Jeffrey Sachs & Vladimir Putin Discuss New European Security 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 The Evolution of Security Architecture 02:01 The Rise of Multipolarity 10:00 The United States and Global Hegemony 19:46 The Future of Great Power Relations 29:57 Rethinking Security in a New World Order

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We have the pleasure of being joined again by Professor Jeffrey Sachs. Thank you for coming back on the program.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Anytime, Glenn. Great to be with you.

#Glenn

You know, in the academic literature, there are two forms of security architecture we can contrast. One is an inclusive security architecture based on indivisible security, where you seek security with other members. The second is a system of military blocs. That’s zero-sum security, where you seek security against countries outside the bloc. During the Cold War, of course, we had bloc politics, but there was a desperate effort to establish some kind of inclusive security architecture through the Helsinki Accords, and we did that with the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in 1990. But again, we didn’t cement it. Anyway, what I want to ask about is how, over the decades, the United States has tended to choose the second option: bloc politics.

It established regional alliance systems that often divided regions into dependent allies on one side and American adversaries on the other, with those allies balancing against the adversaries. And this all seems to be fragmenting now, as the world has already shifted toward a multipolar distribution of power. In the Middle East, we see that the Gulf states aren’t too comfortable with this arrangement

anymore. In Europe, of course, they're discovering this too. And in East Asia, these discussions are also taking place. The security architecture based on a U.S.-led alliance system is weakening, but we don't seem to have a new security architecture to replace it. That vacuum makes a lot of people uncomfortable, myself included. How do you see what's happening now with these security arrangements? Because what they're talking about in Europe isn't just about Europe.

#Jeffrey Sachs

I think when it comes to security architecture, of course, it depends on which state we're talking about. The United States had an almost unique aspiration, and I think the same was true of Britain in the 19th century: it wanted to run the world. In other words, it aimed for global hegemony. Very few states in history have ever been in that position, but there have been a few. The Mongols thought they could rule the world.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Alexander the Great thought he could conquer all the known lands, though he wasn't sure what those were. He thought he could keep going, but when his troops reached India, they finally said, "No more. We're going back home to Macedonia." Most of the great powers in history have aimed not at global hegemony, but at some kind of regional hegemony. We don't know what Napoleon's ultimate vision was, but he aimed to be the hegemon of Europe. He wouldn't have minded becoming the hegemon of the whole world, but I think his practical aim was more or less to control Europe. So when we talk about security architecture, it really depends on who's doing the talking. And it is true that there are maybe three versions of this story.

When there are a number of powers, you can imagine two kinds of stories—the two you started with. One is that the powers cooperate in some way, and we call that, of course, a concert of powers. The most famous example in modern history is the Concert of Europe, which emerged from the settlement reached in Vienna after Napoleon's defeat. In that case, four great powers—Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia—said, "We will cooperate." Then, after the Bourbon Restoration, France was admitted in 1818, bringing the number of great powers in the concert to five. They aimed to avoid conflict and weren't organized into competing blocs. Instead, they were five powers that would meet, negotiate, solve problems, and try to preserve a kind of status quo in Europe.

And that worked more or less for several decades, though, of course, historians debate exactly how long it lasted and how well it worked. By the early 20th century, nearly 100 years after the Concert of Europe began, it had fallen apart and given way to two competing blocs. On the one hand, there was a bloc led by the new German state and Austria, and on the other, there was a bloc that included Britain, France, and Russia. In my view, that second model, with two competing blocs, was the architecture that led to World War I. The fuse was lit by a series of crises in the first decade of the 20th century and, ultimately, by the assassination of the Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in July 1914—or maybe in late June. I don't remember the exact date.

But in any event, that's what eventually led these two blocs into a world war. Now, what does that have to do with today? Well, there was a kind of concert of powers within Europe for much of the 19th century, but if you look at the world as a whole, the British Empire dominated because it ruled the oceans, more or less. Britain put together the largest empire in world history. At its peak, it had about a quarter of the world's population and covered about 29 million square kilometers, making it the largest empire in history by land area.

So Britain was a global hegemon, I think it's fair to say. At the same time, within Europe, there was more or less a concert of several major powers, with Britain always acting as a balancer to prevent any one major European power from dominating. And notably, Britain aimed to prevent Russia from becoming the dominant power in Europe. Two world wars followed. That was the end of the British Empire, and it was the end of European empires around the world. And it was, of course, the end of any kind of Concert of Europe.

And at the end of World War II, the United States was by far the strongest power in the world technologically, militarily, financially, and economically. For a short time, until 1949, it had a monopoly on the new atomic bomb. But Russia was a vast power, of course, in the form of the Soviet Union. And because of choices that were made after 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union, which had fought alongside Britain to defeat Hitler, became rivals for hegemony. So this was a return to bloc politics—very, very dangerous bloc politics that nearly erupted into war between the two major powers several times. They probably came closest to war during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, but there were several other occasions when the Soviet Union and the United States came to blows. When the Soviet Union fell into economic, political, and social crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, the United States gradually became far more dominant.

And then, at the end of the 1980s, with the rise of Gorbachev and the reform period, the Soviet Union itself fell into an extremely deep and acute crisis, especially a financial crisis. And all of those tensions—the economic failures, the political collapse, the social divisions, and the political divisions between different parts of the Soviet Union—led to its dissolution at the end of 1991. And the United States declared itself the world hegemon, the indispensable country, the world's sole superpower. We were told that we no longer lived in a world of competing major powers. This was the end of history, and history had ended with the United States on top.

And certainly the European countries viewed it that way. The United States was their protector, their ally. They accepted vassal status, more or less. Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, was extremely weak. It was dismantling its military capabilities and trying to make political and economic reforms to meet the needs of a struggling population. And so the idea that the United States was the hegemon was broadly accepted. Of course, the thing that makes our studies interesting is that history doesn't stand still, and neither do economics or power. And what the United States didn't count on in all of this was the rise of China, though I'd say it could have been anticipated much more than it was.

Of course, for decades, Asia as a whole was making economic advances. But Japan's economic rise, for example, didn't change the geopolitical balance of power in any way, because Japan was completely subordinate to the United States. And under the constitution imposed by the United States after World War II, Japan's military capacity was starkly limited. So the rise of Asia was changing the structure of the world economy, but it wasn't until China rose that the structure of world power changed. China began its very dramatic, rapid ascent after Mao's death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978. Deng's absolutely brilliant economic leadership after 1978 led to the most dramatic and rapid rise of an economy in world history.

I think it's fair to say that China's economy grew by 10 percent per year for roughly 40 years. I mean, that was absolutely unprecedented. And that means the Chinese economy grew to about 40 times its original size in real terms. It became the largest economy in the world, overtaking the United States during the 2010s. Of course, all of that is measured in what we call purchasing power parity terms. But China's economy today is significantly larger than that of the United States, not per person, but overall. Its industrial production is far larger in almost every sector. Its global trade is far larger. China is now the largest trading partner for probably about 140 countries, including countries in the Americas, countries in Asia, of course, most countries in Africa, and so forth.

So this is what the United States didn't initially understand was happening. But China's rise, together with India's somewhat slower but still important rise economically and militarily, and Russia's economic and military recovery, meant that by the beginning of the 2020s, we were clearly in a multipolar world. The United States hadn't accepted that fact. And when I say the U.S., I mean U.S. strategists, the CIA, and the U.S. security apparatus. They assumed then, and still assume today, that China is a rival and that Russia is a rival to some extent. India doesn't really appear on their radar screen.

The United States is still the most powerful country, and it's in head-to-head competition with China. But the age of U.S. hegemony isn't over, according to Washington and according to most of my colleagues at East Coast universities and so forth. So all of this means that we're only at an early stage of thinking about the real architecture of geopolitics today, because Europe is basically lost in a completely confused Russophobia, a terror of Russia. It remains subordinate to the United States, even as the United States abuses Europe in every possible way.

The Europeans mostly still believe that this is a NATO world with the U.S. in the lead, and that if they just wait out Donald Trump, somehow things will go back to normal. The world they know, where they're comfortable being vassals of the United States and the U.S. is the dominant power, will prevail again. So from a European point of view, there's no interest in discussing the strategic architecture. The only interest is in waiting out Donald Trump, seeing NATO's superiority restored, and seeing Russia ultimately defeated on the battlefield in Ukraine. From the U.S. point of view, the world looks bipolar. The United States sees itself as being in some kind of moral competition with China, but it believes it still holds most of the cards, given the role of the dollar and its financial dominance.

They think they're winning in AI and that artificial intelligence will be the key, and so forth. So the U. S. hasn't really thought very hard about the strategic architecture. But those of us watching—you and I—know the world is different, very different from what European leaders think. There's not going to be a return to a U.S.- and NATO-led world in which Russia is defeated and NATO is predominant. That's delusional, and it's tragic because it's leading to the utter destruction of Ukraine based on a bet there's no basis for making. And around the world, I would say, the realization that we're in a very different world is taking hold quite quickly.

And this year, the completely ill-conceived, almost whimsical, really, yet tragic U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran exposed just how weak America is. America can't even defeat Iran, certainly not without destroying the Middle East, much less rule the world. And Saudi Arabia, one of America's allies, can't defeat Yemen. Things have changed tremendously. Outside Brussels, at NATO headquarters, or Berlin, London, or Washington, the world already looks completely different. And that's why, in all other parts of the world, everyone is rightly asking, "Where are we heading?" And that brings us to the real point, which is your essential point: We have, in my view, at least four great powers.

Conventionally, people say there are two great powers: the United States and China. I think it's indisputable that Russia is a third. Its economy isn't as large as that of the United States or China, but geographically, it's nearly twice the size of either country. It covers 17 million square kilometers, compared with about 9 million each for China and the United States. It's a vast country stretching across Eurasia. It has the largest nuclear arsenal in the world. It's a technologically sophisticated country, and measured by purchasing power parity, it's the third-largest economy in the world, behind China in first place and the United States in second. So it's no slouch in this geopolitical ranking.

I would count India as a great power as well. It's the world's most populous country. It's a nuclear power. It has advanced technology, but it still has poverty, though the rate of deep poverty is falling quickly. And so I would say there are four major powers. But India hasn't asserted itself geopolitically. It's semi-aligned with the United States, I would say, and semi-non-aligned as part of the BRICS group of emerging economies. So the real question about the future architecture of the world is whether these great powers will cooperate with each other or split into two blocs, one led by the United States and the other by China. And those are really the two most likely ways global geopolitics will take shape over the next 20 years. I would say we'll be much safer if the major powers cooperate in a kind of concert of major powers.

And the meeting of President Xi, President Putin, and President Trump last week at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shenzhen, China, was a prototype of what a concert of the great powers would look like. The great powers would meet and cooperate. They wouldn't just have a pleasant meeting; they'd issue a declaration setting out common objectives and then work together to achieve them. When this meeting took place at the APEC summit, the press in the United States and Europe was completely horrified by the sight of Trump, Putin, and Xi cooperating and smiling,

with President Trump even calling President Putin his friend. I wrote a piece with a title something like "Horror, Horror, Horror: Peace Is at Hand."

The Western press was scandalized that these three great powers could have a pleasant meeting. We're supposed to be at war. We're supposed to be in confrontation. America is supposed to lead the way against the evil powers of China and Russia. It reminded me of George Orwell. It's almost like seeing Orwell play out in real life. In Orwell's *1984*, Oceania is Europe and the United States, and Big Brother teaches you that you're supposed to hate the other two powers, Eurasia and Eastasia. And so we have the three powers. In Orwell's telling, of course, they're always at war. It's perpetual war. And Big Brother makes sure you understand that your state is pure good and the others are pure evil. And this is what we saw in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Financial Times*.

It was absolutely the most pathetic, ridiculous coverage of something we should have celebrated: Thank God the leaders of the three most powerful countries are actually talking about nuclear arms control, avoiding a nuclear war, and strengthening the United Nations. But this was met with horror, horror. They're getting along. Oh, my God, what will we do if there's peace? And so, Glenn, the key question right now is probably whether the major powers will form a kind of concert of powers, which could save the world from madness, or whether the world will split into blocs in a new Cold War, this time with a dominant China facing off against an American bloc.

Two other points that I would make. One is that when the three leaders met, one headline kept appearing everywhere: "Yalta II." The idea was that, like the Yalta Conference in early February 1945, this was another attempt to divide the world into spheres of influence. It was portrayed as a sordid meeting where these three leaders were going to carve up the world into three spheres of influence. Well, I just want to say that Yalta in 1945 did not do that at all. All this "Yalta II" talk about carving up the world is sheer ignorance of what Yalta was really about.

The most important outcome of Yalta was an agreement on how the United Nations would be established and what the rules of the game would be for the U.N. Security Council. There was also a commitment to jointly occupy Germany after its imminent defeat and an agreement that all the major powers—the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union—would continue the war together against Japan until Japan's defeat. But Yalta did not divide up the world into spheres of influence. That's one point. And related to that, the major powers can reach agreements without carving up the world into their own spheres of influence.

This is a primitive misunderstanding on the part of the warmongers, or maybe it's propaganda. The idea is that if the United States were to get along with Russia and China, Russia would have its sphere of influence, China would have its sphere of influence, and we would have ours. It's a bizarre misunderstanding of the history of the Yalta Conference, and it's a bizarre idea in itself. You can

have major powers agree without having them divvy up the world into spheres of influence. Their agreement is that they won't go to war with each other. It doesn't mean they then dominate their own neighbors, for example.

That's a completely different issue. So that's one point. The final point I'd make is that in this new world, where the United States is no longer the hegemon, all the regions that have bet on the U.S. as hegemon will have to rethink things sooner or later. Europe will have to rethink things. There are actually glimmers of thought in Europe, but not very many. Europe is the most confused region right now. It's as leaderless, rudderless, and Russophobic an environment as you can imagine. But yes, Europe is going to have to come up with a security arrangement that recognizes that it's not a vassal of the United States. That does not mean going to war with Russia, for God's sake.

This is the mistake Merz and Macron are making, and whoever the current prime minister of Britain is, of course. I know it's Burnham, but they rotate so fast it doesn't really matter. The point is that, yes, Europe is going to have to come up with a new security architecture. If they have any wits about them, they won't organize against Russia, which could get everybody killed. They'll work with Russia to create an inclusive security arrangement. And here's my final, final point: this is happening in other parts of the world, too. I was just at a meeting in Egypt where security arrangements for the Middle East are now being discussed because most of the Middle East, certainly the Gulf countries, bet everything on the U.S. being their protector, just like Europe did. The Gulf states said, "Well, the U.S. is going to protect us from Iran."

"It's going to protect us from anyone who tries to take our oil fields away." Now they know that's fatuous. The U.S. is a magnet for trouble. It doesn't protect anybody right now. And so they're having to realize, step by step, that the Gulf states aren't going to achieve security by opposing Iran. Their security is actually going to have to be based on some kind of agreement within their own region, among the Arab states, Iran, Turkey, and so forth. And it's the same in East Asia. Japan is completely convinced that the United States is saving it from China. It's a weird idea. China has no designs on Japan whatsoever. It never did. It was Japan that invaded China after 1894, not the other way around. But in any event, Japan and Korea are going to have to realize that the United States is not going to save them. They're going to have to cooperate with China.

They're going to have to make an East Asian security arrangement that isn't based on the U.S. as hegemon. So, long story short, we can agree to have a concert of nations within a region and a concert among the great powers globally. Or we can form alliances that pit one side against the other. History shows that if you form alliances, war is vastly more likely. If you instead aim for a kind of inclusive architecture based on a concert of nations, you actually can make peace. And so all of this Western warmongering is mindless, ahistorical, stupid, and dangerous. What we really need is for the major powers to get along. And we need a security architecture within each region of the world where neighbors act in concert instead of lining up against one another and counting on some great power to protect them from the adversary on the other side.

#Glenn

It's an interesting paradox: when institutions deliver stability and security, we don't want to change them. But the problem is that institutions deliver stability and peace to the extent that they're able to reflect realities. And the more successful they're seen to be, the less likely they are to change when the world changes. So I can understand why people look back on the security architecture of the past 80 years with some nostalgia and want to hold on to it. But if it's no longer fit for purpose today, it can be quite destructive to resist changing it.

#Jeffrey Sachs

I would add, though, Glenn, that you're a great historian of this period, and I've tried my best to understand it well. I have no nostalgia for the Cold War. I have no nostalgia for the U.S.-led world. I don't believe there ever was a liberal internationalist order. I think there was an American-led bloc, but it wasn't stable. It was extraordinarily fragile. It nearly led to global annihilation in 1962. From the mid-1950s until the Cuban Missile Crisis, we were on the brink of war. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, there was a period of some détente, starting with John F. Kennedy and Khrushchev signing the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in the summer of 1963. Then came Nixon's détente with Brezhnev's Soviet Union in the early 1970s.

But then tensions picked up again dramatically in the early 1980s when Reagan came to power. He had a really mad head of the CIA, William Casey, who was a great destabilizer. Then Gorbachev came along. He was a remarkable statesman of peace and made a concert of Europe possible again. That was enshrined in the Charter of Paris, the new charter for Europe, which called for indivisible security. But the United States wrecked it by saying, "No, we don't want indivisible security for Europe. We want American hegemony based on NATO enlargement to surround Russia." And that's what brought us to the conflict in Ukraine. So I have no nostalgia for any of that. I think we kept missing opportunities to actually have a concert.

It's a long, long subject, but I think the whole Cold War could have been avoided if Germany had been made a neutral, demilitarized state after 1945. There's a lot of historical evidence to suggest that the whole Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe could have ended the way the Soviet occupation of Austria ended in 1955, when Austria declared neutrality. The Soviet Union was making a point. They wanted a buffer between themselves and Germany, which under Hitler had taken the lives of 27 million Soviet people in World War II. And the United States and Britain never respected those Soviet security concerns, not for one moment after 1945. It's just like today: the NATO countries don' t give a hoot, don't give a damn about what Russia has been saying for 36 years about its security concerns over NATO enlargement.

That's been the whole point since 1945: never respect Soviet or Russian security concerns, because this has always been a quest for U.S.-led hegemony. And that's why I don't have any nostalgia for it. Maybe Europeans—or European politicians, at least—have nostalgia for it because they were raised

in that system. Almost every European politician today has been bred by the United States for subservience. And they show it. They've all been part of the Atlantic Council or the German Marshall Fund, or held some fellowship at a U.S. university, to prove that they're good Atlanticists, ready to bow to U.S. hegemony. So maybe that's where their nostalgia or their self-interest comes in. But my point is that I don't have any nostalgia for it.

#Glenn

I think nostalgia for the Cold War and glorifying it are problematic. I know you're out of time, but I did want to ask you about your trip to China. You were there during this trilateral meeting and had a chance to speak with Putin. Yes. I assume you spoke about the European security architecture, but I'm not sure. Do you have any time now, or…?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yeah, I can take a couple of minutes to talk about it. I was at the APEC summit and had a very nice opportunity to speak with President Putin about these issues. I wouldn't say we spoke at great, great length, but we did speak at length. In a way, I was commiserating with him, saying that there is a security architecture that makes sense. I told him that my personal belief and hope was that if President Trump would just say one sentence—"NATO will not expand to Ukraine"—it would force the Europeans out of their current delusions and force them to understand that, yes, there is going to be a new security architecture, and it needs to be an inclusive one.

And it should be based on the treaties and the machinery that have been agreed on in Europe since 1975, since the Helsinki Final Act. So I expressed this view to President Putin. I never repeat what presidents say to me, just as a matter of course. But the discussion was about the European security architecture. And on my side, I was expressing my unhappiness that, in private, many Europeans will say, "Oh, yes, NATO's not going to expand to include Ukraine." And senior American officials, I can tell you, will say, "Yes, yes, NATO's not going to expand to include Ukraine." But if you ask these people, "Well, why don't you say that publicly?" they say, "Oh, no, no, we can't say it publicly. Oh, no, no, no, no, no."

"We have an open door." And I say, "You're going to have more war because you won't say publicly what you just said privately?" "Oh, Jeff, you know, that's very hard." So this is basically what I was commiserating about in my discussion with President Putin. I find this mind-boggling. I know that many European leaders know full well that NATO isn't going to expand to include Ukraine, that it shouldn't, and that the U.S. pushed them to agree to it, which was reckless. But they're cowards, and they won't say it right now. And I know that firsthand. I'm not guessing. They've said it right to my face. And that was the topic of my conversation with President Putin.

#Glenn

Well, they said that very openly back in 2008 when Ukraine was offered NATO membership. So it's not a big secret, which is why it's awfully frustrating to see that this is considered controversial today.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Exactly. It's controversial to say it.

#Glenn

Yeah.

#Jeffrey Sachs

It's amazing because they'll say to you in private, "Yes, it was a terrible mistake." And then you say, "Say it publicly."

#Glenn

"Oh, no, no, we can't."

#Jeffrey Sachs

"Article 10. NATO's door is open." Unbelievable. Just weird. And the war goes on because of this.

#Glenn

Jeff, it's always great to see you, my friend. I look forward to seeing you in New York in about two weeks.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Excellent. Very good. I'm looking forward to it.

#Glenn

Thank you so much for coming on the show.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Thanks a lot. Bye-bye.