard to point to a lower specimen of humanity than Pete Hegseth. But, you know, he represents, like you mentioned, those statements of his that really embody this wing of the MAGA movement, these crazies. I mean, it's extremely dangerous. We're really looking at a very dangerous situation. And it is the time of monsters, like Gramsci said. You know, a lot of people are quoting him and paraphrasing him—and I'm guilty of it too—but it's true. I really do feel that the old regime seems to have just collapsed, the new regime isn't on its feet yet, we don't know what's going to happen, and now is the time of monsters, when these crazies are going around doing whatever they want.

#Pascal

My main problem is that the old narrative is still sticking with us, very much like the bases. You know how the Europeans pretend that—oh, Iran... I mean, literally, I talked this morning, just before a meeting with Jeffrey Sachs, and he told me he was there when the Security Council had their first meeting on Iran. And they started off with Bahrain, who said, "the unprovoked attack on our country," and then the UAE, "the unprovoked attack on our country."

The whole Security Council then condemns it—because China and Russia abstained—and signs a resolution saying Iran is committing a grave crime under international law by attacking the Gulf states. And you're just left there wondering, what the hell? It's the same kind of speech. So, the perception—of course, the perception—is now breaking, because people are actually seeing, oh no, this started when the U.S. committed the act of aggression. But the narrative is still there. And I think, even in Chicago, they're still caught in this idea that we need to go along with the narrative in order not to upset the big guy.

#Saul Takahashi

Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, definitely. I completely agree with you. You're right, that's a really good point. The narrative is definitely still there. And for sure, you know, the media in Japan tends to be a little bit better than the media, for example, in the United States. But still, they're sort of stuck between a rock and a hard place, and they do convey the dominant narrative in the same way. So yeah, definitely, you're right. And that was just yet another one of those sad and pathetic days at the U.N., when this resolution was adopted, coming down hard on Iran for the attacks and for closing the Strait of Hormuz.

And, you know, I mean, fair enough—that has to be pointed out. But, you know, wait a minute, what about the completely, overtly illegal acts of aggression by the United States and Israel? I mean, I've spent my entire career talking about international law and trying to uphold these international mechanisms and the UN. And I'm feeling, you know, I'm wondering where I went wrong, where I made these wrong career choices, because, you know, already, like—obviously, last November was a very big turning point for me.

I mean, already, you know, obviously, I spent five years in Palestine, and I could see how geopolitics were influencing and preventing the UN from doing what it was supposed to do—preventing the UN, meaning the civil service of the organization, but also affecting how geopolitics in these political bodies were working. But last November, when the UN Security Council adopted this resolution endorsing Trump's so-called peace plan—which is really a plan for colonization, domination, and exploitation—and endorsing this so-called board of peace, despite the fact that it wasn't even clear that the board of peace had been formally established yet.

I mean, it wasn't even clear what it was going to do or anything. Then later on, you open the box and it's completely different. But as it was advertised, you know, this was a really sad day. I mean, this was a day that will live in infamy, for sure. And I think this was, to me, probably one of—if not the—final nails in the coffin of the UN as a credible actor in international affairs in general, and certainly with Palestine, because it was just utterly pathetic that no member of the Security Council even dared to speak up to the bully and vote against this. It was really a disgrace—really a disgrace.

#Pascal

No, it was, but I belong to the people who are still convinced that international law, even if it's not working yet, is exactly where we have to go, right? And in this sense, you're just like a gifted piano player in 1250—the piano isn't here yet, but that doesn't mean that's not where we should be going, right? We have to develop the goddamn piano so we can play it virtuously, right? So, in that sense, we're just not at the end of the development. And it's also no surprise that a post–Second World War institution, founded by the victors of the Second World War—who basically stayed, with the exception of the China seat that changed—remained unchanged. That thing was bound to become useless once the power distribution changed.

And apparently the power distribution is changing right now. Again, the United States cannot—cannot—defend the UAE, cannot defend Qatar or Kuwait from Iran. That's just a fact by now. So where do you actually see this going? Having also been there, with the thinking in West Asia around how to organize this—because you said, okay, Pakistan is Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and so on are talking—but Pakistan also has a security relationship with Iran. Do you think they're going to try to organize something regionally to somehow stabilize things?

#Saul Takahashi

I mean, I think that's the direction things are going. It's almost trite now to say we live in a multipolar world, that there will be different centers of power, and that everything will keep shifting and becoming a bit more unpredictable. But as trite as it may sound, I do think that's where we're headed. And certainly in West Asia, that's probably the direction we're moving in. Again, I don't think it's something that's going to happen in a really dramatic way tomorrow. I could be wrong. You know, nobody predicted the Cold War ending, the wall coming down. Nobody predicted the so-called Arab Spring.

You know, there can be very dramatic changes from seemingly very innocuous events, so I wouldn't rule anything out. But in general, the way policymakers in West Asia—and really in most places in the world—think is that they want stability. They want gradual transitions. They don't want a really dramatic, revolutionary change, because that always brings some kind of danger and anxiety. So it'll probably be gradual, like I mentioned before. It's not going to be that tomorrow the Gulf nations demand the U.S. take away the bases. It's not going to be that tomorrow.

All of a sudden, there's going to be a big regional organization that will pull its military and, you know, have its own sort of Article 5 of the NATO charter. It's probably not going to be like that. It'll be a little more gradual. And, you know, the American sort of receding down on the horizon will take a bit of time, but that's definitely where we're heading. And I say that with full realization that people are being killed right now, and people are paying huge prices for this as the system breaks apart—the current system we have, or at least the old one.

And that's, you know, that's a problem, obviously. Like you, I do believe in international law, and we mustn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. We have to apply these standards in a fair and proper way. And that means accountability for violations, in particular with Israel. Israel has to be held accountable—both the state of Israel internationally, and also individuals who commit crimes against humanity must be held criminally responsible. That really has to happen. And, you know, I very much hope that this happens tomorrow. I really hope we see that.

#Pascal

Yeah, but even if we can't do it tomorrow, I mean, it has to be a long-term goal, right? Because the current state is just not something that's acceptable for the next thousand years. It's just that the current situation actually gives a bit more clarity, right? I mean, the genocidal nature of the Zionist project—of Christian Zionism and Jewish Zionism—slaughtering masses of people in order to get Lebensraum for themselves in this region, I mean, that's becoming clearer now than it was before, isn't it? And also, the United States—kind of the hardcore colonial approach of saying, "No, no, this is our hemisphere, and if we don't like a president somewhere in South America, we go in, we take him out, and we parade him around in New York." By the way, this is just what we do.

#Saul Takahashi

We should just take the oil. Yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, we just take it all. And I feel it's kind of a moment of clarity. But I was wondering about your perception of this—not just neocolonialism, but classic colonialism coming back—the way people talk about it, and even the Europeans kind of jumping on board again with it. Do you have any thoughts on that?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, no, I completely agree with you. It's a moment of clarity—that's a good way to put it. And, you know, the Americans have always disregarded international law when they found it inconvenient, because they could. I mean, they were the big military power. And, you know, like the Canadian premier announced in Davos, this was always a system based on hypocrisy, and we liked it because it favored us. But now things have got to change. Yeah, I think it's a little bit hypocritical of him and of Canada, too, because they seemed to have no problem when Palestinians were being slaughtered throughout Gaza every single day.

But now, all of a sudden, the U.S. is turning on them—oh, now we have to rethink the international order. But that's just part of the whole thing. So, in a way, it's a situation of clarity. And, you know, I don't know. I mean, when I was in Palestine, this was one of the things UN people were saying, and international observers and commentators were saying: it's actually good that we have a really right-wing government in Israel now, because now there's nothing hidden from view. Now we can all see it for what it is. And, you know, the countries of the world will be forced to deal with it. Well, they weren't. Nothing happened, right?

And look, in October 2023, Israel starts its overt genocide, and yet it's still not being held accountable. So, you know, the fact that it's a moment of clarity is important, but we also have to force governments to do something when faced with that clarity. We have to make sure that action is taken. And that's the important thing. That's what we have to do, I think. We, the citizenry, have to keep on talking about this, keep on pushing our governments to abide by international law, to take this seriously, and to hold the baddies accountable. It's an uphill struggle, but definitely, inshallah, we will be victorious in the end. I hope so.

#Pascal

I mean, it's just—we can't do this every other decade. Genocide after genocide after genocide. And I must say again, the Europeans and the Americans—who are basically emigrated Europeans—are just masters at genocide. They've killed tens of millions of people. They kill half a million people every year just through economic sanctions. And we have data on this now—Lancet studies show, you know, about half a million a year.

#Saul Takahashi

Yes, yes.

#Pascal

And they say that we do this for the betterment of humanity. It’s just—it's absolutely insane. That insanity needs to—well, we need to get clarity on that one. And of course, the price is being paid by all the people’s water. But any kind of last thing you’d like to touch on, that you think we haven’t discussed yet, that’s important? Yeah.

#Saul Takahashi

Well, I think we pretty much covered it all. And I think, you know, like I just said—and like you just said—it’s important that we push our governments to take action. At the end of the day, that’s really what it is. And, you know, we can definitely do it. I mean, this is very much an international struggle, and I think what you’re doing with these videos and all your writing is also really important, because it’s important that we keep on talking about this.

We have to keep reaching out and making sure we forge contacts and build solidarity with people in the rest of the world, because that’s really important. It’ll happen. Like I mentioned before, nobody—nobody predicted the wall coming down in Berlin. I mean, nobody did. You know, some people, so-called experts later on, said, “Oh yeah, this was inevitable.” We always say, no, that’s not true. Nobody saw it coming. So, you know, things can change very dramatically, and, for lack of a better word, there can be a revolution. And, you know, I’m looking forward to it.

#Pascal

It's Good Friday today, the Easter weekend. And there's always that hope that at some point, you know, Jesus comes down over Salt Lake City and says, "Stop it now. Mormons, take over. Stop it now. We're going to be peaceful from now on. We'll do it on our end." Saul, for people who want to follow you, where should they go? Is there a place where you regularly publish things?

#Saul Takahashi

Yeah, this is one of the things I'm actually really bad at, and I’ve got to figure it out. I have to do this. There was, of course—you’re probably familiar with it—the ResearchMap, the one that the Japanese quango organizes. I was using that, but of course, after I left for the UAE, I stopped updating it. I do have a website on Jimdo, and I’ll do a better job of keeping it updated and making sure it stays current. People can contact me through that; my contact details are on my Jimdo site. So that’s what we’ll do.

#Pascal

You’ll send me that link, please, and we’ll put it in the description box below. I will do that, yeah. Saul Takahashi, thank you very much for your time.

#Saul Takahashi

Thanks very much, Pascal. It was great seeing you and great talking with you. I hope to see you again soon.