

Zhang Weiwei BLASTS Trump's Iran Naval Blockade: China WINNING?

In this exclusive interview LIVE from China, Danny Haiphong sits down with Professor Zhang Weiwei to react to the Trump administration's explicit targeting of China in the Iran war and China's counter strategy as the ongoing US naval blockade sends shockwaves across the world order. Prof. Zhang Weiwei is a Chinese professor of international relations at Fudan University and the director of its China Institute. He has appeared in countless interviews and forums and is the author of several books that seek to educate the world about China, its rise, and its role in a changing world order. PATREON.COM/DANNYHAIPHONG Support the channel in other ways: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/dannyhai...> Substack: chroniclesofhaiphong.substack.com Cashapp: \$Dhaiphong Venmo: @dannyH2020 Paypal: <https://paypal.me/spiritofho> Follow me on Telegram: <https://t.me/dannyhaiphong> #iran #china #exclusiveinterview

#Danny

Well, okay. Professor Zhang Weiwei, it's great to have you. For those who don't know, I'm live here from China. I'm in Wuxi, which is very close to Shanghai. I really appreciate you, Professor Zhang, for taking the time today to do this interview with me. Thank you so much.

#Zhang Weiwei

Thank you. My pleasure.

#Danny

Yes, yes. Well, let's get started, because there's a lot the audience, I'm sure, is very interested in hearing from you about. My first question has to do with China's involvement in the Iran war. Recently, Donald Trump's administration said that China would be punished if it supplied Iran with weapons. There was a U.S. intelligence report about this, and now we have Steven Mnuchin, the Secretary of the Treasury, essentially saying that the blockade happening in and around the Strait of Hormuz by the Trump administration is targeting China. So maybe you can share your view on China's position regarding the Iran war and these developments that are shaping it.

#Zhang Weiwei

It's not China's involvement in the war. The war was launched by the United States and Israel, and China condemned that. It's an act of aggression and a clear violation of the UN Charter. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, gave a very strongly worded statement on this particular act, along with

China's condemnation in the UN Security Council. So it's a wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time—for the United States and for the region. And as for the...

#Zhang Weiwei

Alleged Chinese exports of weapons to Iran.

#Zhang Weiwei

I checked the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman. He said, you know, China adopts a very prudent, responsible attitude on the issue of arms exports to warring regions. It's a general principle. And also, with regard to this particular threat, it's a joke. I said a long time ago, back in 2018, when Donald Trump launched the first trade war, the tariff war against China, that the United States would lose because the U.S. economy is far more dependent on China than vice versa. So 50%, I said, make it 500%. We'll see what the consequences of this will be.

And indeed, as you know, China is a close friend of all the countries—both the Gulf states and Iran. China is the largest trading partner with Iran and with the Gulf states, and also one of the largest investors in the region, in these countries. So it's in China's coin, so to speak, to have peace and reconciliation in the region. I don't think China, out of its own interest, will inflame the situation or add fuel to the fire. It's not in China's interest. So China will be, as before and as is the case now, a constructive mediator for whatever peaceful solution to the crisis can be found.

#Danny

Right, right, and I'm just going to check this real quick, uh, just to make sure we're all—yes, we are all set up here. So, Professor John, given this, you know, some have observed that this blockade the Trump administration is conducting now against Iran—essentially saying it's a response by the U.S. administration to Iran's own control over the Strait of Hormuz. Now, as I said before, Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bestin has said that the primary objective is to stop Iranian oil from getting to China. And we've seen that actually in the data. The Trump administration, the U.S. Navy, has let a lot of ships pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and the only ships it has stopped are the ones slated to go to China. What is China's response to this, and what is your view on this escalation?

#Zhang Weiwei

From what I've checked, up to at least yesterday—I don't know the latest information for today—two days into this so-called blockade, Chinese tankers are still operating there. Obviously, there's no major obstacle at this particular moment. Yet it's also true that the overall presence of tankers from various countries has declined sharply due to this situation and the war, which is understandable.

For one thing, major insurance companies are not willing to insure these tankers. So this is a more serious threat to trade flow in the region, even for Chinese oil—China's largest purchase of Iranian oil.

There are several ways to carry out this trade. Of course, the main part of it involves Chinese tankers, but also tankers from other countries. And by rail as well—we have one railway between Tehran and Xi'an. At this moment, if you check the data, China's dependency on Iranian oil is between 5% and 10%, depending on how you calculate it. China's overall energy dependency is quite low—about 15%, meaning it's 85% self-sufficient. Of that 15%, the country needs oil and gas from the Middle East, from Russia, and from other channels. So it's manageable.

Furthermore, from my point of view, this blockade is obviously against U.S. interests. It will cause more inflation and more damage to the U.S. economy, which is not in America's interest. So my guess is that it's really a tactical matter, because Donald Trump saw it as additional pressure on Iran for a negotiated solution. He prefers negotiation now. They need this result for the midterm election and for other purposes. In fact, this morning I heard the White House spokeswoman say, "We hope the talks will be resumed within two or three days." So things might be over soon.

#Danny

How has the war on Iran—coming from the United States and, as you said earlier, Israel—changed U.S.-China relations, if it has at all?

#Zhang Weiwei

It depends on how you assess this war situation. I think there's a general consensus that Donald Trump made the wrong decision. And there's no plan B, no exit plan. It's not a plan. Somehow there were so many voices against this war a long time ago, and yet, for one reason or another, people now perceive him as—well, whatever—dictated by Israel, by Prime Minister Netanyahu. So that's one view. Even Iranian leaders claim that the United States should restore its sovereignty, should be free from outside interference. So this is the problem with the United States.

And we are not our own master in this country, so you make this kind of, obviously, as I said at the very beginning, at the wrong time, in the wrong place, starting the wrong war. And then you have to pay a heavy price. That gives you a sense of the quality of decision-making in the White House. It's so low, so deeply flawed. And there's no way to check this kind of flawed decision. This is a problem. Yeah, whatever—separation of powers. Yet you see, this is really a structural crisis for the American political system: a leader elected twice who is obviously doing so much damage to U.S. interests and to Western interests as a whole.

Even from a Chinese point of view, you can see that. Some people say he's more like Gorbachev, in the sense of destroying the Soviet empire, and Donald Trump, in the sense of destroying the

American empire. If you look at this picture, you'll see, as we all know, Professor Jeffrey Sachs said, if you look at the world, China has now become the only adult in the room. And first of all, I just read this amazing comment by Professor Nersh Hema. He said, if you compare three gentlemen—Donald Trump, the U.S. Defense Secretary, and the Iranian foreign minister—who is the adult among the three? The Iranian foreign minister, yeah.

#Danny

Yeah, and he's become something of a celebrity on social media and across the collective West. Well, you know, Trump is said to be planning a trip to China in May. I guess what I wanted to ask you is, what will be the significance of this visit for China? And how do you think the global developments—these headwinds from the Iran war—will affect the visit, if at all?

#Zhang Weiwei

In the first place, this visit was announced by the White House, but so far the Chinese side has been very cautious. They're saying they're still discussing the details of the visit with their American counterparts. It's not officially decided yet. Let's suppose, though, that the visit will take place as announced by the White House. The Chinese approach has always been clearly stated: there is an overall purpose—what we call the Dao—an overall direction. The Chinese mindset is mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation. These are the three guiding principles of China's position toward the United States and Sino-U.S. relations. That will be the case with this visit as well. But at this particular moment, I think Donald Trump needs China far more than China needs Donald Trump.

There are so many problems to solve—domestic problems, international problems. He's in a difficult situation. I don't know how he can get out of it, to be honest, even with China's help. And yet, on my part, I hope there'll be more understanding on the issue of Taiwan and on the Chinese partnership. You may have already noticed that the opposition leader, the Kuomintang chairwoman, came to visit Beijing, and the Chinese leader and the KMT leader met and had a cordial talk. That's a good sign. So China, I think, will explain its position to Donald Trump very clearly. If you read the government report by the Chinese premier—which is very important—you'll see that China is now advancing the great cause of national unification.

In the past, we used the phrase "peaceful unification." Now we promote the cause of unification. Previously, we also used another phrase in official statements—something like "we oppose separatist forces for Taiwan's independence." Now it has become "we will firmly counter separatist forces for Taiwan's independence." These are messages that China is trying to send to the world. The process of peaceful negotiation for Taiwan's return to China, and the broader process of national unification, is underway. I think, hopefully, the United States will have a better understanding of the situation now. Of course, China will work on this with all the parties concerned, but China will make its own decision—whether it has support or not. That's irrelevant.

#Danny

Right. You know, some have suggested in the Western mainstream media and elsewhere that one of the hopes of the Trump administration—with the war on Iran and what happened in Venezuela before that, the U.S. operation there—was to build up U.S. leverage against China. A lot of people have told me they believe that the Trump administration, Donald Trump himself, hopes to go to President Xi Jinping and say, “Look at what I’ve done. Now, what are you going to give me?” What do you think of this kind of logic and orientation? There are obviously some hints that that might be the case, especially in the way the Trump administration has been talking about the blockade’s relationship to China.

#Zhang Weiwei

Well, let's suppose this is really his so-called strategic thinking. First, let's grasp this—whatever—wind, steel, oil, and the Iranian oil, and then, you know, compare that to China buying American oil or whatever. Obviously, it's already a failure if you look at the situation in Iran. From my point of view, I've said openly that this U.S. attack on Venezuela is what I call a tactical victory yet a strategic failure. And for this attack on Iran, I'd say it's a tactical victory and a strategic disaster. It's much more serious than the case of Venezuela in terms of the U.S. It's an overall disaster for the U. S. empire, if you may use that word. Its military hegemony has somehow been shattered, in the sense that it cannot even defend the security of small countries like Bahrain or the United Arab Emirates.

And so this security guarantee is somehow understood between the Gulf states and the United States. That's why they pay such a premium and allow the U.S. to build military bases there. Yet now, even a superpower like the United States cannot cope with a middle power from the Global South. Having suffered from U.S. sanctions for 47 years, still, the United States cannot cope with Iran. Militarily, it's a failure, obviously. And economically, it has caused so many problems worldwide. People blame the United States more than Iran. You know, this is where you caused this war, and now you've made a mess. You cannot say, “Ah, I won,” and then it's up to you to decide. We have the greatest chaos.

And that backfired. The U.S. economy also suffered. Inflation will continue and may even go up, possibly leading to a financial crisis. Given the already high debt of the U.S. government—around \$39 trillion—and according to my data, you're spending close to \$1 billion a day on this tragic Iran war. And then, morally, it's a really bad event. All that talk about human rights, democracy, blah, blah, blah—no, it's all gone. Furthermore, the American-led alliance system, or you could say U.S.-led unipolarity, is gone. And really, even from our point of view, how come the U.S. couldn't even mobilize one of its allies to escort ships in the former strait or join this blockade?

#Danny

Right, right.

#Zhang Weiwei

So not a single ally joined the United States, which means this alliance system has gone bankrupt. And all this shows that this particular event, or this Iran war, is a turning point in world history in terms of the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity.

#Danny

Wow. Yeah. No, I guess then maybe you could elaborate on that, because I've been saying that this war, in just six or seven weeks—now we're heading toward two months—has changed so much, so fast. Maybe you could talk about that and about China's role in it. How will China play a role in this massive—now it seems almost like a, what's the word for it? It's like a shock, like a whiplash, almost, into the multipolar world.

#Zhang Weiwei

If you look at the opinion surveys in recent days, there's obviously a trend showing that China is more and more respected than the United States on the global stage. It's already the case in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, and has been for quite a few years since China launched its Belt and Road Initiative. China is viewed as a constructor, a builder, while the United States is seen as a destroyer, a force of destruction. So this perception is already there. Now this kind of attitude is beginning to spread to Western countries, European countries, and even some of America's allies. In other words, the Chinese philosophy is very simple: we should embrace peace and development.

This should be the priority for everyone. We should embrace the United Nations Charter—in other words, respect the sovereignty of all nations and work toward peaceful solutions to global crises. But China's case is unique, because behind it stands China's immense economic and military power. China is now the largest industrial, manufacturing, and trading power, and arguably a military power as well. In other words, it embraces peace and development, but it's backed by hard power too. Even in terms of soft power, if you look at the Belt and Road Initiative, it's built on three key principles: discussing together, building together, and benefiting together.

So a country or a company, out of its own interest, may choose to join the BRI. China will not compel you to join. As a result, you see over 150 countries have participated in the BRI. And it's a typical case of construction, rather than the U.S. case of destruction—war, war, war, endless wars. The American people are fed up with that. And again, this particular war in Iran—I think maybe China would say this is an irresistible trend of history. In other words, you have to follow this trend, the trend of history. The Chinese like to use this particular word. As a civilizational state, you have learned so many lessons, positive and negative, from your own history and from the history of other countries.

Have you found that in the United States, in Iran, the Middle East, in China, in Russia, this civilization discourse is now emerging? Donald Trump said Iranian civilization will die. Iran would say, you know, we are a great civilization—we are not nothing. So this kind of discussion is important. We have a long history, we have a lot of memories, we have a lot of lessons from history. In the case of Iran, it's far more resilient than expected because it's a civilizational state. And in its long history, it has faced many disasters—it knows how to handle them. It has also had many successes. No, don't be too overinflated. So this is how balance can be achieved—with a long civilization, not with a country with a short history. This is part of the United States' problem.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you just mentioned a huge shift in this war was indeed Trump's comment that he was going to wipe away Iran's entire civilization. And you mentioned that Iran is also a civilizational state. Now, given there are reports recently in the Western mainstream media about how Iran was able to utilize Chinese satellite technology to enhance its targeting. But I think oftentimes Iran–China relations are, uh, viewed through this prism of them building—just similar to Russia—building a bloc that is antagonistic to the United States. But maybe you could talk about this idea of a civilizational state and what makes—because China and Iran have gotten closer, especially over the last 10 or 15 years—what is the nature of this relationship, and how does sharing this civilizational state status, uh, enhance it?

#Zhang Weiwei

Well, uh, Iran is a very interesting case. It's a country with a lot of self-respect because of its long history. For a long time, Iran was independent, but neither in the Eastern camp nor in the Western camp was it aligned. So it takes a kind of principled position, even in its relations with China. It's also true that, you may remember, some senior scholars a long time ago cautioned the United States that it should prevent what they called an alliance between China, Russia, and Iran. Yet somehow, the behavior of the United States so far has pushed these countries—not to form an alliance, since China will not form an alliance with any country—but to have more contact and partnership with each other, which is indeed the case.

China signed an important Comprehensive Agreement for Cooperation with Iran for 25 years back in 2021. It's a very broad framework agreement covering political, economic, anti-terrorism, and technological areas, among others. The document is largely public—you can find it online. As a major power, China adheres to the agreements it signs. If something is included in the document, China will follow through on it; if it's not, China won't. That's also the case for cooperation in different areas, including military cooperation—it works more or less like that.

#Danny

Yeah, well, you know, I think when it comes to this cooperation, Professor Zhang, there's a big misunderstanding in the West—and in the United States—about why China, and why a country like Iran, are able to withstand these headwinds. I mean, these are massive changes going on. And as you said, the U.S. has taken the position of a destroyer and, in many cases, has destroyed. There have been many times over the years, over decades, when countries and people have had to go through untold suffering, and the Iranian people have had to experience that suffering—but they still stand. And China is one of their biggest partners. How does—well, I guess, in this moment, do you feel the multipolar world can continue to build on this level of stability and resilience that remains intact despite some of the most egregious, dangerous, and violent headwinds of the unipolar world in decline?

#Zhang Weiwei

In the first place, if you look at the fundamentals—if you look at the size of the economies of the BRICS countries, now 11 members—it's already much larger than the G7. So this is fundamental, because the economic power is already different. Especially in terms of purchasing power parity, the BRICS is already much, much larger than the G7. So this is what we call fundamental—you have to get the fundamentals right. And then, in this particular case of the Iran war, if you look at opinion surveys, even in the Middle East, Iran's reputation is rising among the people—even among the Gulf states, not among the elite, but among ordinary people. Because people have this deep resentment toward U.S.-Israeli collaboration that suppresses the rights of the Palestinian and Arab peoples.

So it's understandable, and I'm pretty sure Iran will be treated far more seriously than ever before with this war. And Iranians also feel good about this, you know, about resisting U.S. aggression. What I'm thinking is that multipolarity is already here. For instance, if you look at China's BRI initiative, it already involves about 150 countries, with over two trillion dollars invested—the largest platform for global cooperation in the world. And if you look at trade power, China is now the largest trading nation, the main trading partner for over 140 countries. All this means a multipolar world is already here. Yet a multipolar world order is still to come. This is what we should strive for—a new order truly based on the UN Charter, sovereign equality, and win-win cooperation. We hope that will be achieved in the years to come.

#Danny

You know, in this moment, Professor John, as we look at the bigger picture, I don't know if you've seen some of these memes coming out of the West, especially the United States. One of the big ones is this idea of "China doing nothing and winning." On the one hand, China is obviously doing a lot to build up its status, its power, its prestige, and its rise. But I'm wondering if you could comment on this—because right now, a lot of people see what the U.S. and the Western imperial, unipolar order are doing as essentially giving China even more room to win. What do you think about that, and how do you see it?

#Zhang Weiwei

I read these kinds of comments. I read one article where an economist said, you know, Chinese philosophy is that when your enemy or your opponent is doing something wrong, don't interrupt—let him keep doing it.

#Danny

In fact, we tell our American counterparts, you know, this policy is wrong, that policy is wrong—from day one.

#Zhang Weiwei

For instance, I myself host a current affairs show. We make a lot of comments on U.S. foreign policy. From day one of its trade war policy, we said the United States would lose. Then came the tech war—banning chips, Huawei, and so on. We even said the Chinese government should eventually award a medal to Donald Trump. We said this openly back in 2018. And yet, they didn't want to listen. They preferred their own approach. The problem with U.S. leadership is that, in a country full of wonderful, intelligent, long-visioned scholars and thinkers, somehow the people who end up in the White House never seem to learn from history. That's the problem. If you look at this failure of war, people even joke about it—"from Taliban to Taliban," meaning twenty years later, it ended right where it started.

Over \$2.3 trillion squandered. I made a rough calculation based on the Chinese model of eradicating extreme poverty. In theory, if you adopted that model, with \$2.3 trillion we could eradicate extreme poverty worldwide—including in the United States. Zero. Yet this money was squandered. And no one really analyzed or drew lessons from why the United States failed to achieve its purpose in Afghanistan. They're repeating it again, and now it's called "from harmony to harmony." This is true, this is true. You have to, you know, eventually start learning the lesson. In Chinese philosophy, from Confucius 2,500 years ago, you have to think hard about what mistakes you've made in life, in your career, and reflect three times a day. That's a different civilizational heritage.

#Danny

Right. Well, the United States—certainly in terms of its foreign policy and its establishment—they really do give real meaning to the idea of history repeating itself in grand fashion. Professor Zhang, maybe you can talk about the recent talks in Islamabad—the initial post-ceasefire talks—where they were at least trying to reach some terms on a ceasefire and then a peace settlement. There were discussions in Western mainstream media about how China might have pushed Iran to come to the table. I'm curious what your thoughts are on this, given that, you know, maybe we can finish our conversation in the last twenty minutes or so on China's governance and how it actually interacts not only with other countries, but also with Chinese society and the Chinese people.

#Zhang Weiwei

Well, if you look at the overall picture of China's rise over the past decades, you can sum it up as what I call sticking to the principle of development and peace. This is crucial, and it's very different from the American approach to global affairs, which is based on so-called divide and rule—friend or foe. It's always like this: if you're not our friend, you're our enemy. The Chinese approach is much more sophisticated. It really originates from Chinese civilization. We don't treat countries or people as friends or foes; we treat them as friends or potential friends. That's very important. But you need to have a long vision. As we say to Europeans, Russia is your geographical neighbor. It will always be there for the next one or two thousand years. So you have to have some kind of security arrangement with Russia, rather than a Europe without Russia.

#Danny

It's stupid. It's unrealistic.

#Zhang Weiwei

In other words, you have the principle of friendship and potential friendship. That's important. And also, rather than divide and rule, we prefer unite and prosper. So, if you look at U.S. policy toward the Middle East, it's been focused for decades against Iran—"Iran is an evil state, Iran is bad"—divide and rule. And the Chinese said, no, that's not the purpose. We try to succeed by mediating the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This will be part of Chinese diplomacy in the years to come, for the whole region. Just last week, I joined a Zoom conference with a European think tank, and they discussed an interesting idea.

They said, yes, the Middle East is in crisis, but we have to look to the future and present something optimistic for the region. They called it the Oasis Plan—to turn the deserts in the Middle East into oases for development and prosperity. I made a short presentation and said that, because of China, we've achieved something similar. If you look at this latest plan, China has worked hard for years on four major deserts in northern China, and now they've become the largest base for renewable energy in terms of solar and wind power. China is also surrounded by a green belt around the Taklamakan Desert, which is roughly the size of Germany.

In four decades, they've gradually turned this into a kind of platform and base for renewable energy and for China's green production. You may know that Xinjiang—despite whatever smear campaign the Western media runs against it—is now one of the largest producers of grain and, of course, renewable energy in China. For China, and even for other countries, it has the lowest electricity costs in the country. So many companies, including foreign ones, go to Xinjiang because of the cheap power. So I would say, you know, you said "do nothing and win." Actually, China does a lot in terms of doing the right thing for both China and humanity.

And we believe very firmly, you know, that the future belongs to renewable energy. If you look at it, when we talk about a multipolar world order, you can see that the British Empire was built on coal-driven power as its energy base. The U.S. empire was built on petro-power—on the petrodollar and oil. Now, when I think of a new multipolar world order, China will not seek to build a Chinese empire; that's not the case. But this new multipolar world order, in terms of energy, will be based on renewable sources because it's much fairer and more just, far less geopolitical or geoeconomic. Solar energy is everywhere, wind energy is everywhere—you can make the best use of it.

And then, indeed, if you look at the Middle East—this whole crisis in Lebanon, Israel, Gaza, and so on—well, it really has to do with water resources, the scarcity of water. Yet, with enough wind and solar energy, we can have huge projects for desalination. And then, you know, we can turn deserts to better use—for renewable energy and for development. I said to this forum, if we can restore peace in the region, real peace, then China is ready to share its renewable energy technology with the region, based on the principle of discussing together, building together, benefiting together. So we have to be a bit optimistic in this world of chaos; otherwise, it will be cumbersome.

#Danny

Yes, indeed. Well, maybe you can help the audience understand China's way of governance, because every time something major happens historically—like with the Iran war—there's a lot of what I would call projections made onto China from Western thinkers, U.S. thinkers, think tanks, media, mainstream media, the political class, on and on throughout the establishment. Oftentimes, the view is that China is aggressive. So, China's relations with Iran are also seen as aggressive, as if they're fueling aggression and supporting Iran in its aggression. You know, they've said the same about China and Russia, and about China's overall policy in general, right? It's aggressive, it's debt traps—all of these things.

But very little is said in the United States and in the West about how China actually governs itself, versus this kind of trope of "authoritarian China," "the dictatorship." How are decisions made? How did China get to this point—being the biggest industrial economy, a champion of peace and stability? I think now, more and more, ordinary people in the West, in this unipolar world, in the U.S.—they're looking at China differently because of this. They see the contrast, and then they compare that with what they're told about China. And of course, Xiaohongshu really put the nail, I think, in the coffin of a lot of anti-China smears. But your thoughts—maybe you can help the audience understand China's governance, how it does this.

#Zhang Weiwei

You know, let me give you a very brief explanation of what I call the overall paradigm shift—from the Western model to the Chinese model. The Western model is clear-cut: it's called democracy or autocracy. If you don't have a multi-party system, one person, one vote, and so on, then you're an autocracy, you're a dictatorship. The Chinese paradigm is very different. The Chinese paradigm is

about good governance or bad governance. Good governance can take the form of a Western political system—there are a few that provide slightly better governance than others—but a lot of Western models and their practices turn out to be bad governance. So many, I could give you a hundred examples. So we'll focus on governance, because the whole Western political science and political philosophy around democracy has nothing to do with governance. That's the problem.

Governance is only discussed in the West when it comes to failure—failed states. In the end, some Western countries are increasingly becoming failed states. For the Chinese mind, for Chinese civilization and tradition, governance is number one. Then what's the relationship between governance and democracy? It's important, because we would consider a multi-party system and universal suffrage only as what we call procedural democracy. What China thinks is more important is that there are always two levels. One is *Dao*—the overall purpose—which means what democracy is for. From the Chinese point of view, democracy is for good governance. You have to deliver tangible benefits to your people. I call this substantive democracy. With this kind of substantive democracy, you also have procedural democracy. So, two levels—China has these two levels working together.

So democracy cannot become just a debating club or a chatting house. It has to be about good governance. A good government must be backed by competent leadership. If you look at how the Chinese select their leaders—if you look at the top seven members of the Standing Committee of the CPC—virtually all of them have served three times as the number one official of a Chinese province, which means they've each governed over 100 million people before reaching their current positions. So really, if you look at today's leadership in the United States or in the EU, by Chinese standards it's far below the Chinese bar. That's the problem: we have bad governance. It's fair for Jeffrey Sachs to say the only adults in the room, on the world stage, are the Chinese. So, in a way, you have to identify two key features of the Chinese model.

One is long-termism with a holistic approach. Long-term means you have to have a long vision. The Chinese vision, thanks to its civilizational tradition, is always long-term. For instance, I talk about the Taklamakan Desert transformation—over four decades of continuous planning and hard work. Now China is the leader in EVs, which is the result of four five-year plans, about 20 years. Each five years, there's a readjustment and modification of plans. But it's not Soviet-style mandatory planning—how many shoes a factory will produce, how many cigarettes. No, it's strategic guidance: what will be the priorities in the next five years?

If you look at the latest 15th Five-Year Plan, there's a very clear identification of what we call traditional industries, emerging industries, and future industries—and what we should do in all three categories. AI should add to the power of traditional, emerging, and future industries. So this is very clear; you know what to do. This is also a very important and holistic approach. For instance, people now talk about the Iranian crisis—so many countries have been affected by the energy shortage. But China is very safe because for over 20 years it has been working on renewable energy. China knows this is a strategic priority, and we cannot move away from that. We have to stick to our approach.

As a result, if you look at the energy structure today, it's 54% coal-based. But these coal-based power plants have been revolutionized with clean technologies. They're no longer the old type of coal-fired plants. Then about 20% comes from renewable energy, all of which is self-sufficient in China. The remaining part is gas and oil, of which China imports around 70%. Overall, China's energy dependency on foreign sources is about 15%. It's manageable—not a big problem. So without a long-term plan, without this kind of sophisticated planning and the power to execute it, none of this would be possible. When I say China is a "civilizational state," I mean it's a blend of an ancient civilization—5,000 years old—with a super-large modern state. Its planning is very advanced.

#Danny

Yeah, and uh, I guess maybe as we close up here, a question about the dollar system—because I think when it comes to what's happening now worldwide, with China's rise, there's a lot of talk about whether the world is entering a post-dollar era. And now, with Iran having asserted what it calls sovereign and strategic control, or leadership, over the Strait of Hormuz, there have been talks about how this toll—which isn't necessarily a novel idea in the Strait of Hormuz—could involve potentially settling payments or tariffs in Chinese yuan. That would be a big development in this post-dollar world that a lot of people are thinking and wondering about, given the dollar's volatility and declining status. So what's your view on this, and how China's good governance is creating alternatives to what many people see as one and the same—U.S. dollar and U.S. hegemony?

#Zhang Weiwei

And indeed, if you look at the crisis in Ukraine—I remember when the war started—the U.S. and Western countries imposed these sweeping sanctions against Russia, including kicking Russia out of the SWIFT system. As a result, de-dollarization has become a stronger and stronger trend, because you have a weaponized dollar system—a payment system like SWIFT. And now, with this Iranian crisis, that process has accelerated for understandable reasons. The U.S. dollar, or the petrodollar, may become less and less important in the years to come. And as you mentioned, the petro-yuan will grow bigger and bigger, also for understandable reasons.

The Chinese word for currency is interesting. The character itself is made up of two parts: one means "goods," the other means "money." Goods and money together make currency. So if you look at the sanctions against Russia, Russia turned this currency war into a war between goods and money. You have the money, but I have the goods. Even with your money, you can't buy our goods. In this case now, Iran—and eventually the Gulf states—will say, "We have goods, that's what's important. You have to respect our ownership of these goods. And you can't keep giving us dollars that are inflated again and again, and devalued."

So eventually, the world is material in the sense of goods—you have to produce tangible goods. Another part of the Chinese model is always focusing on the real economy rather than the virtual

economy, and that makes all the difference. If you look at the decline of the Dutch Empire, the British Empire, and today's American Empire, it all had to do with the financialization and monetization of the economy. Of course, it's fascinating to earn more from your money rather than from the real economy—it's easier, it's tempting. Yet if you lose your real economy, you will suffer. And that's the lesson of history.

#Danny

Well, Professor Zhang Weiwei, I think we can end on this. I want to make sure everyone knows you're a professor at Fudan University, a legendary author, and an expert in international relations—someone who plays a really huge role in helping Americans, Westerners, and the English-speaking world understand China. I really appreciate you taking the hour to be on this show. Everybody, thanks so much for watching. I hope you enjoyed it. Be sure to hit the like button before you go, and I'll be back again soon. Thanks so much. Good—thank you very much.