

INTERVIEW: *Prof. Jeffrey Sachs*

Will the Death of U.S. Hegemony Lead to Peace—Or World War III?

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, currently a Professor at Columbia University, has held positions around the world as an economist, and has become one of the most outspoken peace advocates in the United States. This interview was conducted on May 15 by EIR's co-editor Mike Billington.



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Mike Billington: I listened to your interview with Jill Stein, the presidential candidate for the Green Party. I noticed that she ran through your various hats, which took her a long time to do! Rather than running through all of that, I thought I would start with your original profession, which was an economist. I want to read to you a quote from Russia's Executive Director at the IMF, Aleksei Mozhin. Do you know him personally?

Prof. Sachs: I know him very well.

Billington: Yes, I assumed you would. What he wrote on May 3rd in *Ria Novosti* was this: "If American debt continues to increase, which I expect it will, confidence in the U.S. dollar will decline. Chaos will ensue in the global economy, and the possibility of a collapse exists." What are your thoughts on that?

Prof. Sachs: First, Aleksei Mozhin has been Executive Director for Russia for, I think, three decades. He's outstanding, absolutely outstanding. So what he says we should take very seriously. He's been dean of the executive directors, meaning the longest serving. He presides often at the IMF. So I have great respect for him.

What he's saying is that the public debt of the U.S., which is now more than 100% of national income and rising rapidly, will be a source of financial crisis in the years ahead. I concur with that. We don't have any kind of political consensus in the United States about what government should do and how to fund it, so the recourse of both the Democrats and the Republicans is to run larger deficit spending.

The Republicans really like tax cuts. The Democrats like various kinds of spending increases or tax credits, but both sides like war. So both sides spend fortunes on war. The upshot is that since the year 2000, the public debt has risen from around one third of national income to more than 100% of national income. The Congressional Budget Office of the United States makes long term projections, and their long term projection for mid-century is that the debt will rise to around 200% of GDP. That's not the precise number that they give, but essentially the ratio of debt to national income doubling. That's not a forecast so much as saying, if we stay on the current trajectory. So the fact that we have no political equilibrium in this country means that the fallback option is raise the debt, and eventually that leads to crisis.

Billington: Right. I'm going to continue reading from Aleksei Mozhin. What he said next was about the BRICS [the organization founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa] and the role of the BRICS in dealing with this situation: "The BRICS are putting together an accounting unit based on a basket of currencies of the original five members of the BRICS, which will include daily quotes for the main commodities," and he mentions in that regard oil, grain, gold,

metals and timber. He goes on: “Mutual trade will be carried out in this accounting unit. If there is a collapse, it would be necessary to turn the BRICS accounting unit into a real currency backed by exchange traded goods.”

That’s his quote. I’ll mention that this is very close to the idea proposed by Lyndon LaRouche in the year 2000 called “[Trade Without Currency](#)” which was subsequently studied by Russian economists Sergey Glazyev and others who are planning the BRICS policies for how to deal with this global crisis. As you know, the Russians and the Chinese are also quite verbally warning of the severity of the global financial blowout that we are facing. So what are your thoughts on that idea?

Prof. Sachs: Well, I think, first, it’s important to say that a number of things are in play, and one of them is that the BRICS countries want a means of settlement that isn’t the U.S. dollar. This is one part of what’s in play. That’s not even mainly because of the debt crisis in the United States. That’s mainly because of the weaponization of the dollar by the United States. The U.S. began around 20 years ago to use the currency not merely as a system of settlements for international transactions, but also as a weapon of foreign policy, by seizing the assets of countries deemed to be adversarial to the U.S. The United States seized the balances of Iran, seized the balances of Venezuela, of Afghanistan. And now the big one, Russia—roughly \$300 billion of Russia’s financial assets frozen by the Western governments. So these countries in the BRICS, that’s Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and now five more countries added, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Emirates, Iran, and, we think, Saudi Arabia—not entirely clear about Saudi Arabia, but it seems to be the case. They are saying that they want to hedge against this kind of geopolitical risk. This is one factor in this.

The second factor is that the dollar itself may become unstable for the reasons that we were speaking about. I would say a third factor is that there is lots of technological change, creating different ways to make settlements. The current settlement system goes through banks, but in the future it will go through digital currencies, probably central bank digital currencies.

Now, all of that, then, also raises questions. If you have a central bank currency, renminbi or a dollar or ruble, how do you manage monetary policy? Should that currency be backed by a basket of commodities? If so, in what sense backed by that basket? Could be

a price indicator for monetary policy? It could be a literal kind of gold standard where you can take your currency unit and convert it into units of some kind of commodity or basket of commodities. There are lots of technical choices.

But the question is: does the central bank need some kind of anchor of a commodity to be responsible? Otherwise, the claim is sometimes made that central banks are inherently inflationary. At the end of the day, unless the currency is backed by something, it will be inflated away. So these are the issues that Lyndon LaRouche raised.

These are the issues that the BRICS are tackling right now. In my view, the order of priority for the BRICS is first not to have their foreign reserves seized by the United States or Europe, because both the U.S. and Europe are misbehaving very badly. They are using what should be financial instruments as foreign policy adversarial instruments. This is a big mistake and the BRICS want something else. Second is this unit of account issue. It happens that the first five countries Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa all have currencies that start with the letter R: the Brazilian real, the Russian ruble, the Indian rupee, the Chinese renminbi, and the South African rand—so they call it the five R currency unit.

I just found it an amazing coincidence. But in any event, Aleksei is carrying the ball on this. There are lots of good ideas to have a unit of account. I think there’s an interest among these major countries to do that, and they’re working pretty hard on this right now, and I’m in favor of it. I think there’s nothing wrong with having some alternatives. I keep saying to American policymakers, “Stop wrecking the dollar, stop weaponizing the dollar, stop seizing other countries assets. It’s absolutely ridiculous. If you want the dollar to be used, you can’t use it like a punching bag this way. I’m sure you know that.”

Billington: There’s now a bill in the Congress and discussion to not just freeze the Russian money, but to use the interest earned from it to literally hand over to the Ukrainian war.

Prof. Sachs: This is part of the aid legislation—not aid, this is part of the military spending that was passed last month, directing some kind of seizure of Russia’s assets. Plainly illegal, but also plainly stupid. But I don’t count on intelligence from the Congress.

Billington: As I mentioned, I watched your interview with Jill Stein. I also saw your interviews with Judge Napolitano, which was very interesting, and with a man named Robert, whom I surmise is connected to the Vatican.

Prof. Sachs: Yes, he does a show around Vatican issues, Robert Moynihan.

Billington: I found them all very interesting. It's obvious that you're making your views known about the global crisis facing mankind generally as widely as you possibly can. I appreciate that, and I appreciate your agreement to do so with *EIR* as well. Of course, in particular, you have condemned both political parties, as you just mentioned, being totally pro-war, united in their insane view, and that their expected presidential candidates are fully subservient to the military-industrial complex and to war, including the war between NATO and Russia being fought with Ukrainian bodies, and the horrendous genocide that's taking place in Palestine, as well as their preparation for a war with China. All of which clearly is bringing us closer and closer to global war and probably global nuclear war. Can you expand a bit on your view of the Biden and Trump situation and the danger to the U.S.?

Prof. Sachs: I think fundamentally what is at play is almost tectonic, like the plate tectonics on the Earth, but the tectonics of geopolitics. The United States, especially with the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, but really going back to the early days after World War Two, came to believe at the highest strategic level that the U.S. dominates the world scene, that it is the hegemon, to use the political science term, meaning the political power that effectively is in control of the world scene, and that its grand strategy should be to protect its hegemonic advantage. Sometimes this is put very explicitly. For example, in a very clear article written for the Council on Foreign Relations by Robert Blackwell [a former U.S. Ambassador and now at the Council on Foreign Relations] and Ashley Tellis [a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace] in 2015, where those two authors, senior analysts, one a very senior U.S. diplomat, discuss what U.S. policy towards China should be. The article says very bluntly and clearly, the U.S. grand strategy is to be number one. If China's rise threatens the U.S. being number one, the U.S. needs to take action to curb China's rise. Well, to

my mind, this is the fundamental issue in the world scene today.

The U.S., and by that I mean the military-industrial blob, or complex, a small number of powerful people, from the security establishment, the intelligence agencies, the Pentagon, the military companies and their supporters in the Congress—that group wants to preserve American hegemony as they see it. But the real issue is: Russia is a powerful, technologically sophisticated country. China is a very powerful, very technologically sophisticated country. And not surprisingly, neither Russia nor China, nor most countries around the world, want a hegemon. What they want is in large part to be left alone so that they can get on with their lives. But they would like peace. They really do want global cooperation, they just don't want the U.S. to tell them what to do. The U.S., on the other hand, resents Russia for being big and powerful. The U.S. has a completely neurotic fixation on China. Again, when I say the U.S., I mean real individuals at the top of the power structure in the U.S. I don't mean American society as a whole.

The reason we are slipping towards World War Three is that America's self-image as hegemon is completely inconsistent with the reality on the ground, which is: Russia is powerful. China is powerful, other regional powers are powerful, and they don't want American dominance, period. So when the United States government declared already in the late 90s, but then committed in the year 2008, that it would expand NATO to Ukraine, Russia said, "No, not on our border. We don't want you next door." It's obvious that if China said, we're going to start putting military bases along the Rio Grande, it would trigger a kind of reaction in Washington. Not saying, "Oh, that's just fine. You do what you want."

Billington: We saw the response when the Russians moved weapons into Cuba.

Prof. Sachs: We ran that show at once. But one of the points about the U.S., just to digress for one moment, is that our senior officials absolutely refuse even to try to think like the other side might think, and to take that into account, much less to reflect on it and use that reflection as a way to stay out of disaster. We absolutely reject that. We do what we want, and we expect others to do what we want. And so what you raised, the war in Ukraine, the war in the Middle East, the risk of a cata-

strophic war in East Asia—in my mind, it all comes down at the core to this U.S. demand: “You do it our way or we’ll have war.” And the U.S. ends up getting in a lot of disastrous wars. It gets millions of people killed, because of this kind of approach. And we’re in the midst of it now.

Biden obviously doesn’t know where the brakes are. I don’t know if he knows where anything is right now. Trump is an odd character, utterly unpredictable. He had neocons and he had anti-neocons in his administration, doing very haphazard things. It’s probably true he would be less pro-NATO in Ukraine, but he was absolutely up for goading China and as aggressive as can be pro-Israel in the Middle East. So all of it is to say, in my view, there’s not so much difference at the political personality level. Structurally, the U.S. security establishment is fighting for its hegemony and it could end up creating a world war.

Billington: I’ll mention, since you brought up the military-industrial complex, you may know that Ray McGovern has expanded that idea to the MICIMATT which includes the Congress, the intelligence community, the media, academia and the think tanks.

But let me first ask you about the Oasis Plan. I’m sure you’re familiar with this. This is an idea that LaRouche had way back in the 1970s, with his idea being that the only way to resolve the perpetual warfare that had been created in the Middle East by the British—the way they set it up as a cockpit for war, eventually against Russia and China—but the only way to deal with that is through a massive development plan addressing the needs of both sides, and in particular, the massive shortage of water in the region, through canals, nuclear powered desalination of seawater and related developments, Belt and Road style developments for the entire region.

We sponsored a conference on this concept last month in which four ambassadors, including one from Palestine, who basically spoke in support of it, along with scientists and water experts from around the world. Lyn argued, when he first developed this, that the idea that we have to get a political settlement first—that this is backwards, that the vision for a real solution, a solution that is long term, that actually addresses the infrastructure needs of both sides, is required, like the Peace of Westphalia, which I know you’re familiar with. You know Southwest Asia very well. What are your thoughts generally on this development solution?

Prof. Sachs: I think that we actually need a political solution *and* an economic approach, and the political solution is at hand, because all the world agrees to it, other than two countries. The political solution is that there should be a State of Palestine, and it should live alongside the State of Israel, and Israel should not be able to veto a State of Palestine. And we’re actually quite close to that, except the U.S. keeps vetoing it on behalf of Israel. If the U.S. would actually be sensible and say, this is what international law, international agreements, and the only way for a global consensus that exists to resolve this crisis is, we would actually get there quite quickly.

The U.S. alone vetoed the State of Palestine as the 194th UN member state. What’s ironic, and I speak to diplomats in the Arab region all the time, and in the Arab and Islamic countries all the time. They’re ready for peace. Peace with Israel, a peace, normalization of relations. They don’t want war in the region. The Saudis don’t want war, the UAE doesn’t want war. Egypt doesn’t want war. Jordan doesn’t want war. Lebanon doesn’t want war. But they want Palestine not to live under apartheid rule or worse, under a genocide, which is what’s happening in Gaza right now. So I think the politics is actually straightforward, except that it’s blocked by the United States. And I’m hoping that America wakes up to the very obvious point that the American people want Palestine to have political rights, and the world community is united for that, and that all the United States is doing is perpetuating war and promoting its own complete isolation, and I would say fundamentally endangering Israel as a viable state, because Israel needs some legitimacy, not just to be seen as a war crime state protected by the United States.

That’s a bad bargain for all concerned when it comes to the economics. I couldn’t agree more that there’s ample opportunity for regional development. And there is a water crisis, and desalination is the way forward. And there are so many things that could be done. One needs peace.

Now, the reason why we have to combine the political and the economic is that one of the gambits of Trump and Biden was: “Oh, we could kind of bribe them. They don’t really need a state. All we need is some economic terms.”

But the truth of the matter is that Israel right now is absolutely radicalized, extremist compared to what it was even a quarter century ago, much less in the 1970s.

It's an extremist government. It is saying overtly, among the major cabinet members; "This is our land. We will never allow a state of Palestine. We will dominate the land," and so forth, including the so-called occupied territories, which is Palestine, but they call it Judea and Samaria. It's really dangerous how extremist Israel has become. And so I think we need to say, as a world community, stop the extremism. We need a political settlement. Clearly: 1967 borders, the State of Palestine, capital in East Jerusalem. And we need an economic framework that can go along with that. And I think both are possible.

Billington: With a Peace of Westphalia approach, where you acknowledge that you have to forgive the crimes of the other side, which both are so adamant in insisting upon.

In your interview with Robert, you brought up the encyclical of Pope Francis in which he spoke about the meeting of Saint Francis with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil of Egypt on the battlefield of the Fifth Crusade. I found that absolutely fascinating.

Prof. Sachs: It is a great story, a true one.

Billington: Pope Francis's encyclical, which I looked up, is called *Fratelli tutti*, which means "all brothers," which of course reminds you quickly of the Friedrich Schiller phrase "*Alle Menschen werden Brueder*," "all people will become brothers," which Beethoven set in his Ninth Symphony. What can you tell us about this meeting of Saint Francis and the Sultan?

Prof. Sachs: Well, this was the Fifth Crusade, and Saint Francis was saintly. He believed in peace. And he believed that there would be a way to reconcile the Christian and the Muslim world. So he trekked on foot from his native Assisi to the battlefield in Egypt in 1219 and met with Sultan al-Malik. He had an all-nighter with the Sultan in a discussion, a debate about religion, politics and war. It is a meeting that went down in history as a peace seeker. It did not end the Fifth Crusade. Saint Francis left without peace.

But he did have that conversation. And Pope Francis raised this at the beginning of this wonderful encyclical, because he said that it not only is inspiring that his namesake, Saint Francis, made this journey, but also because he and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, which

is the great, great center of learning of the last thousand years, in Cairo, in Egypt, the great Muslim center of learning, the Pope and the Grand Imam have really joined hands in calling for peace and saying, there is a way forward, but you have to reach across the divide, like Saint Francis did in 1219. So that's the message of the encyclical. It's a wonderful encyclical. It's really Pope Francis's great wisdom as a great pastoral leader. He's basically explaining, how do you deal with the other side through? Do you deal with hate propaganda, war making, or do you find a way to have what he calls encounter? And that is to meet the other side?

In addition to the meeting of Saint Francis and the Sultan, a lot of the encyclical is taken up with the parable of the Great Samaritan, told by Jesus, where you have a Samaritan, robbed and left bloodied on the side of the road. Many pious people walk by him, Jews in the community. But it's a Samaritan, meaning someone from another jurisdiction and a religious group that the Jews looked down on at the time of Jesus's parable.

And it's a Samaritan who rescues the robbed person, brings him to an inn, gives money for his care, and, the Pope says, this is the way that the world can be saved. And the only way the world can be saved. And I find it an extraordinarily important encyclical, very basic in its intention, which is, don't shout hate to the other side. Find the way to have a dialogue with the other side. It's so simple and so basic and so far from what we do right now.

For me, the telltale fact of the recklessness and foolishness of Washington is that Biden has not tried to speak with Putin one time since the end of 2021. With all the war going on, the risk of nuclear war, the disasters. Biden doesn't even understand that there's a role for speaking. And why do I say Biden? Because President Putin actually said repeatedly, "I'm open for discussion, but they don't want to talk." And the truth is, I've been watching this very close up, because I know all these people. The U.S. does not have the idea of diplomacy. They don't get it. They don't know it. We have a Secretary of State, but we don't have a diplomat.

Billington: On the question of the Vatican's role in this situation, in addition to the encyclical which you just described, you're also a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at the Vatican. I'm afraid I don't really know exactly what that is, but I'm wondering what you and others with whom you are in touch in

the Vatican might be doing to try to realize the Pope's offer, from a few years ago now, to use the Vatican as a forum for peace negotiations?

Prof. Sachs: The Pope has reiterated this. Just recently, he said that Ukraine should show the "bravery" to be open to negotiations. Actually, in Ukraine, there's a law that Zelensky pushed which says that it's illegal to negotiate with Russia, until Russia leaves Ukraine. In other words, we can't have negotiations to end this war. The war magically has to end first. This is completely backwards, completely destructive. It has meant that Ukraine rejects negotiations. And the United States, which is very poorly led by President Biden, takes the line, which I think is both a dodge and a delusion: "Well, we can't do anything unless the Ukrainians ask for it. And since the Ukrainians don't want negotiation, we say no to negotiations." This is a complete copout. Actually, it's almost the opposite of the truth.

The U.S. has pushed this war all along. The U.S. has funded this war. The U.S. has armed Ukraine. It's the U.S., by the way, that told Ukraine, "Keep fighting," when Ukraine was ready to settle on the basis of neutrality in March 2022. Then the U.S. and UK came in and said "No, no, we will arm you, you keep fighting." That is about 500,000 deaths that would have been averted but for the U.S. insistence I would say, that its client state keep fighting. All of this has meant that while the Pope has said repeatedly, "the Vatican stands ready to use the Pope's good offices, to use the Vatican, to use our ability to have outreach to Patriarch Kirill and other religious leaders"—it's been blocked by the geopolitics up until now.

Billington: In terms of the U.S. as the unipolar power of the world, nearly the entire Global South is now quite verbally and publicly and openly rejecting the whole policy of colonialism. Really, the 500 years and more of human history has been largely defined by this colonial era. But they're now being offered something quite different from the BRICS, from the Belt and Road, something different than the austerity and subservience that the IMF and the World Bank policies and the colonial powers have imposed on all these centuries. What do you think about the Belt and Road and the BRICS policies in terms of dealing with the continuing immiseration of much of the developing sector, the so-called Third World, as we used to call it?

Prof. Sachs: Well, the U.S. really has starkly divided the world, because the U.S. has said, "You're with us or you're against us." It said that repeatedly. It said that with regard to the Iraq war in 2003 and onward, and it says it now with regard to Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia. You're either with us applying these sanctions or you're against us. Most of the world doesn't want to be for or against. It wants to be left alone. Most of the world is trying to get on with living, trying to get on with facing many, many challenges and crises. And it doesn't want to be told by the United States, you do what we say, or we somehow punish you or put on sanctions and so on. So we're in the midst of that upheaval right now.

Europe, to my disappointment, which has the capacity to be an independent actor, has for the moment fallen almost entirely into the U.S. camp. Countries that should know better, and a European Union that should know better, act almost as if it's simply a complete dependency on the U.S. And the European Union no longer distinguishes between the EU, which is an economic and political union, and NATO, which is a U.S. led military alliance. It's a shame, but true, that the capital of the EU and the capital of NATO are both in Brussels, in the same city, and effectively the same thing right now. So when the world divides—you have the U.S. and Europe and a few allies in Asia, important countries, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, effectively in that group. And then you have most of the rest of the world, not per se against the U.S., but saying, "Stop it, stop dividing the world, stop creating Cold War, stop your military expansionism, stop your regime change operations and all the rest. Just get along."

That's the vast majority of the world, I would say, 150 countries or so. There are 27 in the European Union, plus the United States, plus the handful of non-EU countries, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so forth, coming up to probably about 40 countries in the "U.S. camp." It's a dangerous, sad, ridiculous way to behave that "we're number one. And if we can't be number one for everybody, we'll be number one in our group," among the 40 or so, "and we'll divide the world." It's a lousy bargain for Americans. It's a lousy bargain for the world. It's pretty much where we are right now.

When you look at any other individual developing country, generally their position is: "I'd like to trade with the U.S. I'd like to trade with Europe. I'd like to

trade with Russia. I'd like to trade with China. Why should I choose? I just want to get along. I don't need to take sides." But it's the U.S. that is forcing this sharp division.

And it's a shame. And it's a huge mistake for the U.S. because when countries are forced to choose, they say, "Okay, we'll go with the other side because it looks like a better bargain." And when you ask specifically about what's on offer, one of the things that's on offer right now is this Belt and Road Initiative, which is a \$1 trillion plus initiative of China to finance modern infrastructure in partner countries. Fast rail. This is a huge part of Belt and Road. Many places are getting rail service for effectively the first time, or the first time in modern technology, such as a rail line that I actually was near to just recently, in Ethiopia, running from Addis Ababa to the port in Djibouti. Many countries are getting major power systems, hydroelectric dams and so on.

So the Belt and Road Initiative is a tremendous initiative. Naturally, the United States bad mouths it, says it's awful. It's terrible because the United States can't say anything good about China, because China is an affront to the American arrogant claim of superiority. So everything the U.S. says about China is badmouthing, it's basically lies, fibs, misrepresentations and misunderstandings, because what China is doing is very constructive in the world. This is why so many other countries are saying, "Okay, you've forced me to choose. I choose the Belt and Road."

Billington: Well, finally there's some revolt going on in the United States. We now have hundreds of universities in upheaval. Students are protesting the war policies of our government. They're spurred on, obviously, by the genocide in Gaza. But it really goes beyond that. The response of both parties and most of the Congress has been sending in the police, and perhaps soon the National Guard. People may recall that it was exactly 54 years ago, in May of 1970, that the National Guard opened fire on peaceful demonstrators at Kent State University in Ohio, killing four and wounding nine. Are we seeing this coming again?

Prof. Sachs: We're seeing a kind of panic by the politicians and by the university administrators to what the students are saying. What the students are saying is: they don't like genocide. They don't support what Israel is doing. They want it to stop. And the students are ab-

olutely correct in this. This is a shock to the politicians, who are, of course, deeply influenced, one could say bought off by the Israel Lobby, by the big money that that entails, or by the military-industrial complex. And frankly, they are shocked and amazed that there's such a strong sentiment among America's young people, pro-Palestinian. I don't think the political class expected this at all. But then again, what Israel is doing is so vulgar, so cruel, so crass. It's not really surprising. But this caught the politicians and the university administrators completely off guard.

Remember that many of these universities have large donors, Jewish donors and other donors, very pro-Israel, very pro-military-industrial complex. And these donors immediately said, "What are these students doing? How dare they do this?" And so the administrators at Columbia panicked, behaved very incorrectly, in a very peremptory way, suddenly started outlawing student organizations, cracking down on students for being on zoom calls, and couldn't stomach that there were overt demonstrations on the campus against Israel's war in Gaza. Of course there would be! And so what? It's a protest! So let it be. But the university said, "Oh, this is terrible. This is anti-Semitism. This is a danger." Everything was exaggerated in a kind of panic. The universities wanted to prove to the Congress, "Oh, we're going to take care of this anti-Israel sentiment."

This is absolutely terrible. And so they cracked down. They called the police, across the United States. Students, faculty arrested. Students expelled. If they had read Pope Francis's encyclical and actually talked to the students, they would have gotten somewhere. The President of Harvard, it seems, from what I know, and I know him, actually very, very well. And I think he's done a good job. He spoke to the students, he discussed with them. They said, "Okay, you've made some promises. You're going to take up the issues of the university's divestment policies. We're going to have more learning about what's happened in the Middle East," and so on. And they peacefully decamped. Whereas at Columbia, the police came in, twice, very brutal and absolutely unnecessarily.

But that happened all across the country because the university administrations, by and large, wanted to show these right wingers—it's not even right wingers, I scratch the phrase—they wanted to show both parties of Congress that we absolutely understand what free speech is, which means don't allow it if it's against the

prevailing policy of the United States, which is to support Israel at any cost and at all costs. And so they fell all over each other to impress the politicians. The politicians did their usual demagoguery, and they came to the campuses and they called the pro-Palestinian protesters anti-Semitic and every kind of slur and slander you can imagine. And this is where we are in America. We do not speak with each other in a civilized way.

Billington: Do you know Professor Bruce Robbins at Columbia?

Prof. Sachs: No.

Billington: He's a professor of English and literature. I sent you this morning a six minute video that he released. He describes: "I went to the encampment. I talked to them. They're all peaceful. What they want is peace. They want to make their point about the genocide, about the evil that's taking place. And what's the response? The response is the police came in." Then he said that he began to see something was amiss when after the October 6th events, Colombia set up a 3-person team to investigate anti-Semitism. But all three of the people that were chosen were Zionists! Their report just completely ignored, 100% ignored, what was going on in Gaza. All they talked about was the evil of Hamas and so forth. It's a very interesting video.

Prof. Sachs: Yes. I didn't see it, but it completely comports with everything that I've spoken about with my colleagues at length in recent weeks. I think the actions that were taken by our administrators and similar actions taken by administrators of universities in other places were wrong, completely contrary to the spirit of the university, completely contrary to First Amendment rights of free speech and the right to protest and completely neglectful of the reality, which is that Israel is killing tens of thousands of people. And I'm proud that our students are saying, "No, don't do that." That's what students should be saying.

Billington: You said something similar in your interview with Judge Napolitano, which I took note of, which is that the U.S. wants to maintain its hegemony around the world, but to do so it is imposing internal suppression on the U.S. population, and that this was in your terms, "breaking apart our community, undermining the role of universities as places of debate, speaking out on ideas,

and instead is bringing in the police to crush peaceful opposition." So that's what you've just explained.

Prof. Sachs: The American people do not want or need in any way hegemony for our safety, our security, or our well-being. China is not an enemy. Russia is not an enemy. We don't need these wars. They don't make us safer. They don't make us more prosperous. And the American people sense it, or know it, and they oppose the foreign policy. And of course, in the U.S. at this point, almost all foreign policy is managed secretly, really by a small group. Everything is classified, under control. What is told to us are lies, and the public is protesting. And in order to keep to the lies, the government is cracking down. That's where we are. It's extremely dangerous.

Billington: What else do you think is going on amongst the faculty at Columbia and perhaps other universities that I'm sure you're in touch with as well? What do you think they are doing about this and what do you think they can do about it? I can imagine that having Hillary Clinton and Victoria Nuland becoming professors at Columbia is not going to help very much. The president of the university, Minouche Shafik, was the first university president to call in the police to shut down the student protests. I don't know if you know her background, but she's also a member of the House of Lords in the UK. She was Vice President of the World Bank and a Managing Director at the IMF, and a Deputy Director at the Bank of England. So we're dealing here with a person at the very center of the global financial oligarchy. And now she's running a leading university like Columbia. What do you think of that?

Prof. Sachs: Well, I think the main point is: her community is the students and the faculty. And I would say to her, and I have said to her and to the administration, pay attention to your community. The outsiders who are aiming to divide us, the politicians who are always ready for their bit of demagoguery, even the donors, okay, they may be generous, but they cannot run an academic community, and should not. And everybody should know that, including them, including the donors themselves. Pay attention to your community. Because if the community breaks, what do you have? What's left?

I think that this is really the point. The faculty are very unhappy. At least hundreds of them are. There is

a faculty vote of no confidence underway, right now. It's a several-day online system of voting, so I don't know how it's going or what the outcome is, but the fact of it, is a demonstration that a significant fraction of the Columbia faculty was really unhappy with how things have happened. The faculty is very concerned about the students: Students who were expelled, suspended for doing the right thing, protesting injustice and exercising their critical faculties, their thinking and their First Amendment rights. And they should not be suspended for that, much less expelled..

Billington: The universities are beginning to shut down now, at the end of the term and the summer break. These protests may not continue. But what, in your view, what would it take to rally the national sentiment of the students that are already expressing their concerns, and the rest of the population as well, to rally them against these wars, with something like a march on Washington or some major display of the kind of sentiment, which, as you said, the U.S. people don't agree with these wars. How do we galvanize that?

Prof. Sachs: I think it's likely to continue. I don't think that even with the school year ending, the protests are going to stop. We're in an election year also. There are going to be lots of gatherings of people. There will be political conventions. There will be campaign events. If, which seems tragically likely, the fighting in Gaza continues the way it's going right now, with more senseless deaths and more violence, I'm pretty sure that the protests are going to continue to play a very big role in American society in the coming weeks.

Billington: Do you have any recommendations on how to consolidate that or to expand on it?

Prof. Sachs: I don't have recommendations. I'm trying on my part to move forward to diplomacy. My particular area of effort right now is to try to apply the maximum logic and geopolitical sense for the U.S. to drop its veto on the State of Palestine, because I really believe if we could have a state of Palestine in the UN, so much of the rest of making peace would follow very quickly.

Billington: Well as you certainly know, there were tens of thousands of Israelis who have been out in the streets over the last few weeks, generally demanding an

end of the war and a release of the hostages. And Bibi, of course, has insisted that the planned slaughter, and now it appears the ongoing slaughter of innocents in Rafah, is going to proceed, with or without a deal with Hamas. Do you see any hope that the Israelis themselves can end this? The madness of Bibi and Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and so forth?

Prof. Sachs: I'm not so optimistic. I'm not so close to it, but this group is ruthless. This is obvious, with so many tens of thousands dead, with this senseless and absolutely brutal military campaign underway. This is a ruthless group, and the demonstrations are not exactly for peace. They're for release of the hostages. They are anti-Bibi to an important extent, but unfortunately, there's a lot of feeling across Israeli society, according to the opinion surveys, for very harsh, continued measures in Gaza. That is very concerning. I'm not sure that the peace is going to come from within Israel. I think it's more likely to come from the international community, which, again, putting aside the U.S. veto, is pretty much unanimous in rejecting what Israel is doing.

Billington: I'll ask you to close by saying what you can about China. You know China very well. You spend time there. We've already discussed the fact that the NATO people want a global NATO, want a war on China. What do you think we should do about this?

Prof. Sachs: Well, since China's rather big, 1.4 billion people, and with a very constructive role to play in the world, I hope we could have another discussion about that at length. I don't want to oversimplify, but I will say basically one sentence: China is not our enemy. This is the most important point to understand. China is not out to run the world. It's not out to dominate the United States. It's not out to invade the U.S. It's not out to hinder the United States. The idea of China as the enemy is a U.S. concoction. It's a resentment of China being large and successful. It is not a measure of China per se, and this is the most important thing for Americans to understand. Stop making enemies where they don't exist. If one persists long enough in calling someone else an enemy and acting that way, you'll create an enemy. But if you have more sense and understand that China is not our enemy, we have no reason to make China an enemy, nor will it be an enemy.

Billington: All right, very good. Okay. Thanks a lot.