Jeffrey Sachs: Permanent War Machine Meets New World Order

Professor Jeffrey Sachs is a world-renowned economics professor, bestselling author, innovative educator, and global leader in sustainable development. Follow Jeffrey Sachs' YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@JeffreyDSachsOfficial Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Buy Diesen merchandise: https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL 00:00 Why voters reject wars but wars continue 03:01 Eisenhower’s warning and the military-industrial complex 05:24 The political cost of the Iran war 07:20 Can Democrats become the party of peace? 10:40 New lawmakers and an opening for anti-war politics 13:07 Overreach, living costs, and U.S. support for Israel 16:27 Sachs’s proposed diplomatic basis for ending the Ukraine war 18:35 Diesen’s question: can U.S. foreign policy break its pattern? 21:36 From the Cold War to the post-1991 drive for hegemony 24:21 How successive administrations sustained intervention 26:48 Why wars end, and why China changes the equation 30:37 CIA autonomy and the limits of oversight 33:01 Reasons for cautious optimism about a policy shift 35:26 Sachs’s call to press politicians for diplomacy 37:00 Diesen’s closing reminder about where power resides

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by Professor Jeffrey Sachs. Thank you for coming on the program. Thank you. I wanted to ask you about an article you just penned about peace being good politics, because it seems that a recurring theme in American politics is that Americans tend to vote for peace, but then they end up getting more wars. And what we saw in these midterm elections was that the Republicans were punished severely for the Iran war, a war which is widely unpopular among the American public—more unpopular than previous wars as well. So they voted for the Democrats. However, the question is, of course, whether or not this will be a vote for peace, because it does seem that the Democrats want to scale down the Iran war, but they would like to scale up the war against Russia. So I was just wondering, how do you assess the election outcome, and to what extent do you see peace being good politics?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yeah. So, of course, there's an electoral issue, a public opinion issue, and a deep state issue in the United States. My whole life has been in periods of unpopular wars. The United States fights a lot of

wars. Most of them are unpopular. Occasionally, they start with public support, but the public support usually turns sour rather quickly. After it does, the wars continue, sometimes seemingly forever. And I'm a baby boomer, a child of the 1950s, so I grew up during the Vietnam War period, which became profoundly unpopular. Of course, we had the Iraq War. We had the Afghanistan War, which dragged on for 20 years. We've had the wars of the Middle East. We have the Ukraine War, which is a proxy war by the United States aimed at Russia.

Of course, there are contested narratives, but the one that you and I understand full well is that the United States strategically and tactically wanted to bring Ukraine to, quote, "our side" against the Russians. And that caused that war, which has dragged on for now 12 years because it started in 2014 with the violent coup in February 2014. The public doesn't want these wars, but they continue despite the public opposition. And the main reason for that, of course, is the relative autonomy of military, security, and foreign policy from public opinion and from the votes. And that is the deep state idea, which is a true one. It is what Dwight Eisenhower, a general who then became president of the United States between January 1953 and January 1961, labeled for the first time the military-industrial complex.

And he, a general, warned the American people that the military-industrial complex was a threat to American society and American institutions. That was back on January 17, 1961, when he gave that warning. So that was 65 years ago. And it proved, of course, both correct and prescient in many ways. So the Iran war is just the latest of these deeply unpopular wars. What generally happens in the United States is that governments that pursue these deeply unpopular wars get thrown out of office, and then another government comes in. Too often, they continue the wars, but not always. Sometimes the wars actually end. Sometimes a change of government is an opportunity to say, "All right, that war was a disaster, and we don't have to take responsibility."

We even thought that's what Trump was going to do in Ukraine: blame it on Biden and get out. But he wasn't smart enough, clever enough, or determined enough to face down the deep state. Maybe he didn't even care. Who knows? But the fact of the matter is that he continued the war, and it became Trump's war. And then he started another war, contrary to what he promised: the absolutely bizarre, terrible, destructive, and losing war against Iran, which was a U.S.-Israel concoction, or, more properly put, a Netanyahu-Trump-Mossad-CIA concoction that has proved to be a massive failure, hugely unpopular, and directly responsible for driving up petrol prices, electricity costs, food prices, and so forth.

And the American people just gave a resounding, rather amazing response—a huge kick in the butt to Trump, saying, "You lied to us. You campaigned in 2024 on the basis that you wouldn't do this. MAGA meant 'Make America Great,' not go to war for Israel, not do Netanyahu's bidding, not get us into another useless war. You promised you wouldn't do that, and you lied, basically, or you failed, or you blundered because you're incompetent. Take your pick." But in any event, the American people across the country, to an absolutely heartening and amazing extent, shouted, "No, we don't want this war."

We actually want you to pay attention, surprisingly, to the cost of living, to food prices, to energy prices, to housing prices, to health care—the things that really are making it quite difficult for us day to day. This is what the French people are saying. This is what the people in Germany are saying. This is what the people in Israel are saying, by the way, though it's a little bit more complicated. They booted out Netanyahu's majority in the Israeli election, saying, "We don't want you to keep getting us into these endless wars." So, to come to your question, Glenn, the question is: what does this new Democratic Party majority make of it? And the truth is, two things.

One, we don't know, because the Democrats have been agents of war like the Republicans, because we have a deep state. The parties are much less significant than you would hope. It's not a war party versus a peace party. It's basically two war parties most of the time. And we have to remember that Biden-Harris lost the 2024 election in large part because they had prosecuted the Ukraine war and had been complicit in the Gaza war. And we know from the exit polls that the American people were sick of those two wars. So the first point is, we don't know what the Democrats will do. Will they just, in effect, continue the same failed policies? When it comes to Iran, probably not, because the message is so clear.

This was a debacle. This was stupid. This was completely unnecessary. This was vicious because it was killing the Iranian leadership in the midst of explicit negotiations that were going forward, which is about the most dastardly, phony reason for an actual war you can imagine. Negotiations are proceeding. The Omani mediator announced on the day of the bombing by the United States and Israel, before it occurred, "We're making progress." And the reason the Iranians were all assembled at the Supreme Leader's residence was to discuss the next round of negotiations. And Mossad and the CIA said, "Okay, let's kill them because they're there to discuss the next round of negotiations."

So the American people shouted, "We don't want this anymore." I have to believe the Democrats, who don't own this war, will go along with that verdict and even use it politically. But you asked the right question: Well, what about Ukraine? And here was the second point I wanted to make, which is that if you were to look at the leadership of the Democratic Party, it's the same Russophobic, warmongering leadership that was there under President Biden, whom I absolutely disliked and thought was a terrible president. And I warned the Democrats, which was my home party during most of my life, that foreign policy was going to cost them the next election, which turned out to be exactly correct.

So if you were to look at the leadership in Congress right now, in the Senate and the House, you'd conclude that, my God, you know, all we're going to do is go back to more warmongering on Ukraine, even perhaps blaming Trump for not supporting Ukraine enough. But here's the point that I want to emphasize: the actual new class of politicians voted into office this round includes a lot of peace advocates. So the new politicians coming into Congress are a very interesting, very ethnically,

racially, and religiously diverse group, including the first-ever Muslim elected senator, the senator from Michigan, somebody I know and like very much because he's extremely smart: Abdul El-Sayed, an absolutely wonderful person.

This new group doesn't own the Ukraine war, is not owned by the military-industrial complex, did not receive funding from the military-industrial complex, and actually has a real chance within the party to say, “No, let's not do this. We got elected in an anti-war vote, and we have another election coming up quite soon.” I, of course, mean the presidential election in 2028. And we should become the party of peace, diplomacy, and War Department budget cuts. Don't even call it defense, because it's bleeding the American budget. And it's the reason why the politician says, “Sorry, we can't afford to help you on housing or health care or education.”

The budget has a big deficit because they spend a fortune on the military. So I wrote this article yesterday, a kind of missive to my friends or acquaintances in the Democratic Party, whom I've known in many cases for decades, to say, look, listen to the voters. Don't fall into the same trap that you, the Democrats, were in in 2024 and that you have now used to defeat your political foe in 2026. Understand the message really coming from the public. The message coming from the public is a kind of classic one, which is that America has overreached. It's a vastly overstretched empire in the classic form. It cannot afford the vision of America as the world's hegemon.

The public doesn't want it. It doesn't see any glory in high petrol prices or an unaffordable cost of living. It's not reaping any kind of psychic benefits from saying, “We're bombing Iran.” It's not what Americans want. What they want is affordable health care and housing. And I'm saying to the Democrats, wake up. You have a chance right now. Become the party of peace. Clearly, on Iran, you will support the end of the war. But come on, guys and girls. Stop this open-ended, disastrous support for Israel, which has been on the American agenda for decades. Yes, I know there's a powerful lobby. I know many of the reasons for the pressures.

But stop now, because the American people are sick of Israel's rogue behavior. The American people overwhelmingly support the Palestinian cause. And if you look at young voters, it ain't even close. Right now, they're disgusted with Israel because they don't have that kind of generational regard from having grown up with a young Israel that wasn't as destructive as it is now. All they know is an Israel that has committed genocide, and they don't want any part of it. So I'm saying, in all of the conflicts we face and have caused or are complicit in, stop the war. Stop the war in Iran for sure. Stop this checkbook for Israel.

And there are more pernicious things underway. In a way that, as you know, is completely shocking, the Israel lobby has gone far in actually putting into legislation direct coordination between the Israeli military and the U.S. military as a legislative partnership, which is something you would not imagine a sovereign country ever doing. And the United States is on the verge of doing that with Israel in the authorization legislation for the so-called Defense Department or War Department. So don't do that. And then, when it comes to Ukraine, of course, don't own this war. Stop it. And we

know rather straightforwardly that this can stop diplomatically because the Russians have said for about 30 years what the reason for this conflict in Ukraine is.

And they've said for the last 12 years, since 2014, what the reason for the war is. And they've said since 2016 how to end this war. And they said it again in 2021. And Biden rejected the Russian proposals. And they had it on paper with the Ukrainians in 2022. And Biden told the Ukrainians, "Keep fighting." In other words, Glenn, we know that the basics of peace are: Ukraine becomes neutral. NATO abrogates its crazy commitment to expand to Ukraine, which is the underlying casus belli of this whole war. A peace is reached. Ukraine can then do what it wants as a neutral country, join Europe if it wants to. But it becomes neutral, without European troops, without NATO troops, without American missile systems in a neutral country. And that would be the basis for ending this war on some armistice line that would be set.

There are details to be negotiated, but that's how this war will end if it doesn't end with the simple, outright military defeat of Ukraine. And so that's what I'm saying to the Democrats. You were agents of this. You are part of this. There has been bipartisan support for this horrible policy of NATO enlargement to Ukraine, knowing how dangerous this is. But now you have the chance. You don't own it. Stop it. And that's my message to the Democrats. Will it stick? It will appeal to a significant part of the Democratic caucus, especially the younger and newer parts of the caucus. Whether the older establishment of the Democratic Party can understand, just in pragmatic terms, that that's the way to win the White House in 2028 remains to be seen.

#Glenn

There's a strange continuity, I feel, though. Even in the post-Cold War era, we saw Bill Clinton run on a peace platform, I would say, in '92—that is, the post-Cold War peace dividend and diplomacy. But then he delivered NATO expansion and the Yugoslav wars. Then we had George Bush. He condemned Clinton's nation-building. Then he gave us Afghanistan and Iraq, which was nation-building on a whole new level. And Obama ran under the slogan of change. And then he gave us Libya, Syria, Yemen, even the regime change in Ukraine, which triggered the war there.

And Trump, he seemed like the ultimate peace president, especially in the second round, when he denounced all of these forever wars. He was going to end the Ukraine war. I mean, the fact that he said it during the election campaign as well, knowing it would make him an enemy, was quite remarkable. I'm just wondering, do you see any reason for optimism on the Republican side now? Because people like J.D. Vance seem to quite genuinely oppose this war. On the other hand, he also said at one point that what differentiated Trump from the former president was that he wasn't stupid, at least. When he attacks Iran, he's going to win. I would like to be optimistic, but pessimism sets in.

However, in the wider picture, if we assume—perhaps a flawed assumption—that, to some extent at least, intentions derive from capabilities, then if you have the ability to dominate, it will be too

tempting. But with this shift in the distribution of power, might the US accept a more modest role in the international system, if merely out of its own self-interest? That is, to scale back a bit, rebuild its strength, and let the other great powers, you know, balance each other instead of collectively balancing the US. I mean, do you see something different this time, or am I a hopeless optimist here?

#Jeffrey Sachs

No, no. First, you know, over your right shoulder, among many great books, including yours, I see the book Hubris, which is a book by Jonathan Haslam, a wonderful historian. Hubris, of course, is the deadly sin of believing that you have more power than you really have. And America suffers from hubris, if nothing else, which is a chronic overreach and a chronic desire to run the world. And so we are fighting a deep tendency, without question. And that's why there is more continuity now in foreign policy than there is in politics—why governments come and go, but seemingly the direction of foreign policy and military and security policy remains relatively unchanged.

And just to put it in simple terms, since 1945, the United States has essentially viewed itself as aiming for global hegemony. During the Cold War, the idea was somehow, in this twilight struggle, to defeat the Soviet Union and then be the leader not only of the so-called free world, as the U.S. defined it, but of the world. And in 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States declared itself the world's hegemon, the sole superpower, the indispensable country, the country that sees farther than any other country.

It was the moment of maximum hubris, and it was at that moment that the so-called strategists decided that NATO could expand anywhere, that we didn't have any commitments we really had to keep, and that we could unilaterally leave nuclear agreements that were very important, very much calibrated to create a kind of metastability, however fragile—like the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which the U.S. unilaterally left in 2002. Hubris said, "We can do it because we're all-powerful." Of course, that led to many of these wars that I've talked about, led by both parties. The Bush Jr. administration led the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—the 2003 Iraq War. We should remember that the 2003 Iraq War was a Bibi Netanyahu playbook war, sold to the American people on a bunch of lies.

And that resulted in not only massive deaths and destruction, but many, many years of disaster until the United States finally pulled out. And then Obama came in and started his own set of wars. He was really supposed to be the peace president. He came into office with a Nobel Peace Prize, nothing less than that, for accomplishments yet to be made. And he was not a president of peace. He was a president of war because he tasked the CIA with overthrowing the Syrian government. He led the NATO operation to overthrow the Libyan government, and his government was the one that backed the violent coup in Ukraine in February 2014. So that was Obama. Then Trump says the Ukraine war never would have occurred.

But, you know, "if I were president"—he was president, and the Ukraine war did occur during those years after 2014. And it was Trump who funded the buildup of the million-man Ukrainian army during his first term. Then Biden came in, from the other party, and he was delighted, it seems, to prosecute the war because he thought it would topple Putin, bring Russia to its knees, and crush the Russian economy. In other words, accomplish what the United States had set out to do back at the start of the Cold War. They viewed Russia as the next target: make sure that Russia is subordinate to the United States. Now that the Soviet Union's gone, we must basically bring Russia into subordination.

As you know, they even thought, "We'll break up Russia." Brzezinski wrote about Russia becoming a confederation of weak regional governments: one in Europe, one in Siberia, one in the Far East. It's mind-boggling, the hubris and the delusions. So we have the deep state, and President Putin expressed it very vividly, very famously, in 2017 in an interview with French media. I think it was Le Figaro, where he said, "I've met three presidents now. They come into office with ideas, even interesting ideas. But then men in dark suits with briefcases and blue ties show up and explain to these presidents how it really is." And then Putin says, "You never hear of those ideas again." And so this is President Putin's vivid way of describing the American deep state. So this doesn't give a lot of confidence, except for two things that I would say.

There are, even in this period since 1945, periods of at least relative peace. American wars end. It takes a long time, usually, and exhaustion. But the Vietnam War actually ended. The Iraq War more or less ended, although Iraq remains a semi-vassal state because Iraq's oil revenues still get paid to the United States. Shockingly, it's just unbelievable how that goes on. Afghanistan's occupation finally ended after 20 years of war, in which the United States changed Afghanistan from Taliban rule to Taliban rule 20 years later. In other words, accomplishing nothing except 20 years of destruction and lost economic development. But the wars do end on occasion, usually when there's a political change so that the incoming politicians say, "That's the war of the outgoing politicians."

And that's why there's a moment of opportunity for the Democrats right now to use that and then leverage it for the 2028 presidential election. But there's another point. In addition to that kind of continuity, there's a fundamental change in history underway. And that is that, in the most real terms, America's dominance is gone. We're in a world fundamentally different from the world of 1992, if for no other reason than the fact that China is a larger economy than the United States. China holds more cards than the United States in trade, which we saw when the U.S. under Trump tried to launch a trade war, and it lasted for about 48 hours. And then the U.S. sued for peace because the Chinese said, "Okay, let's have a trade war. We'll stop giving you rare earth magnets."

And then the Americans said, "Oh, my God, that would be the end of our auto industry. It would be the end of our manufacturing, and it would be the end of our military industry." So they said, "Let's have a truce." And that truce is going to be extended when President Trump meets with President Xi in China in just a few days. So the world's really different. Truly different. We are in a multipolar world that is substantively different—economically, financially, technologically, and militarily—from

30 years ago. So whatever the deep-state intentionality of the United States is, the reality is on the oceans, even more than on the ground.

I was going to say on the ground, but it's even more true on the oceans. The United States cannot win a conventional war against China, for example, over Taiwan. Every war game shows the same thing. This means that the deep state itself cannot sell a package anymore with any plausibility of success. So the politicians have three reasons for doing something different right now. One reason is, "It's not our war. We're coming in, and we're saying, 'Stop all of this.'" Second, "We want to win the 2028 election." And third, if they have their eyes open, "Hey, we're in a different world."

We cannot continue the strategy of 30 years ago, set at the end of the Cold War, much less the strategy of 80 years ago, set at the end of World War II. Now, one more point that I would add is that our deep state is very much centered on the CIA. The CIA has a lot of autonomy. That's built into the design, both to take away accountability for the CIA itself and to give deniability to the political class by giving that institution some autonomy to operate in secret, even with budgets that are not on the American books, because CIA operations are sometimes paid for by other countries. It's just amazing how this has worked.

And one of the great issues in American politics is that the CIA itself has not been investigated or held to account for 51 years. The last time the CIA was actually examined—really examined, and even then not fully examined, but substantially examined—was by a committee led by an Iowa senator named Frank Church in 1975. And that exposed tremendous abuses and assassination schemes and tremendous surveillance of the American people, which is blatantly illegal for the CIA as an agency, and crimes galore. And there were some attempts at reform and a little bit of oversight, but that was 51 years ago. And so the deep state agenda is unexamined. And this is a reason for some skepticism or some belief that, yes, there's going to be a part of this machine that's going to continue in the same direction.

But I have some hopes because of this combination of factors: new, young politicians not beholden to these horrible wars or to these lobbies; politicians who came to office running against the Israel lobby—not on the basis of the Israel lobby, but explicitly against the Israel lobby; a generational change in attitudes among the young people of the United States; a public across almost every demographic against these wars and shouting at the politicians, "Pay attention to us. Stop fighting these overseas wars of hegemony." And there's the fact that we are in a different world, so nobody believes the case, say, for going back to fight Iran. Nobody believes it. I don't think any of the generals in the United States, the Joint Chiefs—I don't think anybody believes that it makes sense to start firing again in Iran.

And if it happens, it will be some bizarre Trump-Netanyahu thing with its deep state undertones, not because of any realistic prospects of success whatsoever. So I don't mean to be naively, glibly optimistic, but I'm not totally pessimistic either. Countries can change course. It's hard. But I think the resounding clarity of what just happened should be taken into account. And so should the fact

that Trump himself, who's neither the most astute nor the most honest person, to put it mildly, said on election night, "Iran had something to do with it."

And then his own vice president, as boldly as he conceivably could, said, "This is the disaster that caused our political disaster." Because Vance wants a political life. He wants a future. He read the truth. He read the exit polls. He read the results of the election. So all of this, Glenn, means that there's some hope. We should be shouting at these politicians: "Listen to the truth. Listen to the voters. You have a chance to change direction in Ukraine, to end the war with diplomacy. You have the opportunity to do this right now. You can absolutely stop the Iran war just by not starting it again."

And with Israel, for God's sake, no more of these Israel-led wars. So that's at least what I'm going to try to promote in the coming weeks. This new Congress comes into office in early January, but I think even before it comes in, it can be the policy of the incoming leadership to warn Trump: "Look, if you start the Iran war despite all these reasons not to, we have an impeachment vote ready for you if you drag us back into this completely awful, failed, disastrous, unnecessary war." And they can stand up and say, "And on Ukraine, stop it. Stop it before we even come into office in January." And of course, when they come into power, be aware of where power resides as well.

#Glenn

That is, be aware of your military-industrial complex, your intelligence agencies. And yeah, I think that's quite important as well. Well, Professor Sachs, I know it's late over there in Shanghai, so I want to thank you so much for taking the time.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Great to be with you. We'll talk soon.