

Jeffrey Sachs: The Greater Israel Project is Collapsing

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs discusses the collapse of the Greater Israel Project. Follow Jeffrey Sachs' YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@JeffreyDSachsOfficial> Stop 'Greater Israel' to make peace: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2026/6/21/stop-greater-israel-to-make-peace> 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> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to discuss the Greater Israel Project. Thank you for coming back on.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, great to be with you, Glenn, as always.

#Glenn

Well, you recently published an article about the future of the Greater Israel Project, and I thought a good place to start is perhaps how this concept is defined and also how it has shaped the wider region.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Absolutely. Israel is a state. It was established with certain borders in 1948 when Israel declared independence following a partition plan that had been voted on by the U.N. in its early days in 1947. Israel's declaration of independence generated opposition, a war, because the Arab states rejected the partition plan, which was non-binding. It was an advisory plan. Israel used that as the basis for a unilateral declaration of independence in 1948. Israel won the war and took more territory. And then in 1967, the so-called Six-Day War occurred, again with some debates about how and who provoked it. But the fact is that Israel captured in that war the rest of what had been British Mandatory Palestine. In other words, Israel now had 100% of the territory under control after the 1967 war.

Then, after Israel and Egypt reached an agreement, what had been the Sinai Peninsula, also taken in 1967, was returned to Egypt in a peace agreement. But Israel, in effect, kept control over three main places with large Palestinian Arab populations: Gaza, the West Bank, meaning the Palestinian territory west of the Jordan River, and East Jerusalem, which is a concentrated Palestinian Arab population. The Greater Israel Project is a term that's used to signify the desire to keep all of that territory that was captured in the Six-Day War and to resist any kind of Palestinian state. And this is a project, under various names, that goes back to the beginning of even the first Jewish homeland, to call it that, under the Balfour Declaration when this area was under the British Mandate.

And it has been an ideology, though not by any means the only ideology of the Zionist cause, which means the political ideology of a Jewish state in this area. It's been an ideology all along since 1917, since the Balfour Declaration opened up a Jewish homeland in what had been Ottoman Palestine, but now was British Mandatory Palestine until Britain gave up its claim in the interest of finding some post-British solution in some kind of partition. So the Greater Israel Project says this is ours and it's going to stay ours. The problem with the Greater Israel ideology in a practical, legal, and moral sense is that there are 8 million Palestinian Arabs and there are approximately 8 million Israeli Jews in this place, which was British Palestine.

And it's the 8 million Israeli Jews, according to the ideology of Greater Israel, that will rule over the 8 million Palestinian Arabs or expel them or ethnically cleanse the region or kill them, which is also happening in shocking numbers in Israel's war in Gaza. So the current government led by Benjamin Netanyahu is the most radical extremist government that Israel has ever had. And it is ardently a Greater Israel project. I can add that in the more expansive versions of Greater Israel, the ambition goes beyond even the borders of the British Mandate because of two reasons. One, that it is held by advocates of Greater Israel that it's necessary for Israel to control territory in Syria, such as the Golan Heights, or territory in Lebanon, for example, south of the Litani River.

In order for Israel to be secure, there's a security argument that says Greater Israel extends beyond Israel's borders. There's also a theological argument by the religious holders of this ideology, which says that according to the Jewish Bible—the Old Testament for Christians and the Jewish Torah for Jews—God promised land beyond what was the British Mandate, from the great river in Egypt, which in the biblical text is not necessarily the Nile but is sometimes interpreted as the Nile, to the great river of Mesopotamia, which is the Euphrates River. And so some religious ideologues believe that it's God's promise to the Jewish people—a land that goes well beyond the British Mandate.

And the U.S. ambassador to Israel today, Mike Huckabee, who is an evangelical Christian fundamentalist, espouses the idea that Israel can take land from Egypt to the Euphrates because that's God's promise. And in a notorious interview with Tucker Carlson a few months ago, Huckabee unabashedly said, yes, what Israel can take, it's Israel's because that's God's promise in the Book of Genesis. It's rather shocking for a hundred reasons, by the way—practical, legal, moral, ethical, and theological, I'll add—because theologians were completely scandalized by what Huckabee said, both

Jewish and non-Jewish theologians. But in any event, it is to say that for some, Greater Israel is impunity within the broader region.

Now, all of this matters because Israel has been pursuing this doctrine under Netanyahu for 30 years. Netanyahu became prime minister in 1996. He's been prime minister off and on for much of the period of the last 30 years. He comes from a political movement, Likud—still the party that he leads—which holds this Greater Israel view ostensibly on security grounds. So Netanyahu was never religious, never arguing from biblical texts until fairly recently. And the Likud, in its founding charter in 1977, said that all of the territory from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea would be under Israeli sovereignty. So this goes back 50 years, basically.

And in the mind, in ideology, even before the founding charter of the Likud. So it's been Netanyahu's mission to keep Israeli sovereignty over all of Mandatory Palestine. But in the current coalition—and this is a trajectory that Israel has been on since that 1977 founding charter of Likud—the religious impulse has become also more and more important. These are religious zealots or extremists. They espouse a... truly, it's ugly to say, but they espouse a Jewish supremacy that, as an American Jew, I find completely repulsive, disgusting, and contrary to 2,000 years of Jewish teachings under rabbinic Judaism. These are not people that reflect the history of Judaism.

And as a Jew, I can say that the views of people like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir are different—fascistic, disgusting, and completely extremist in my view. They have nothing to do with rabbinic Judaism, which taught something completely different. But they are a supremacist idea, and based in some sense on this interpretation that God promised Israel to his chosen people, and therefore it is their right to conquer this land, killing as many people as would be necessary to do so. And it's also an extremely—what should I say—interesting, extremely tribal view that the lives that matter are Jewish lives, and that non-Jewish lives don't matter.

Uh, Smotrich and Ben-Gvir sometimes put it quite literally that for every one Jewish life that is taken in this conflict, a hundred or a thousand Arab lives should be taken. It's a vulgarity. But, and here's my point, it is the prevailing belief, the doctrine of the current government of Israel. So this is not some fringe ideology. This is the doctrine of the government of Israel. Now, just to conclude on what is Greater Israel, Netanyahu has espoused this for 30 years. As I say, there are two strands: one, a kind of security argument that Israel can only be safe as Greater Israel; and the second, a religious argument that this is God's purpose, and this is therefore redeeming God's purpose by the Jewish people. And both of these now sit together in Israeli politics.

I should quickly add that the religious view rose after 1967, in particular with hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers from Israel into the Palestinian-occupied lands. Illegal settlements, because you're not allowed to settle occupied territory that needs to be returned to the rightful political entity—not Israel, but to a Palestinian entity. And yet hundreds of thousands of settlers came in, some because they wanted swimming pools and more land, but many others for religious purposes that form this Jewish supremacist idea now that is in government. So this has developed over decades. Final

point—sorry to go on—but the final point is that when Netanyahu came in, he had strong American backing and strong American advisors. And the idea was the following.

Greater Israel would lead to militant resistance. After all, it's a denial of the political right of self-determination of the Palestinian Arab people. And the UN General Assembly has said that not only do the Palestinians have the right of self-determination, but they have the right of armed struggle for self-determination. That idea is not outside of international law. The right of armed struggle for self-determination has been recognized repeatedly by the UN General Assembly, in fact. So Netanyahu and his American advisors said, well, we are going to stand for Greater Israel. We know this will be trouble. There will be resistance. What they call terrorism, what others call the struggle for self-determination—you know, it's all in the rhetoric and the eye of the beholder.

But what Netanyahu said was very pertinent, and he was backed by the U.S. neoconservatives. He said that you don't root out what they call terrorism, and others would call the armed struggle for self-determination. You don't root them out by fighting those militants. You root them out by overturning the governments of those who support the militants. So you don't defeat Hamas per se or Hezbollah per se. You have to fight the governments that support those militant groups. That's their ideology. Again, I find it repulsive, because the way to fight an armed insurgency is to sit down and negotiate a political solution in which there are the rights of political self-determination of the Palestinian people.

And that's what ideas like the two-state solution have proposed since 1997, and actually back to 1947. But for Netanyahu, this is armed struggle—an armed struggle that has to be crushed. And the way to crush what he calls terrorism is to overturn other governments. Now, he captured American politics. It's true. Israel, under Netanyahu, successfully mobilized American politics for the cause of Greater Israel. This is rather shocking. It's also a very complicated story of American politics. And it's not a simple story. Of course, there were American Jews who were part of that lobby. There was the direct engagement of Israel in American politics relentlessly.

But there's also another complicated piece of Americana, which is the Christian evangelicals like Huckabee, who constitute tens of millions of voters heavily concentrated in the Republican Party and in Trump's voter base. So they also, by biblical terms, say, well, that's Israel's. By the way, they don't say it because they love the Jews or they love Israel. They say it because they read in the Bible that the condition for the second coming of Jesus Christ is Israel's control over this land. So they read it as prophecy, not as somehow a gift to the Jewish people. In fact, they think, in their biblical interpretation coming from the Book of Revelation, the Jews are going to die in the final struggle, or they're going to be converted, or they're going to be condemned in the final judgment.

It's all very, very weird. But from 1996 onward, the American government has basically backed the Greater Israel Project, and it has gone to war constantly to fight Israel's claim to overturn governments that were supporting Palestinian rights. And Iraq is a classic case. The 2003 U.S. war on Saddam Hussein to overthrow the Iraqi government was completely pretextual. It was based on

absolutely deliberate propaganda that the U.S. had to invade Iraq after 9/11 to prevent Iraq from getting, or to dismantle, its weapons of mass destruction, which then were shown not to exist at all. And they said, oh, so sorry, we thought they existed. No, they knew they didn't exist.

This was a Netanyahu, neoconservative plan to overthrow a government that was supporting the Palestinian cause on a pretext, on a lie, a war on utter lies. And this has gone on now for 30 years, and just about all the wars in the region, in one way or another, include the CIA and Mossad and Greater Israel as a motivation. So overthrowing Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which was a CIA operation called Operation Timber Sycamore, signed by Obama in 2012–2013, tasking the CIA to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, was also at the behest of Greater Israel. Why? Because Assad had links with Iran, and Iran was seen as the supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah, and hence this axis of resistance, so-called, needed to be defeated by overthrowing Bashar al-Assad.

That turned out to be a 15-year bloody war caused by the United States, prolonged by the United States, denied by the United States because they called it the Syrian civil war. There was nothing civil about it. This was a war by the CIA and Mossad to create a government that would not back the Palestinian people. Well, the long and the short of it is that since 1996, Iran has been the prime target for Greater Israel proponents. And when this current war started on February 28th, 2026, when Israel and the United States attacked Iran in a completely unprovoked war of aggression—completely illegal, completely fatuous, and a failure—when they did that, Netanyahu tweeted, “This is my dream of 40 years.” And I read that and I was taken aback because I had always said it was his dream of 30 years, because I didn't know what his dream was for the 10 years before he became prime minister.

But this is his dream of 40 years. Well, my point has been, Netanyahu, go home. Take your own dream away from the United States. And to the United States, Greater Israel is not an American project. It's not in America's interest. It's not according to morality. It is not according to theology. It is not according to international law. It's disgusting. It's perpetual war. And why the United States backs this is a disgrace. It's because of lobbying and people who are not thinking straight, and big money in campaigns, and tens of millions of Protestant evangelical voters looking for the end of times, and many odd things. I live in a kind of crazy country that is able to do this. But this has been a 30-year perpetual war for something that has no justification whatsoever. So that's what Greater Israel is.

#Glenn

Well, uh... I was going to say, in the 1990s, though, this Greater Israel project had a good fighting chance. That is, it was backed by the only superpower in the world, which gave its unconditional support for this project. But since then, we've seen a multipolar world emerge. And I guess the Iran war was supposed to reverse this, restore U.S. hegemony, but also Israeli supremacy in the region. But given the defeat there now, which doesn't only change the distribution of power but also the United States, we see it distancing itself more from Israel—not by everyone, of course, but groups

which didn't utter this in the open in the past. I was just wondering, as a brief question, what will be the impact on the Greater Israel project? I mean, what are Israel's strategic options now?

#Jeffrey Sachs

I sincerely hope the idea of Greater Israel is finished, period. That's my own hope. It's a disgusting idea. There are 8 million Palestinian Arabs, and there is absolutely no cause for genocide or ethnic cleansing or apartheid rule. And there needs to be a solution. And for many people, and it's quite plausible and natural, there should be one state that is democratic and binational. And there are many examples of that. I could take Belgium as an example of the Walloons and the Flemish. They haven't always gotten along. There are deep cultural and sectarian and historical differences, but they make two states, by the way. They actually have five parliaments in Belgium to handle all of the different complexities of the multi-ethnicities.

So Israel could become one state, a binational state, or what has been the international law and the intention of the UN General Assembly for, I would say, all the periods since 1947, and then especially after 1967 again—two states: a Palestinian state and a state living side by side. Many people say that's now passé. I don't know what's passé. Either solution is possible. What is not possible, in my view, is an apartheid state or continued reckless murder by Israel, whether in Gaza or in the West Bank. And the violence in the West Bank every day is shocking—Israeli settlers dragging Palestinians out, killing them, expropriating their land, burning houses.

It's just got to stop—this violence, absolutely inhuman behavior, and this intergroup hatred, and this Jewish Power, which is actually the name of one of the political parties that is governing Israel right now, that kind of supremacist idea. It's just got to stop. There are two basic reasons why it may be coming to an end right now. And you emphasized one of them—very important. The United States and Israel cannot impose this solution on the region. They thought, well, Israel's invaded Lebanon in the past, it's weakened Hezbollah, Syria has been overthrown, the Iranian reach has been brought down, Hamas has been weakened, if not defeated, by the Gaza war and the Gaza genocide. So one view says that, OK, we're close, all we have to do is overthrow the Iranian regime. Turned out this was delusional.

By the way, if they had asked you or they had asked me on February 28th, we would have told them that it was delusional. But they went ahead thinking this would be a one-day war. And it proved not only not a one-day war, but Iran is a sophisticated country, a large country of more than 90 million people. It's got hypersonic missiles. It's got space technology. It's got advanced drone technology. And it has the capacity to destroy a lot of the neighborhood. So it has a deterrent capacity, which it demonstrated, which is why there is this fragile, nascent agreement—because Iran closed the straits, demonstrated military deterrence, the U.S. had no military option that would have been able to avoid a destruction of the Gulf region and the world economy. So in the end, Trump said, OK, we stop this. And that's what this agreement is about.

And I agree with Trump on this. Of course, I disagree with him on having started this war, which is fatuous. But I agree with him on ending the war because what are you going to do? Nothing else. This really is a stalemate. So that's one reason why this Greater Israel Project, I hope, is on its last legs. But the other is internal to the United States, and that is that the U.S. has been essentially the backstop of the Greater Israel Project. Europe, for many reasons, does Israel's bidding to an extent, but there's much, much less backing. And the U.S. has backed it because the power of the Zionist lobby has been great. And it's been a kind of dual lobby.

One is the American Jews and their relations with Israeli Jews in promoting this cause. And the second has been the Christian Zionists like Huckabee. And that's been a formidable lobby in the United States for 30 years. But what's happened, Glenn, is that with the genocide in Gaza, people watching this every day, people are coming to understand what this is about and why there isn't a state of Palestine alongside a state of Israel. Why isn't there some solution to this? And hearing that the Arabs are saying, yes, we would have peace and normal relations if there's a state of Palestine, their peace initiative—Americans have come to understand something is really wrong with this picture.

And so in just three years, American public opinion has swung from support of Israel to support of the Palestinian people. And the view of Israel is hugely negative. And the attitude towards the war in Iran is devastatingly negative. Americans hated the war. They hated the war because it was useless, it was expensive, and it raised their gasoline prices. And it was cruel, killing 160 schoolgirls on the first day because Palantir couldn't get its targeting right. Come on. So the American people were completely disgusted by this. And Trump is also looking at this, and he's facing an election in early November. And what happened, Glenn, in my city, in New York City, a couple of days ago is absolutely amazing.

New York City is the greatest concentration of Jews, American Jews. It's very Jewish—it's not a Jewish city, but it's got a very strong Jewish population. The voters of New York voted for the anti-Greater Israel candidates. We had one congressional primary election, two Jews running against each other. One was his current congressman, who supported the normal, we love Israel, we support what Israel does. And the other, a city councilman, who said, I'm running against Israel, against Israel's extremism, and I'm running against my candidate who is for it. So anybody that says this has to do with anti-Semitism or something else knows nothing.

This was two Jews running against each other, and the anti-Israel candidate won in a landslide. Landslide. And then there were two other congressional races, basically, that weren't two Jews running against each other, not even Jewish candidates. But in fact, the candidates that said, "We stand with the Palestinian people," won decisive victories. That's New York City. This is happening across the United States. I keep telling—I've said it from the first days of Israel's war in Gaza, and I've said it to the Israeli ambassador to the UN, and I've said it as many times as possible—Israel is losing its only support because of its extremism. Americans would support Israel, but they do not support Greater Israel.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's an important distinction. So, well, I want to thank you for taking the time. I know you have a big day there in Turkey. If we had more time, I would have loved to ask about Naftali Bennett's comments about Turkey being the next main threat to Israel.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, let me just say, if I can, one word about that, which is that if you're basing it on a...

#Jeffrey Sachs

A completely unacceptable, immoral, illegal project like Greater Israel. There will be opposition. And the opposition won't go away because the proposition you're putting forward is fundamentally false. And so what happens with the Greater Israel advocates, because they are pursuing a goal that is fundamentally unjust... they find enemies everywhere. And so when Naftali Bennett says, "Turkey is next"—well, who isn't next? They are actually saying these Greater Israel advocates are turning on the United States. Fine. The U.S. is the only backer of Israel in all of this. So they can turn on the United States all they want, but they will lose their only support.

The fact of the matter is, these politicians are going to have to rethink what Israel is. If it's a rogue state like it has been, they will find no support anywhere. Israel will be fundamentally endangered in its survival, not because of the rest of the world, but because of its own rogue behavior. So Naftali Bennett boasting that, you know, a would-be prime minister again of a country of 10 million people, that they're going to take on Turkey, a country of 90 million people—come on. It's getting, and that's what they did with Iran, another country of 90 million people. It's getting tragic, absurd, and this whole delusion needs to stop so that we can go to peace.

#Glenn

Well, thank you, Jeff. And yeah, have a great day over there.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Great. We'll talk soon. Thanks a lot.