

# UK Professor Reveals Shocking Roots of Russophobia | Richard Sakwa

Prof. Richard Sakwa joins Pascal to discuss Russophobia, the post-1945 “political West,” and why Russia was never fully accepted into it. He links today’s tension to old history, power politics, and the split between Atlanticism and continental Europe, then explains how the Ukraine war, sanctions, and weak Western states have pushed the world toward more division. Links: Richard Sakwa - University of Kent: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/politics-international-relations/people/2273/sakwa-richard> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Intro and Russophobia 00:03:34 Why Russia Was Excluded 00:07:42 Power, Civilization, and Mearsheimer 00:10:09 NATO, EU, and Western Hostility 00:14:28 West in Crisis: State, Economy, Society 00:19:16 Militarization and New Cold War 00:25:27 Russia, China, and the West 00:35:53 False Universalism and Decline 00:42:33 Advice for Russia and China

## #Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies, everybody. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I am joined today live by Professor Richard Sakwa. Richard, welcome back. It's my pleasure to be with you. It's fantastic having you here and that we can sit at the same table for once. We were just at a conference about Russophobia, actually, and you gave a very brilliant exposé, I think, on what Russophobia is about. Can we talk about that? How do you analyze—especially what we looked at is especially Western Russophobia, right? How do you make sense of it?

## #Richard Sakwa

Well, it's very hard to make sense of. But two things to say. First of all, Russophobia changes. So it's not a continuous thing. It's discontinuous. It goes up and down, interspersed with moments of alliance and two wars, for example. But what I'm particularly focusing on, and what I'm trying to argue, is that after 1945, this sort of Russophobia is just another way of describing the relationship between the West and Russia, with a particular inflection in the way that this attitude is, of course, tempered by a long history of relations all the way back to the split.

You could go back to the split between Byzantium, between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in 1054. But my particular focus is how, in the post-war years, a distinctive type of political West emerged, led by the United States, but bringing together the United States and West European states, and that this political West transformed the character of politics internally and the way they really acted and related to external other actors, of course, China and in earlier days as well. So this

political West transformed the way it deals with outsiders. I mean, it's... In the early years, of course, we had the Cold War, the first Cold War, which was a type of regularized hostility, because the political West is a model of world order.

It basically considers that, you know, and that is a model of modernity, if you like. It's a model of modernity. It takes different forms, but it's not homogeneous, and there's always tensions and conflicts within the political West. I never ever argue that it's totally homogeneous. Of course, you had the emergence of a Gaullist critique of it at a certain point. But nevertheless, it was in the first Cold War that it generated a critique of the Soviet Union as an alternative model of world order, based on a different principle, socialist internationalism, as opposed to the liberal internationalism of the political West in those early years. But it also generated a type of systemic hostility.

It used to be the anti-communist crusade, which, of course, in some ways shaped into a relationship. We had McCarthyism at a certain point. Then you had the CIA establishing journals and the whole cultural onslaught. But the key point in all of this, to sum up, is that after the collapse of the Soviet model of world order in 1989–91, the end of the first Cold War, instead of all of this sort of attitude towards Russia changing, it intensified. Why? That's a great question, because in my earlier book called *\*The Lost Peace\**, I precisely argue that we squandered the opportunity, a twofold opportunity: first, on the European continent, to build a genuine peace order all the way from Lisbon to Vladivostok. The Russians wanted it.

Plenty in Europe wanted it. But because of the way that the political West had developed this Washington-led alliance—you know, we talk about NATO, but NATO was only a symptom of the larger hostility. We know quite clearly that in the 1990s, Gorbachev earlier, then Yeltsin, and then Putin all wanted to join the political West. It couldn't do it. And that's the question—it couldn't do it. And my answer is because of the character of the way that this particular model of the West had developed. It could not absorb Russia because Russia comes with a whole civilizational baggage. We used to think the problem was communism. Then, as Alexander Zinoviev said, we tried to shoot communism and we hit Russia.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah. And of course, like the older version of Russophobia—and we've had speakers who talked about this, most importantly Alexander Mercouris, who will also be speaking again here on this podcast—but Russophobia is much older than communism. It's much older than the revolution. It goes back, and then it survives also communism. So in a sense, this feeling that Russia is the significant other and that it must be opposed, and that then comes together with the stereotypes of the evil Russian, the drunk Russian, the nefarious Russian, the despotic Russian—all of these stereotypes. Communism was kind of just a very convenient vessel in order to say, like, oh no, no, it's actually all very rational. But there's a deep irrationality behind it, isn't it?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Absolutely. Once you stripped away that communist level, you actually find there was a deeper vein of hostility to Russia as a state, as a civilization. As you say, it's long-term but discontinuous. So yes, in the 19th century, it took a particular form, as outlined by our colleagues, and particularly generated after, well, the Congress of Vienna and sort of the Holy Alliance, the Union Défensive. You had, as it were, the liberal revolution of 1848. But also, one of the trigger events was the Polish uprising of 1830. You add then that a lot of Poles went to the West, and later on Hungarians added to this voice, which actually has been repeated today, of course, by Russian dissidents going to the West and asking the West to use coercive measures against their homeland for various reasons.

So that's what generated it. And of course, we had the long competition between England and Russia over the so-called Great Game in Central Asia, the wars over Afghanistan, because of that Britain did it, and the Crimean War. So yes, there is, because you could say there are three or four factors involved. There's the religious factor, that Russia is Orthodox, but of course so are Romania and Greece, but of a particular form. There's the historical factor, which goes all the way back to 1054, if not more. But there's always, in my view, ultimately, it's generated by geopolitical competition. Russia is a vast state to the east, which always considers itself a separate, unique type of civilization and geopolitical force.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, and you just... they didn't like it. You just used the C word. And we've had, in our conference, especially Jeff Roberts, who says, like, ah, nonsense, it's not about civilization, this has some other roots. But your interpretation actually goes quite a bit together also with John Mearsheimer's analysis, which says, like, look, at the end of the day, it's all about the power differential between great powers. What do you make out of Mearsheimer? I mean, is Mearsheimer important in order to understand Russophobia?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yes, I mean, he's right, of course. It is about the fact that Russia, however, you know, the standard for Russia is never as strong as it thinks it is, but it's never as weak as we think it is, or vice versa. So there is this element. But when we talk about civilization, it does matter. So, I mean, Mearsheimer is very good, but he misses out two fundamental things. Obviously, his hard offensive realism is based on the premise that there are two things: that there's a black box of internal politics.

You don't look at internal politics, you don't look at internal culture, and so on, which I think he's right about in some points, because people determine foreign policy largely in terms of positionality, strength, security assessments, and so on. And the second thing he doesn't look at is that in the larger context outside—and I've been arguing against him personally—I think he's great, his

thinking, but the fact is that we do live, since 1945, after the Second World War, not only was this political model of world order established, which after 1989–91 considered itself universal, couched in the language of the end of history and all of the other stuff. And so he radicalized.

Instead of going away, it became more offensive. But when we talk about civilization, we're talking about, at a sub-political level, that Russia, China, Persia, Iran today, India, of course, and so many other countries have a deep cultural identity, a sense of themselves as a culture, as a civilization, and you cannot ignore that. So it's more than just a simple balance of power, because it's how you see yourself in the world. And Russia sees itself today, and it uses the language of multipolarity to express that individuality and its agency or activeness in international affairs.

## **#Pascal**

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on [neutralitystudies.com](http://neutralitystudies.com). Links below. See you there. But that, of course, then begs the question whether the West—and I think your concept of the political West is actually a civilizational expression, right? It's the people who belong together in their civilizational terms, although they live in different countries. But at the end of the day, what we're seeing at the moment is deep collaboration to the point of integration of these systems. And some people then argue, oh, this is just the United States controlling its satellites, which to a certain extent it is. But on the other hand, probably, if I understand it correctly, it's a shared outlook on the world and a shared kind of feeling of how this should be confronted, which then begs the question: is Russophobia actually a civilizational trait of the political West?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

It turned out to be the case. I mean, it was just simply empirical. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia emerged and said, guys, we want to join you. We want to be part of the political West. And so many, a whole generation, emerged thinking about this. And then they were shocked. And NATO enlargement, you know, we often focus on all of that. It's just a symptom of this larger problem, which was, you know, maybe NATO should have enlarged. It's the way it was done to exclude Russia. I mean, NATO could do good things. I mean, if it was stopping Greece and Turkey going to war over those islands and so on and so forth, you know, why not? But what you could not do, which of course they did, they enlarged effectively against Russia.

And this is where another source of Russophobia emerges, and that is the Eastern European dimension, which, of course, once they joined NATO beginning in 1999 and then the European Union—so which are, of course, in this model of the political West, the European Union and NATO—and the whole cultural baggage, the language of freedom, the language of Russia as despotic, all emerges again in a new form. That Russia is murderous, it's conducting hybrid warfare against us. In other words, we have reproduced conflict where there was no need. And Russia wanted to join

this political West. One aspect is that what you have in the political West is Atlanticism as an ideology versus continentalism, as the Gaullists would say, all the way uniting the continent.

So there's multiple layers to it. So Russophobia, I'm not always sure it's the best word to describe this, because it's often used as well to negate what you could say is valid criticism. Any political order should be subject to criticism. I mean, I think it's healthy. It actually makes the system more vital, more resilient if you critique it. But quite too often, any valid criticism of Russia is condemned—oh, it's just Russophobia—whereas we say, no, it's a critique which is based on a genuine sense that there are deficits and so on. But that applies to all countries. But what Russophobia does is add to this normal critique almost a sense that the other model of world order is illegitimate. And that's the distinction there.

## **#Pascal**

And it needs to be broken up. It needs to be split into even smaller units, right? So this Western idea that what happened to the Soviet Union is what should happen to Russia, and “decolonize Russia,” that's basically, again, breaking up Russia. And behind that is this wish of kind of destroying what Russia is today, right? And we had colleagues, Russian colleagues at the conference, who were kind of interpreting especially Russian criticism of Russian émigrés, or people who went to the West during the Cold War and then started complaining about the system at home.

They interpreted that as Russophobia. But you and I, we would say, no, no, no, that's critique of the system, right? This is separate from what the West does when it also creates these very visceral cultural stereotypes. Your point was that what we are seeing in relation to Russia, with the Russophobia—especially the one that's going around right now as we speak in 2026—has to do with three crises, not three images, three distinct crises of the West. Can you tell us how they link?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yes. Indeed, the West has evolved. First of all, the political West as a model always had, if you like, two faces. It had a Commonwealth face, which was the public goods and the language of freedom and so on—constitutionalism, the rule of law, all good stuff. But it had the second face, which you could call empire, which was a series of subaltern and domination relations. In the first 40 years after the Second World War, we had a social democratic West, great development of welfare states. The United Kingdom, for example, by the mid-1970s was the most equal it ever was, using progressive taxation policies, redistribution policies, and so on, and it needed welfare policies. Then we spent the last 40 years undermining that with neoliberalism, and it wasn't just a disembedding, if you like, of liberalism and the economy from social control and progressive visions.

It was worse than that because it actually undermined our ability to govern ourselves. And Britain is exceptionally badly governed. You can see it in very simple taxation policy when 78% of local government revenues go not to cleaning streets, mending potholes, doing public good, looking after

public parks, developing libraries—all the stuff that we should expect a local government to do—instead of which 78% goes to adult and child care and so on, social care. Now, these are important things, but these should be done by central government, not by imposing it on financially starved local government. In other words, we have undermined our own ability, and you could put it in terms of the void, the emptiness which has emerged—the neoliberal assault on the modern society, the Western state, if you like, in Western Europe in particular.

## **#Pascal**

The modern Western state being the one that we had around the 1970s, like in Britain, in Scandinavia, but also West Germany and so on—that kind of model of welfare plus... indeed.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

This post-war welfare state, but everything goes deeper. All those institutions of modernity, if you like—we're talking about, in particular, political parties. I mean, Peter Mair, way back, fifteen-odd years ago, talked about "Ruling the Void," the way that public expression and articulation, representation, works. And there's a crisis of representation today. And this is what leads to this populist upsurge you have in the United Kingdom—Farage's Reform—but across France, Le Pen in France, in Italy you had similar things, and in Germany, of course, Alternative for Germany.

So all of this is an expression that we have a political void, we have an economic crisis, because clearly we've had a financialization of the economic systems, which override, if you like, genuine productive investment. And also, of course, you've got a social crisis as well, where you have... identity politics has its place in any society. Of course, no one is denying that. But it's, if you like, its super-expression. It has overcome the genuine issues of equality, of class politics. In the United Kingdom, for example, you have an extraordinary inability to have genuine regional development policies. And this is one interesting thing.

We may soon be having the mayor of Manchester maybe making a challenge, and one of the bases to the British government, to Keir Starmer's government in the Labour Party. And it is precisely a challenge dealing with this issue—that municipal and local government has been starved of resources. And it's called Manchesterism again, going back to the 1840s, but an alternative model. And if Manchester means anything—and of course it's very vague what on earth they mean—it means that we have to shift away from the vast centralization on London and the overdevelopment of London, which, let's hope, develops as well, but more to the other, the resource-starved, transport-starved regions of the North and the West.

## **#Pascal**

And so this is one of the crises, right? There are others. In your discussion, you mentioned these three distinct kinds of crises, like the one of the state, right, being the de-modernization or post-modernization. Oh, and then there's the whole military aspect to it as well, isn't there? Yes.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yes. I mean, what has happened is that at the moment you're having a—one of the reflections of this crisis is the, how can I put it, the re-militarization of European international relations. Yeah. Which is extraordinary. We're having a... an Iron Curtain is now developing, a new Iron Curtain, no longer from Narva, we had a Dnestr in the north to the south, but about a few hundred kilometres further east. But we've reproduced the Cold War in a far more virulent, far more aggressive form than we ever had it earlier. And a second element is that this is a Cold War now generated and perpetuated more by European powers even than the United States. Which is bizarre.

## **#Pascal**

And even during the Cold War, there were always these contacts, right? And you could read Pravda in almost all European capitals and whatnot. And there were certain red lines of what would happen militarily. And all of these red lines are gone. And we in our circles are trying to make sense of how come that after the ideological struggle is gone, you again have such a kind of, at the time, unthinkable situation—escalation toward Russia, including launching strikes, Western strikes, NATO strikes from Ukraine deep into Russia, and at the moment maybe even from NATO territory. We don't know, but that's the fear we all have. And this links then to this idea of what Russia is, and I think what our conference is about is this hate of Russia. Do you think it is an inspirational factor in doing all of this?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yeah. Well, indeed. So one of the points which I did make in the conference, isn't it, is that we live in a post-world. Everything seems to be post-structural, post-modern, post-industrial, post-democracy, of course, was a big debate, and now post-liberalism. And what fills this void? And it's precisely this aggression. And this is more than something just generated by the terrible war between the Slavic nations of Russia and Ukraine since 2022, even more than 2014. Because I've been warning that the way the political West was emerging, it was consolidating around a set of positions which were excluding Russia.

And it was quite clear to any analyst that this would end badly. And of course, at the heart of it all, where you have NATO, you also have the European Union, which has Article 42.7, which is a security one. I know that was put there, by the way, deliberately by the Poles. Sikorski was the foreign minister at the time of the Lisbon Treaty, and then they brought Carl Bildt, the Swedish foreign minister, on board. They deliberately put it in to annoy the Russians.

## **#Pascal**

42.7 is the collective security kind of article, right? It's not as strong as Article 5 of NATO, but still, it says, like, if one of the EU countries is attacked, then the others... Actually, it says must support, right? It doesn't say must militarily support.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yes, which actually is stronger than Article 5 of NATO, which actually says that you can. Yes. So paradoxically, in other words, what they've done is NATOized the European Union. And of course, in the latest versions, we're seeing the merger, effectively, of the European Union and NATO. The European Union has become militarized, and the way it's talking about military Keynesianism—to use military investment as a way to pull it out from the economic doldrums. Meanwhile, NATO is doing its own thing in militarizing as well, with 5%, for example, meant to be spent on defense and suchlike. So, in other words, this political quest is something which actually exists, which, of course, people would say, no, no, we're just a set of countries coming together. And of course, it's always been directed against Russia for the cultural and other reasons which we've talked about.

So this is more, you know, when you just asked it a second ago, why? Why did you do it? And that's, you know, I don't have the full answer, but we're trying to grasp this. How did the West squander money? What was the potential for a positive peace order at the end of the First Cold War, in the late 1980s, early 1990s? And how did we end up in a position today which is far worse than anything we've seen before? The West has become hermetic; it cannot do dialogue. We're in the fifth year of this awful war—fifth year—in which there's no attempt, apart from Washington, which is to be welcomed, of course. Any opening towards dialogue and diplomacy is to be welcomed. And European powers absolutely refusing to go that way. You couldn't make it up.

## **#Pascal**

The realists among our colleagues will then again go back and say, like, yeah, duh. I mean, this is just what great powers do. It's in the interest of the United States to keep everybody down, right? Mearsheimer's security competition is unavoidable. Therefore, anyone who could potentially, even in the future, be again a rival needs to be put down as soon as possible. And total dominance is actually the best strategy for any great power. And Europe is just a satellite and has already been subdued, right? That would be their point. But still, it seems to leave out the mechanisms through which this works, even if true. It would leave out the mechanisms.

And the question then is whether Russophobia and the imagery of Russia are one of these mechanisms, and if it's different from others, because China is clearly the other—a significant other, right? Maybe even more significant than Mr. Mearsheimer actually says. Russia, we shall care about Russia, about China, because China is a peer competitor, Russia not really. But with China, we don't see the same version of xenophobia. I mean, what we see with them is a form of China threat

narrative, yes, but not this kind of, oh, they're drunken, incapable people who fight with shovels and washing machines, right? That's not what we see with them. That's what we see with the Russians. Why do you think that is?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Yeah, absolutely. You're absolutely right to identify the difference. It's that, of course, the Russo-Ukrainian War is even presented in the West as a civilization—let's go to the C word again—a civilization war, that Ukraine is the front line in holding back the barbarian hordes pouring in from Eurasia, the Asian steppes, and so on. All those 19th-century tropes. That's why Russophobia does have a substantive meaning. It's more than just... A critique of Russia's true set is valid. You could critique any country, and you should do.

But there's a deeper antagonism, a deep, deep antagonism, which you've just identified, which is different from the relationship to any other competitor, in particular, obviously, China. And of course, the logic of that argument, which you've just outlined—that you mustn't allow a regional competitor to emerge and should squash it before it does—is that the argument then is, well, we should have brought Russia on board as part of our element. Precisely. That would have made much more sense.

## **#Pascal**

This is actually where the realist approach also goes astray, right? With Russia against China, it would have made much more sense.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Instead of which, we've consolidated the Russo-Chinese alignment, which is, again, absolutely clear—that Russia and China have better and more intense relations than ever in history, and it will endure. But this alignment, obviously, has its own contradictions and tensions within it. That's normal. But what it is based on is a repudiation of the politics of the political West.

## **#Pascal**

Mm-hmm.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

And that's hugely important, that the political West as a whole has generated a whole approach that we are the sphere of freedom, whereas it's despotism. We have free economics, they have state corporatism, and so on. Corruption is always used as the great term. Anything, any system you don't

like—for example, Georgia today—oh, it's a corrupt society, which is probably far less corrupt than Ukraine for sure, and many, many other states, and so on. So we have within the political West—it's what, the word I've used is hermetic. It's closed. It can only talk to itself.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

And even then it becomes increasingly irrational, because on the basis of your argument, the question would be, OK, that would be logical from Washington's perspective—to keep Russia or any other major threat, potential or actual, down, like China. The question is, why did the European powers go along with it when it is not in their strategic interest? It would have made a lot of sense for Germany, Russia, and France to build this continentalism. And I've been arguing for this for 30 years, by the way. This is not just Gorbachev's common European home, it's Mitterrand's Confederation of Europe, even Mrs. Thatcher, who was one of the most able politicians—I disagree a lot with her politics—but who understood some of these issues early on. It's that you needed this continentalism against Atlanticism.

But I remember one meeting in London with ambassadors at the Polish embassy, and I mentioned this, and Lord Hannay, our former representative to the United Nations, said, ah, the Gaullist heresy. It was a heretical thought. Even the word heresy was significant in this context, because, in other words, there's a limited and allowed type of discourse, but anything beyond it becomes heretical, and now, of course, is squashed. And we have a whole system of so-called anti-disinformation, fake news, and so on. So we've worked ourselves up, and again, a point I made yesterday, to a war fever. It's a war fever similar to the First World War. And when we read the history of the First World War, it's madness. Just a week, a month before, you had the Tsar, or two months before, in the Isle of Wight, at the sailing festival. All the families were connected, and they went to war in which millions died.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, and let's not forget the Tsar, the Kaiser, and the King of England were cousins.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

They were all cousins.

## **#Pascal**

They were all grandchildren of Victoria, right? But you do see in all of these pictures of the First World War, when it broke out, when it was declared finally, people were in the streets celebrating in all the capitals, with their hats off and saying da-da-da-da. And then, with smiles on their faces, into the wagons of the train and off to the front—the Germans, yeah, “See you at Christmas on the Champs-Élysées.” And it didn’t go that way. And it didn’t.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

At the moment, we are not there yet. No, we're not yet, because I think the societies don't want it. We've seen this in Germany, in public opinion polls, when the defense minister said the Germans should be ready to sacrifice, and indeed some sort of soft conscription being sought, there was a huge reaction—no. So this is, yeah, it seems to be an elite thing at the moment, but... as we know, the popular press, the yellow press as we used to call it, and the media today, social media, can whip up this enthusiasm.

As you say, out of a clear July crisis of 1914, a clear blue sky, you suddenly had this thunderbolt, and within a month they were slaughtering each other for four years in a pointless, stupid war. Ultimately, yeah, and you know, the Ukraine war has already been going on longer than the First World War, interestingly enough. Today, the 12th of June 2026, is exactly the day we're meeting when the Russo-Ukrainian war is as long as the First World War. It's exactly today.

## **#Pascal**

Funnily enough, we're meeting at a particularly interesting time, which means that the statement I just made—that it's already longer—is actually factually wrong.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

No, it's longer than the Soviet Union's participation in what they call the Great Fatherland War. So that's been something for a few months. In those years, of course, as many Russians say, we defeated Nazi Germany and we got to Berlin. And after this, now in the fifth year of the war, they're still fighting in the Donbas and moving, you know, a few kilometers with a bit of luck every several months.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, yeah. And of course, a lot can be said about this, also about the fact that Russia still says it's not a war, it's a special military operation and has completely different goals and whatnot. But the fighting has been going on for a while. Do you think that the way the Ukraine war went actually intensified the Russophobia in the West? And do you think it intensified the Westophobia in Russia, if something like that exists?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Absolutely. What we do see is that the Ukrainians have managed the narratives and the communications brilliantly, and that they've been able to cancel Russia. Even earlier on, concerts by Russian musicians and so on were canceled. And still, Russia is not allowed to participate in most sports under their own flag and as a national team. And they're not going to be allowed to take part in the next UEFA European Championship, for example. This is unprecedented, even in the heartache of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, all the communist countries.

## **#Pascal**

And, of course, we have a completely different dynamic when it comes to Israel and the United States, which just unprovokedly attacked Iran and so on. I mean, we see now this blatant hypocrisy. It's getting more and more clear. But the interesting thing is, it works, right? Russia can be excluded from these organizations. The United States and Israel can't.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

And what really annoys them, of course, is that Russia cannot be excluded as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. They'd like to have done that. And of course, the British and others are saying that Russia has no place there. Meanwhile, Israel is committing mass murder, and the United States is launching an unprovoked, literally unprovoked, attack on Iran on the 28th of February this year. So, and this is another thing why this model of the political West, for me, is important, because it means that so-called double standards are systemic. It's not random. In other words, in my model, you have the international system, which today is the Charter international system, the United Nations, which is, you know, it's not a world government by any means, but it establishes international law and what are the norms and what is legitimate in international politics.

And then you have the political West, which after the end of the Cold War called itself the rules-based international order, the liberal international order, which began to supplant, usurp, and squeeze away the norms that are based in the United Nations. That means they were then generating, you know, a so-called rules-based order, making up their own rules in their own order, not in conformity with the United Nations, which means double standards — we do what we're doing because it's the right thing to do and we can do it, we can get away with it. And already, even before Donald J. Trump, this political West was defecting and trying to substitute for the impartial and universal norms embedded in the United Nations Charter and subsequent international law.

## **#Pascal**

And international law is, of course, much older than the UN Charter. We've got that built on it. It's built upon it. But, you know, the interesting thing here is that the political West constantly, constantly claims, and probably even itself believes, that it is not a form of particular civilizational

approach towards world politics, but that it's universal. It claims universalism when in fact it is quite a well-tarnished or well-camouflaged Westernism, right, that it puts on everybody. What does this do? And what does it do to the political West that this is now failing? I mean, it's falling apart, this idea that the world, the international world, put sanctions on Russia. I mean, it's obvious that it's not true. It's even getting obvious to the West. So there's now this rude awakening that this universalism that they're claiming is really nothing else but a claimed particularity, right?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

What do you think it is? Yes, absolutely. It's a false universalism because it's based not on generally agreed United Nations principles, but they then... So, as I said, there are competing models of world order. We used to have the Soviet Union as a model of world order, which kept the political West, as it were, forced it to adapt and reform and build the welfare states, as we talked about earlier. Once that alternative went, the West went bonkers, if you like, went mad, because it no longer had this disciplining other, which forced it to ensure that its own populations didn't look and say, oh, that's a good model of universal childcare, public housing, cheap energy, all those good things, which the Soviet Union did achieve, by the way. Bad things, of course, as well.

But once that disappeared, then, of course, the political West claimed to be universal, not only challenging the United Nations and that genuine universalism, but... As you say, it's two things going on at the moment. The Western European powers, certainly, and even the United States, the sheer economic weight is declining in comparison to the BRICS grouping in general. Because what has happened is that as it becomes relatively weaker and poorer, it becomes more and more violent and more aggressive as a symptom of decline and thrashing about and trying to find solutions, its relevance and its role in the world. What has happened is that it's... I've lost the end there, but it was losing the... Its failure to conform to its own norms, if you like, in the United Nations, is leading to this sort of whole series of pathologies.

## **#Pascal**

Because if the political West actually stuck to its guns and actually used its own standards on itself... I guess they would have had to buy in, right? They would have had to buy in from Russia, they would have had to buy in from China, if that proclaimed universalism had been actually universally applied also to themselves. But since they don't do that, the only other option for the others is to say, like, no, we go back to the actual universal norms, which we did already write down and agreed upon. And guys, we're going to push you to adhere to them — is what the others are doing now, Iran and Russia.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Absolutely right. In the joint declarations of Russia and China, over and over again, they appeal to and defend the charter system. So that's why revisionism is a useful term here, because the West

has become revisionist in repudiating the norms that it had earlier proclaimed, whereas China and Russia... By the way, they're not anti-Western. They're post-Western — another "post" involved there. And they're not simply, if you like, counter-hegemony, counter the dominance of the West, meaning they want to actually change the rules themselves and say, you know, we're not just simply opposing the West as a major power. We say this is ridiculous, what the West is doing. And it's anti-hegemonism.

We don't need that in the world. And this is what I was going to say — that the international system has matured. We now have 193 states in the world, and none of them are willing to give up their autonomy and independence, apart from those in the political West. You know, sovereign states deciding — I'm thinking of India, I'm thinking of Mexico, I'm thinking of Brazil, I'm thinking of South Africa, and many middling and even smaller states — they're not going to give it up. The international system has matured, which has made the false universalism of the political West look even more anachronistic, even more dangerous. The European Union is open.

That is going into Africa not for the good of Africans, to build bridges, to build railways and so on, but to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative or Russia's involvement. So the negativity is always there. Just one final point in there, because you're reminding me that in the political West, in Europe in particular, we're trapped between, on the one side, democratism, where you have always the political decisionism always standing above the popular will. We saw this in elections in Romania and elsewhere. And all elections now are contests, as it were, between geopolitical orientations, which is exactly how it was in the Soviet Union. You're voting no longer for government; you're voting for civilizational choice. Are you with the political West, or are you going to be pro-Russian, and so on?

And on the other side, you're trapped with this whole illiberalism emerging. You've seen it in many countries, including the counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom. It's highly illiberal. It goes against the fundamental principles of Magna Carta, habeas corpus, the whole tradition of common law. So the West is really the political West as a form. And of course, it's now slipping because we have Trump and the United States saying, we don't even need this political West. We're powerful enough — America first, make America great again. We don't even need these European powers. Let them look after themselves, which has led to even more disarray and total panic, of course, among France, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

## **#Pascal**

So you don't buy the argument of thinkers like Brian Berletic that, you know, in the end, it's just make-believe. It's that, you know, Europe is just being strung along through another route, right? Pretending to give it up in order to make them militarize more and then implement the U.S. empire and U.S. hegemony. You know, not by being nice to the Europeans, but by pretending that you're not. But in the end, you still have the same agenda. You're not interpreting it that way.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

No, that is, there's contradictory movements going on. On the one side, the United States has, as we saw in the National Security Strategy and the various speeches by Marco Rubio and others at the Munich Security Conference, been saying that we need a reset within the political West, a fundamental U.S. touch. And it's reflecting a genuine sense that 70, now 80 years after the end of the Second World War, what on earth? You know, if you remember when NATO was established in 1949, Eisenhower said, if we still have American troops in Europe 10 years from now, we will have failed. And it's now 70-odd years since then. I mean, so there's a sense of stagnation, a sense that this is an exhausted political phenomenon.

Now, I want to see a renewal. You know, we talked about the many Wests. We've talked about the political West, but maybe that's another thing we can just quickly talk about. But, you know, you have the other Wests, which are also in crisis. There's a triple crisis, if you like. Can I just say a couple of words? Yeah, please. So, as I said, the political West has this militarized vision, which is designed to keep Russia out, which is what it was after 1945. First Cold War, Second Cold War, far worse than the first one, where you don't even have direct flights between the Western powers and Russia and Belarus. It's just incredible.

You have then another crisis which is overlaying it, which we saw in Black Lives Matter and this whole discussion about the role of empire. And this is the imperial or colonial West of the last 500 years. And that revision and debate is hugely important at the moment — the role of slavery and the development of capitalism, all these debates — and ultimately one which has been going on. Niall Ferguson wrote a book on British imperialism about two decades ago, which is saying actually the British Empire wasn't so bad. And we heard Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference say, the glorious 500 years of Western civilization, Western culture. So that's an overlay on the present time, which was, again... And, of course, the Russians then counter, saying we have, and we heard it yesterday, that we were never imperial colonialist powers, and so on.

But, in other words, all countries, I think, are coming to reckon and to understand colonialism and the neocolonial forms which today... Russia, of course, presents itself today, once again, as the Soviet Union did, as an anti-colonial power. Then there's a third issue, which is what I now call emergence, what used to be called the Judeo-Christian or Greco-Roman West, which I'm now calling the Philosophical West, because it really was a different type of thinking about itself. You move from a cosmological view of the world to a theological view, and then one of the unique features of our West, and I'm proud to be part of it, if you like, is its philosophical reflections from Plato, Aristotle, and so much more, and that this type, the philosopher, came from Persia.

Right. So right at the roots of this, it's a de-Westernizing — I mean, not something narrowly Judeo-Christian — to say we were at the beginning, and we then have taken a particular trajectory. But at its roots, it was always, you know, a civilizational element. And, of course, again, one would say, why are we, you know, the Persians, the Babylonians, and, of course, the Indic and the Sinic civilizations we had in the beginning? But we took a specific path. The philosophical West has always

been reflective about itself, obviously full of illusions and deceptions about itself, yet it's an important tradition. I mean, I would say, in between, I say, as a great Neoplatonist, it is hugely important.

And there is the way that Aristotle examined politics and so on. Well, we have a tradition, just as the Indians and the Persians and the Chinese have a tradition. And this is why civilization, as a meta level, the deeper level of contemporary, we should be aware of that. Be aware that there are these long-term understandings, and also it's a vision in which we're not competitive in this narrow, dominant sense that we've got to keep China down. It could be a fear, almost makes it almost ridiculous, to be honest, that China is a great civilization, and we should only take great pride that today it's moving people out of poverty, it's developing. What's wrong with that?

## **#Pascal**

Just to wrap up, I mean, we started with Russophobia, and we are going to further explore whether or not Russophobia is baked into the political West, or whether it is just a meta phenomenon that the political West could exist without. But if you had to advise Chinese and Russian diplomats, to say like, look, guys, I would recommend you to work with the political West as follows — what would it be?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

I think it has to be strategic patience. Do not rise to the provocations. As the political West declines, has its own internal tensions, domestic disturbances, as we see in the United Kingdom today, all of that, it's going to be lashing out. And the totally irresponsible escalations within the Russia-Ukraine war, we see it almost every day — do not respond, first of all. Just do what you want to do. So as far as Russia is concerned, invest in your society, invest in your people, modernize, build apartments. And we see it, by the way. Russia is developing despite five years of sanctions — well, many, many more — five years of intense sanctions. Russia is developing.

The shops are full and so on, with its own goods. And in fact, a couple of Russians have said to us, even at this conference, that the best thing the West ever did was impose sanctions on Russia, forcing it back on its own — and the Chinese as well. And the key thing is to remain committed to the United Nations and the Charter system, because we know that Israel, we know that Ukraine and the United States do not like the United Nations. So defend international law. Of course, most countries are better at declaring allegiance to these principles, but that's not the issue. As long as you maintain the normative commitment to them, that's important. I mean, the Russia front — we won't go into the causes of the Russia-Ukraine war — but certainly it tries to defend it in terms of Article 51 of the UN Charter.

It's questionable, but nevertheless, it's trying to do so. So that's my advice: patience. Do not rise to provocations, first. Second, stick to that. And third, maybe establish a model of how to do international politics based on United Nations principles of sovereign internationalism. Sovereignty,

yes. We're developing our way. But genuine internationalism is when states come together in a multilateral format for the public good and for the general good and for the cause of peace and development. So, in other words, do not become simply the mirror image, with all of its pathologies and decline and so on, of the political West, but be an example of how to do things differently. Beautifully said.

## **#Pascal**

Richard Sakwa, where should people go to find your writings and your books? And what's the latest book that you recommend to everyone on this topic?

## **#Richard Sakwa**

Well, I've just actually got a book on the Russia-Ukraine war out, and the subtitle is Follies of Empire, which covers some of this ground, and before that, The Lost Peace. Fortunately, the University of Kent website has a list of these things, so if you look at the Department of Politics — I'm an emeritus professor there — the publications are listed. But I'm planning to build up my own website in due course.

## **#Pascal**

And we will host you again in the very near future. Everybody, go to the University of Kent website, find Richard's books. He writes prolifically and a lot the whole time. I mean, prolifically and a lot, that's basically the same. But with that out of the way, Richard Sakwa, thank you so much for your time today.

## **#Richard Sakwa**

It's been my pleasure. Thank you.