

# Jeffrey Sachs: New European Military Bloc for War Against Russia

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs discusses the Europeans developing a new military bloc as an alternative to NATO. Beneath the empty rhetoric of deterrence and peace, Europe is preparing for war with Russia. RECORDED ON MAY 12, 2026. 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](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](https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## #Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined again by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to discuss the European security architecture, or, well, the changes to it. So, thank you for taking the time.

## #Jeffrey Sachs

Great to be with you, as always. Thank you.

## #Glenn

Well, we saw that after the Cold War, we had essentially two options for European security architecture. We could either have an inclusive European security architecture, which included Russia, in which we pursued security with other members instead of security against non-members, like a military alliance. But instead, we returned to bloc politics with NATO expansion. I think it was primarily to keep the US in Europe, but either way, it predictably revived this Cold War logic. Anyway, now we see that European leaders are recognizing that NATO is fragmenting. And the solution is, instead of going back to those agreements we had in the early '90s, the Europeans appear determined to develop a new NATO — that is, a European NATO — which should include Ukraine and not Russia. But this time without the U.S. protection. So this is starting to feel like almost a determination to go to war with Russia. I was wondering, how do you make sense of this?

## #Jeffrey Sachs

Well, in 1990, as you say, there was an option on the table that was extraordinary, absolutely historic. It was put on the table by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and he meant it. I know. I watched. I was there. I was close up. His proposition was a common European home — a common

European home that actually, he said, stretched right across Asia, in fact, from Rotterdam to Vladivostok, as it was put. The idea was that the divisions between Europe and the Soviet Union should be ended. The Cold War should be over.

There would be internal reforms in the Soviet Union, democratization and demilitarization, and there would be a fundamental change in the security architecture — the disbanding of the Soviet military alliance, the Warsaw Pact — and at most an end to NATO as any kind of expansionist or offensive operation. Indeed, the promise, absolutely explicit, made by Germany and the United States in February 1990 in the quest for German reunification, a formal end to World War II, and a response to Gorbachev's offer, was that NATO would not move one inch eastward. And the commitment was undoubtedly made, no matter what is claimed by those who defend NATO enlargement.

What was on the table was the concept enshrined actually 15 years earlier in the Helsinki Final Act as indivisible security — that there would not be bloc security. No country would join an alliance that would threaten a neighbor. And in particular, no country would join, for example, an expanding NATO that would threaten those outside of NATO. This was clear, it was on the table, and it was rejected. So this is quite an interesting point. What happened instead, despite the commitment made very clearly by Germany and the United States in 1990, was that NATO expanded, and ultimately this led to the ongoing war in Ukraine. So why did that happen? And I think you mentioned one reason.

I think that there are two reasons, and those two reasons go back to even the origin of NATO. One reason was to keep the United States in Europe as a security defender of Europe. But against who? The Soviet Union wasn't an enemy anyway. After the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, dissolved into 15 former republics of the Soviet Union and now 15 independent nation-states, there was no threat. But some parts of Europe, particularly the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that had just come out of domination by the Soviet Union, said, well, now we want the United States to stay in to protect us against any kind of Soviet or Russian revanchism.

So especially these demands were heard in Central Europe — in the Czech Republic, or Czechoslovakia at the time, and in Poland and Hungary. We want Europe to be protected still by the United States, even though there was no evident or any real threat at the time. There could be no more Soviet invasion. There was no Soviet Union. Russia was absolutely looking inward at internal restructuring and reform. It was dismantling the military-industrial complex. I know that. I was there. I saw that. That wasn't a gimmick. That was a reality. It was begging for simple cooperation, for peaceful investment, for turning what had been a military-industrial industry into a civilian industry.

That option was turned down and stopped. Interestingly, Germany played a major role in pressing for NATO enlargement for that reason. German companies wanted to invest next door in Poland or in Hungary or in the Czech Republic or in Slovakia, Slovenia, and so forth. And they said, we'll feel safer about our investments if these are also NATO countries. So Germany reneged on the clear,

firm, unequivocal commitments that it had made to achieve reunification, to win Soviet support for reunification. It immediately started to call for NATO enlargement, probably to protect new commercial investments that were being made in neighboring countries. But there was a second idea. This was not the only reason for NATO enlargement. The United States chose NATO enlargement also as a policy tool. For what? For hegemony.

The idea was now that NATO is essentially not a defensive alliance against a now non-existent Soviet Union, but it becomes the military branch of U.S. overseas power. And so NATO enlargement became part of the new unipolar world that American strategists decided they would create with the fall of the Soviet Union. In other words, the United States also made a choice: should it make peace with Russia and see a recovery of Russia to, let's say, a great power status—not a belligerent country, but a powerful country, a country of 17 million square kilometers, roughly twice the size of the United States and the next largest countries? Or would the United States attempt to keep Russia down, maybe to divide it, but at a minimum to ensure that it could never rise again as any kind of threat, even though it wasn't threatening anybody?

Well, the United States chose that approach. While European countries, especially Germany and the countries of Central Europe, said, we want more NATO, the United States also decided, yes, that's a good idea—not to protect those countries, but to project American power. And the chief proponent of this idea, the chief ideologue, I would say, in the 1990s was Zbigniew Brzezinski. And he's a very smart man, a very interesting man. But he didn't like Russia, and he did not want Russia to have a strong, even if peaceful, standing. Perhaps as a Polish-American, he reflected Poland's long history of anti-Russian sentiments dating back to the 18th-century partition of Poland and even wars that went back to earlier centuries between the Polish-Lithuanian countries.

Empire and the Russians. So Brzezinski definitely had no sympathy for Russia. He wanted to see it weak. He wanted to see it divided. And he saw NATO enlargement as a core strategy for that. And in his very interesting, provocative, and absolutely wrong and dangerous book in 1997, *\*The Grand Chessboard\**, he played out the U.S. geopolitical game of NATO enlargement. He said that Eurasia is at the center of the world and Ukraine is the geographic pivot point of Eurasia. He who controls Ukraine controls Eurasia. By the way, China was seen as a secondary power, not of any real interest to the United States at the time, off in the periphery. The question was Russia and what to do about it.

And in this book, *\*The Grand Chessboard\**, and an accompanying article written for *\*Foreign Affairs\** called a... Eurasian grand strategy or something to that effect—I'm paraphrasing—Brzezinski said we should aim for a weak Russia. We should aim for basically the expansion of Europe and NATO, both the economic and the military side, to Ukraine. And Russia without Ukraine can never be an empire—that was Brzezinski's basic formula. So Ukraine became a prize, a geopolitical prize. If we take Ukraine, then we also banish forever any Russian pretensions to great power status.

Brzezinski, in his musings, went on to the idea that, well, maybe Russia would just end up dividing. Maybe it would be, as he put it, a loose confederation of three component parts: a European Russia, a Siberian Russia, and a Far Eastern Russia.

## **#Glenn**

Oh, these were delightful musings for Mr. Brzezinski.

## **#Jeffrey Sachs**

Russia basically disappearing as a strong state, being a pliant state, maybe one where American companies could gain access to Russian resources, but certainly one where Russia would never pose a threat. So these were the two lines of thought. For Europe, keep the United States in—it gives us security. For Germany in particular, expand NATO—it helps us to invest in the neighboring countries because they'll have clear military security as well as eventual membership in the European Union. And for the United States, pieces on the global chessboard to ensure what was the new and clear policy after 1991, but in a sense always the policy of the United States since 1945. And that was global hegemony. But between 1945 and 1991, the Cold War intervened—there was a superpower rival. But after 1991, with no superpower rival on the scene, global hegemony came into clear view. The end of history had arrived, and NATO would be a very convenient instrument for the expansion of U.S. power into Eurasia.

I like to refer people to a fascinating debate that was shown on American television—took place on American television, I should say—in 1994, on what was called the \*MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour\*, with a very fine newsman, Robert MacNeil, who interviewed two people in 1994 about NATO enlargement. One was the last U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union as the Soviet Union was ending, Jack Matlock, and the second was Henry Kissinger. And Matlock said, don't expand NATO. This could poison relations with Russia. This could undo the goodwill that is clearly here. And Matlock said, if things go sour later on, we'll have plenty of time to regroup, to reinforce security, to build our defenses. But don't antagonize Russia. Russia's trying to be cooperative, friendly. It's a bit down on its knees right now because of economic crisis.

Don't shake up a fragile but positive path to peace. Kissinger says, no, NATO must enlarge. And he's asked by MacNeil, why? Mr. Kissinger, is Russia a threat? And he says, no, no, Russia's not a threat. Well, is Russia threatening any of its neighbors? Oh, no, Russia's too weak. It's not threatening any of its neighbors. Well, Mr. Kissinger, would NATO enlargement antagonize Russia? Yes, yes, it would. Well, Mr. Kissinger, if Russia's not a threat and it would antagonize Russia... why would you do it? And Kissinger gives the classic imperial answer. He says, well, if you can't antagonize them when they're weak, what are you going to do when they're strong? So it was anticipatory antagonism. In other words, we have to get in there when we're strong and they're weak.

We have to provoke. We have to take the territory we can. We have to take the ground that we can. And Kissinger, this is what exactly went down. Kissinger later on started to say NATO enlargement to Ukraine is not a good idea. Even Brzezinski later on said that, I believe. But at the time in the 1990s, they were just gung-ho for American power. And I can add one more thing, Glenn, which is that the Russians were really peeved as NATO started to enlarge, but it came in three waves, which we should understand. When the first wave of NATO enlargement came in 1999 with Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, and really pushed by those three countries as well, by Václav Havel and others, who also wanted the NATO protection, the Russians swallowed hard.

They were in a weak position. This was still a long way from their borders. They were unhappy. They thought they had been cheated, which they had been. But they went along with the NATO enlargement in this first wave. And when President Putin became president, he was not antagonistic to Europe or to the United States. And famously, he explored Russia actually joining NATO and then found that, no, no, you don't understand, NATO's against you. This only became apparent later on. The second wave of NATO enlargement brought NATO to Russia's borders in the North Sea, in the Baltic states. So the wave in 2004 was seven states: Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia in the Baltic region; Slovenia and Slovakia; Bulgaria and Romania.

Ah, this was also now real national security. The Black Sea was now being taken by NATO. The Baltic states were being taken by NATO. And this 2004 expansion came in the wake of America's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, which I think really shook the ground, because now the nuclear balance was being undone by the United States as the U.S. unilaterally walked away from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. So 2004 was really a very, very bad expansion, and it put Russian backs up tremendously. And that's when they said, don't you dare come further. That's when President Putin said at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, enough, you've cheated, you've reneged, but don't come further.

And of course, the United States being the United States, and Europe at that point being Europe, unhappy too much about all this expansion, committed at the Bucharest NATO summit that Ukraine and Georgia, a nation-state in the South Caucasus that is in the belly of the South Caucasus, a real security concern for Russia, would also join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that was not defending against anything. It was just expanding. And the 2008 NATO summit was the breakpoint. And you can even trace it hour by hour in Angela Merkel's memoirs, because she knows, she knows that the NATO commitment to enlarge to Ukraine and Georgia was a casus belli. It could lead to war. She knew it. She resisted a specific timetable because she was afraid, but she gave in to the American pressures.

That was when Europe lost it all, in my view, when the cautious leaders of Europe said, OK, OK, NATO's going to enlarge to Ukraine and to Georgia. That wasn't about defense. It wasn't even about investment security. It was just about American hegemony. It was an American project. It was pushed on Europe. Europe went along when Angela Merkel folded her hand at the end of the first

day of the NATO summit in 2008. That's when Europe lost it. And that's where we are today. It took a U.S.-backed coup in Ukraine in February 2014, the Maidan coup, to bring to power a government that even wanted NATO, because the vast majority of Ukrainians said, we don't even want this, we're neutral.

But the U.S.-backed coup, led by Western Ukrainian far-right paramilitaries, in fact, took over the government. And then the United States and Ukraine from then on were intent on NATO enlargement. By the time the United States lost interest in this project, by the way, because Russia stood up to it and fought back and said, no, NATO is not going to enlarge to Ukraine, the Europeans now take this as their grand project. And this comes back to your opening remark that Europeans are talking about a military alliance that includes Ukraine. Well, if they do so, they're just meaning war with Russia. It's nuts. Look at a map. Ukraine should be neutral, period. This is the way to peace. And the Europeans are rejecting that for God knows what mindset reason, but it's crazy.

## **#Glenn**

Well, as you said, the Europeans back then, at least they were cautious, and they knew that taking these steps, expanding NATO, especially to Ukraine, would create a war. And also, after all this time at the end of the Cold War, trying to replace bloc politics with indivisible security, they actually had it. But they wouldn't take yes for an answer. And they knew the risk of reviving bloc politics. They knew that a Europe without Russia would inevitably become a Europe against Russia. And this is why it's so hard to understand what's going through their minds, because this new military bloc, it can't create hegemony.

It is definitely not going to create anything that looks like security, because a European military bloc will instigate conflict, but without American protection. It kind of begs what the purpose is. And if you see this together with other initiatives, such as all these European countries, including Germany, pushing these drone programs, this mass production of long-range drones for the explicit purpose of striking deep into Russia, they keep talking about deterrence and helping Ukraine, but the Europeans have gone to war now against Russia. It's just difficult to understand what the purpose is. Yes.

## **#Jeffrey Sachs**

Let me try to give you my explanation. First, let me say it's madness. It's suicidal. It's a path of war. So what I'm about to say as an explanation is not justification. It's trying to understand what is going on, because this is crazy, what Europe is doing right now, thinking that it's girding for war with a nuclear superpower. Crazy. So what is going on? Well, part of it is really the mindset of Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe was under Soviet domination for 45 years, basically. And they have this visceral hatred, fear of Russia. And so a lot of this is driven by the Baltic states. It's driven by Poland, certainly. Much less so by the Czech Republic or Slovakia, which actually resist all of this, or by Hungary, which has been resisting this, or by Bulgaria and Romania.

But the Baltic states and Poland are Russophobic to the core. That's part of their long history. It's part of their Cold War history. It's a tremendous lack of understanding of history and an unwillingness, a radical unwillingness, to understand anything from the Russian perspective. It's very, very sad. Even the Cold War, maybe we can discuss another time, had its roots in terrible misunderstandings and security dilemmas. Russia was looking for protective space. And again, just like now, the United States and Britain were not interested in giving protective space to the Soviet Union. They wanted a remilitarized Germany. So lots of mistakes were made that led to the division of Europe back in the Cold War period.

But from the mindset of the Eastern Europeans, that's what's driving them now — that Russophobia born of their history from 1945 to 1989–91. And I think it's a huge mistake, a huge failure of understanding history, a huge misreading of everything going on right now. So this, I fear, is one major part. And then in Brussels... the European project depends on keeping these new entrants happy also. They don't want a politically divided Europe. So who is their chief foreign policy spokesman? An Estonian of complete Russophobia. This is crazy for the European continent to go with the most Russophobic ideas as the guidelines. But that's what they're doing, in part, for their internal cohesion in Europe. But there's a second matter, Glenn, that I think is really, really important.

Germany is failing its historic role right now of making a European peace, because what has happened was that for decades German chancellors understood: make peace with Russia, make peace with the Soviet Union. This goes back to Ostpolitik with Willy Brandt. It continued with Helmut Schmidt. It continued with Helmut Kohl in 1990. It continued with Schröder. But it failed in part when German industry said, expand NATO so we can invest. That was the beginning. But then it failed with, unfortunately, Merkel's lack of will. Because the will to resist NATO enlargement, she knew. She knew intellectually this was dangerous, but she went along with the United States. And this is rather regrettable. But then it got worse and worse.

Scholz became nothing but a factotum of the Biden administration — not a peep of any thinking about how dangerous this situation is. And Merz, even worse — Merz is almost an open warmonger. Shocking for a German chancellor, actually completely shocking. And so, in addition to the Eastern European fears — understandable but wrongheaded in my view — is Germany's lack of self-understanding, historical awareness, understanding that Germany broke its own commitment to the Soviet Union and then to Russia, that Germany is key to indivisible security in Europe. You have Merz now just openly saying we need to prepare for war. Why? It's shocking. I can't quite say why. It's such a bad misunderstanding of Germany's real needs and real place in the world. It's actually terrifying in a way.

And maybe Merz also sees an economic dimension to this — the retooling of industry for war-making. God forbid. Military Keynesianism? Is this really what Germany is about right now? Germany is losing its industrial base, but what Merz is doing is going to possibly provoke a disastrous war, but leave Germany even farther behind economically. It's completely the wrong track. So all of this is to

say that I see two strands at work right now. Most of Western Europe, not so much in this agenda. Eastern Europe, absolutely — or much of Eastern Europe, the Baltics and Poland in particular — pushing this anti-Russophobic line. Germany... oh... absurdly, tragically unaware, self-unaware, now even championing this idea. And then always in the background, one has to add British Russophobia.

Because Britain, to my mind, is madness. It is imperial nostalgia to this moment. Even as Starmer goes down the drain, they put Ukraine as a great national project because they've hated Russia since 1840. So just to add one coda to this, all of this is to say, Glenn, that at best, we have the classic security dilemma — that Europe is taking defensive steps that are going to lead to war because they are really offensive in what they're doing. But what we see is a complete lack of political and security imagination in Europe. What started as a misguided project for Central Europe and for American hegemony has turned into an absolutely, profoundly dangerous European project for remilitarization that would be the march to war.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, it's incredible that they took all these steps and how they're also defining deterrence these days. If all your security is about deterrence, that's horrible enough. But what they put under that category today has clearly nothing to do with deterrence. Exactly. But here we are. Anyway, thank you very much for your analysis, and have a great flight. Great.

## **#Jeffrey Sachs**

Okay, talk to you soon. Bye bye.