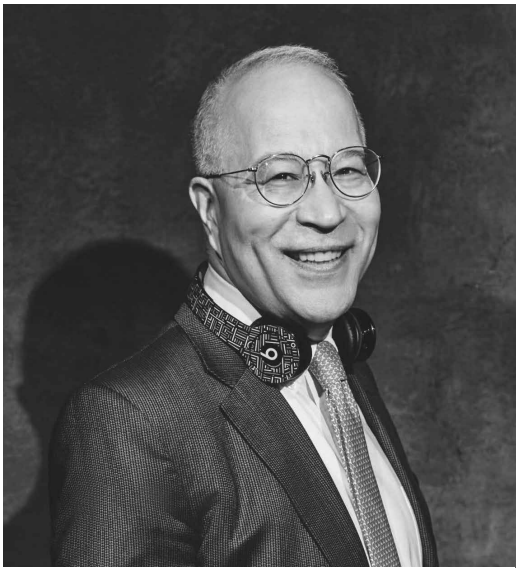
II. Interview

INTERVIEW: *Einar Tangen*

Living in Two Universes: What the West Gets Wrong About China—And Itself

by *EIR* Staff

Born in the United States, Einar Tangen is a widely recognized commentator and analyst living in China. He is a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, a senior fellow at the Taihe Institute, and the founder of Asia Narratives. This is the edited transcript from an interview conducted by EIR*'s Editor-in-Chief Helga Zepp-LaRouche on March 11. The full video of the interview is available here.*



Einar Tangen Facebook page

Einar Tangen

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: Good day, Mr. Tangen. It's a great pleasure and honor to talk with you. For our listeners, you are involved with the Center for International Governance Innovation, a senior fellow at the Taihe Institute—which is a private think tank in Beijing—and an analyst and commentator on many, many topics. So, it's a great honor, especially because you are, as far as I know, an American citizen who has had a career in the West, so to speak, as a lawyer, as a banker, but now for the last 20 years you've been living in China. And judging from what you have said in the past, you have a rather unique overview on the strategic situation, because you can look at the picture from an American side, a so-called Western side, but also from a Chinese side.

I think that is what is very much needed by people in the West, because the present relations between China and the West, and that includes Europe and the United States, suffers a lot from an almost blinding narrative. I find the difference between what's really going on with China and in China, and what a lot of people in the West think—it could not be more different. You almost think you are in two different universes. So therefore, I welcome you very much.

Given the fact that we have this war going on in the Middle East, about which [Chinese Foreign Minister] Wang Yi recently said should never have started—and China is also doing a lot to try to find a diplomatic solution; they have sent a special envoy who is in contact with many of the different governments in the region—what is your view, sitting in Beijing, on this war?

Einar Tangen: Well, I actually didn't think that it would happen, or I thought it would be something very short and more just symbolic, like last time. [U.S. President Donald] Trump would lob a few missiles into Iran, and Iran would respond by lobbing a few missiles into some place where there weren't too many people. But simply because we are where we are, and it was predictable. Iran has no choice. It's up against an asymmetrical military situation. It cannot take on the United States directly.

And for years, it has been developing a defensive program, which they call the Mosaic Program, which basically allows independent entities to operate continually, with or without centralized leadership.

You have to understand the topography of Iran. It's a series of mountain ranges, very difficult to get in. That's why the Iran-Iraq war never progressed. It was almost impossible to get through the mountains that

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surrounded the borders between Iran and Iraq. So, I mean, a ground offensive just doesn't work. Decapitating not only the leader of the country but the spiritual head [Ali Khamenei], was foolish. I don't know what that accomplished other than making sure that this war would go on.

Now, when I talk about Iran's defensive posture, the Mosaic Program is not aimed at winning a war. It's aimed at creating time, time in which it intends to blockade the Strait of Hormuz, which at its narrowest point is about 21 miles across. But there's a narrow channel there. It doesn't sound like there are 21 miles, but the sea lanes—the demarcated sea lanes that are safe to travel there—are about two to three miles across going in each direction. So therefore, they can be easily defended. They go all along the Iranian coast. They can be hit at different points. Once you know their trajectory, you know approximately where they're going to be, you can send drones, which are fairly cheap, very effective, especially against oil tankers, and potentially against any kind of escort warships.

So the real question is, why did Donald Trump do this? And we know that for the last 30 years, there was this idea of an [Israeli] "clean break." Thirty years ago, actually 1996, there was a white paper that was given [by some U.S. neo-conservatives] to [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu. Richard Perle, who was in this team, worked on this. And what it said is, Israel should not try to have any kind of compromise and shouldn't use diplomacy in order to maintain its existence. Their idea was that, in essence, Israel should weaken or take down any government that could be a threat to it. And if you look at the last 30 years, you can see quite clearly that is what they've done. In fact, if you look at the plan, you'll see that, in essence, in its broadest strokes, it's been followed.

Now, the most difficult part of this plan comes down to Iran. Iran named Israel as its mortal enemy after the fall of the Shah of Iran. The United States was kicked out and Israel is considered the partner of the "Great Satan," as they referred to the United States. And since that time, there's been nothing except enmity between them.

Iran has obviously engaged in proxies, whether it's in Hamas in Gaza or in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq. These were all areas where it was extending its kind of resistance to the United States, but ultimately, they know that they cannot win in a pitched battle with the U.S. Now, Israel cannot take on Iran. They're about a thousand miles apart, so it's not like they have a shared border. In addition to that, it's a nation of 92 million people. The number of Israelis in Israel is only seven-and-a-half million, and not all of them agree with what Israel is doing. And although they don't like Iran, I don't know how many would be willing to trudge across a thousand miles and try to attack a country that has obviously a lot of geographic defenses.

So, they had to bring in the United States, and it was a question of waiting. So, after 30 years of Netanyahu claiming that Iran was two weeks or two months away

Official White House Photo by Molly Riley

U.S. President Donald Trump

from a nuclear weapon—and he literally said that 30 years ago—he was able to convince Donald Trump, who, for a number of reasons, a lot having to do with the [Jeffrey] Epstein files—which are decimating his base; they don't understand why he's covering up for these people. And the most recent revelations indicating that he is named numerous times, including having raped young women. He says they're without any foundation, but then, why did he try to cover them up?

And then the other part is domestic problems. His economic idea of re-industrializing America has proven to be a failure this last month. They expected to gain 52,000 jobs. In fact, there was a net loss of 94,000 jobs. So, he's beset with a lot of problems, and he's been using this as a diversion.

He also thought that this would be a repeat of Venezuela. He runs in—it doesn't matter about the legality—runs in, asserts American power, and then leaves.

Unfortunately for him, Iran is not Venezuela, and he's just massively miscalculated. And these were things that he was advised of by his military. They said, "If you think this is going to be a walk in the park, you're wrong. They have more missiles than we have defenses. And it's a question of attrition." Donald Trump waved them aside and he went forward.

Zepp-LaRouche: The cabinet seems to be not totally unified. [Vice President] JD Vance seems to be not so gung-ho on this operation, and [Director of National Intelligence] Tulsi Gabbard apparently did not confirm that Iran is about to have nuclear weapons. To the contrary, the intelligence services in the United States said there is no such thing, and everybody knew that the *fatwa* of [Iranian Supreme Leader Ali] Khamenei was still on; that for religious reasons, Iran would not pursue nuclear weapons. That may change now.

But I think one of the most ominous aspects of this whole thing is that the so-called Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, seems to have been motivated by not just military concerns, but also religious concerns. And there was this picture circulating widely on the internet, where President Trump was sitting at his desk in the White House, surrounded by many religious people. This idea that a war against Iran will bring about Armageddon—if religion in this way enters strategic policy, including something which could eventually lead to an escalation globally, even with the use of nuclear weapons—I'm most worried about that element of irrationality. Because when you enter biblical predictions from the Old Testament, where is reason?

Tangen: I completely agree with you. But you know, this is not the first instance; the entire history of crusades goes back over one thousand years. Basically, it was just people who in the name of religion would go and try to sack the Middle East. Back then, it was about gold and about trade items, silk, these types of things, lands, and control. Today, it's about oil. So, it's exactly the same—these people who use religion as a convenient prop for the evil that they do. That's always been the irony. It's that those who commit the worst atrocities always do it in the name of belief.

Beyond the Middle East: Geopolitics, BRICS, and the Drive for Unipolarity

Zepp-LaRouche: There is the economic aspect of this, but are there not, in your view, deeper geopolitical reasons? When the Trump administration released the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy at the end of last year, it focused very much on control of the Western Hemisphere. And we see there are now very radical moves by Trump to kick the Chinese out, to push back on Chinese influence in Peru, the Chancay deep port, pressure naturally on Venezuela, and Cuba is on the list.

But is there not also the element of Trump's stated opposition to the BRICS? Because Iran is both a member of the BRICS and also the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. And is that deeper geopolitical effort to keep a unipolar position, which sort of was expressed also by [U.S. Secretary of State/National Security Advisor] Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference, to which many Europeans said, "Oh, this sounds so much more diplomatic than JD Vance a year ago." But if you look at the fine print, he basically told the Europeans, either you join us in trying to keep this position, or else you may have regime change against you as well. What is your view on that?

Tangen: You've covered a lot of ground there. Okay, first, let me get back to the issue of economics in China. China over the last two months increased their oil buys by 16%. It's estimated they might have, between the private and public sector, 1.1 billion barrels. They use between 8 and 15 million barrels [per day], depending on the oil that comes through the Hormuz Strait. But so far, a number of ships that are under Chinese flags and oil tankers have been able to get through. So the main object for them is price. They have the supply, they can weather it for a while, but the larger issue is what happens to the world.

Oil price spikes are going to hit nations that do not have the wherewithal to buy it, who are dependent on oil. You start looking at the South Sea Islands, for example, far, far away from the fighting. Well, they currently spend one-quarter of their GDP on diesel fuel. This is how they run their economy. So, this is going to be extremely damaging. Any kind of increase bites directly into their competitiveness. If you go into Africa, there are countries there that are going to really feel the bite. Ironically, it's an area like Russia that is going to benefit, because they have the oil. Obviously, people are going to be less choosy about where they buy oil from, and that means that they're not going to be using U.S. dollars.

So, U.S. dollars, remember, that's about $1.3 billion a day [that] is not going into the recycling of petrodol-

Tasnim News Agency

Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Iran is interdicting any hostile ship attempting passage through the Strait.

lars—that's where everything is settled. Why isn't it being settled? Because no one's buying. So it's not huge, but it adds up over the year. And the fact that you have other oil trades being done *outside* of that is going to compound that fact. So, this could literally lead to a global depression. And this is very serious for so many countries, including in Europe.

Now, getting on to the other issue you were asking about. Once again, you were asking about how Europe was reacting to this. Europe should be very concerned. As I said, there's the economic side of this, but there's also further disruption. This puts into limbo what is happening in Ukraine. It takes away any ability to provide missiles, because the United States is using them up like staples, and in a quest that's not going to go well. I mean, the regional stabilization—there's absolutely no long-term winners if, in fact, the world goes into a global depression.

Zepp-LaRouche: President Trump said today that he thinks the war may come to an end fairly soon. Do you think that that is due to the backlash, to the blowback he's getting from the Gulf states and from some others? Or do you think it's due to the fact that the American defenses are not in such great shape? Because apparently some of the THAAD systems were eliminated, the radar was knocked out, and since Iran has prepared for this war for a very long time, they are now using very modern hypersonic missiles. There is a big dispute, you know, over how many of these missiles Iran has. And given the fact that this war is existential for Iran, maybe they will not lose the war in the short term. I think Israel has much more interest in keeping the war going. But might Trump pull out of it because of all of these factors? What do you think?

Tangen: It doesn't matter. I was asked this question today, and I wrote an essay about it. The biggest mistake that Washington is making is [believing] that it holds the time clock. It doesn't. Once they lit the fuse on this, Iran is the one who's going to decide when they've had enough, not the United States. So, I don't care if you take all the carrier groups out of there, you remove all your troops, you leave the local GCC countries to the tender mercies of the Iranians who believe that they were complicit in these attacks, guess what? It continues. The Strait of Hormuz does not open up because the U.S. leaves. And, as Iran has said repeatedly, the U.S. is engaged in bad faith. There were two negotiation sessions, and the U.S. attacked during both of them. So, how do you sit down with somebody and say, "Let's negotiate peace," when in fact, they use that to attack you? So, there's no trust there.

Iran's long-term plan throughout this whole thing, all of the defenses we're talking about, were aimed at an economic response to a military response. The economic response is aimed at decimating the American economy and the U.S. petrodollar hold over the world.

Remember, the United States is now at $39 trillion in debt—that debt has to be serviced in terms of the money into it, and it has to be turned over. And who's going to buy it? All right, it used to be these petrodollars as part of that. So, they're in a real dire situation where you could see the rates going up; this would affect the United States. And as I said, there's a cascading effect that could literally push the U.S. into a depression. This is exactly what Iran wants, and they're going to extract their vengeance. This was not just that you sent a couple of missiles at some destroyers; you killed their spiritual leader, you made it [a] religious [conflict]. And now you're trying to back it up by making it religious on your side, that this is somehow a justified holy crusade

to take back oil? You heard the disgusting statement that was made by [U.S. Senator] Lindsey Graham, saying that, oh, I'm so concerned about the oil. And not one mention of all the people who are dying. The 160 young ladies who were attending school [in Minab, Iran] who were basically evaporated by American missiles, which increasingly looks like it was deliberate.

I mean, these are war crimes. They're meant to intimidate and cause terror. So, by that definition, if the United States is actually doing that, it's a terrorist state. And by the definition of what a rogue state is, the U.S. and Israel fit that description. So right now, the only one who's fighting back and is willing to do that—because in a sense, they have nothing to lose; it's their homeland, there's nowhere else for them to go—is Iran.

CGTN

The 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) convened its fourth plenary session in Beijing from Oct. 20 to Oct. 23, 2025, focusing on proposals for China's 15th Five-Year Plan.

China's Model: Economies Serve the People

Zepp-LaRouche: Shifting to the economy, I have thought for a long time that, if it ever comes to a new global financial crisis, the Western economies will do much more poorly, because they have put so much emphasis on the financial aspect of speculation, on maximum profit, while the Chinese economy is much more solid from the standpoint of the real economy.

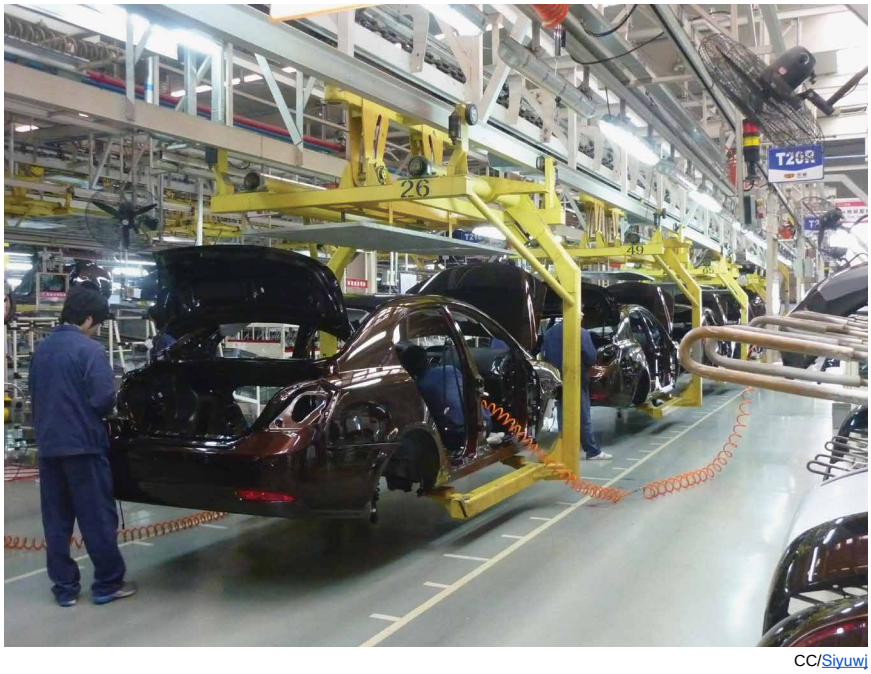
And in that context, I would like your comments on the new, 15th Five-Year Plan, which I think is an extremely interesting document, because it discusses in great detail, in my view, the secret of why the Chinese economy is so much more successful than the West, by putting emphasis on what they call the "new productive forces," on the continuous injection of innovation, on disruptive technologies, which always leads to a higher degree of productivity. So why is the West not looking at that as an example to follow, given the fact that China is without any question more successful than the West?

Tangen: Because, you know, China is "evil." It's a "communist state." So therefore, anything that China does, it cannot be good. If China solved world peace tomorrow with limitless energy, the United States would say, "Ah, it's a trap!" So, it doesn't really matter what China does.

I did a number of commentaries on the two sessions [of the announcement of China's new Five-Year Plan] about both the CPPCC [Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference], which is the advisory body, but it plays an active role in terms of supervision, and making suggestions and reviewing any kind of legislative matters that are coming up; and then the NPC [National People's Congress], which is the lawmaking body itself, which does, in essence, the same thing. Now, these are bodies that only meet officially for a week as a whole, but they're actually working all year. And there are those among them who are constantly working. And you're talking about millions of man hours that go into the planning that has made China what it is. They come up with the ideas, they take them down to the grassroots, to the village level, and they have to talk about them and make their suggestions. They go up, then all of these things have to be harmonized.

And the big difference of this 15th Five-Year Plan from the 14th Five-Year Plan is the emphasis on social development. Now, while the rest of the world is focused purely on economics, China is making a very clear statement: Economies are to help the people. They're not magic boxes, where you just help the econ-

omy and somehow something good will happen to the people. That's the laissez-faire idea. But for competition and the market, this is the irony. What China does, is they set policies that talk about helping the people, but then they use competition to actually get it to work. So, you see tremendous competition amongst EV makers, electric vehicle makers. In fact, they got to a point where they're concerned about involution, where these companies are cutting into themselves in order to out-compete others and drive them out of business. But this is hurting the overall industry and people are going without jobs unnecessarily, and there's a lot of economic dislocation.



CC/Siyuwj

Assembly line of Geely Auto, a leading Chinese producer of electric vehicles, in the Beilun District of Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province.

So, they're putting their emphasis on this, and this shows a tremendous amount of confidence at a time when there is so much unknown in the world. China has said, "Look, we cannot make Europe, United States, Israel, any other country do anything. They are sovereign nations. They'll have to decide themselves. So, we're going to concentrate on the things that we can control, which are within China." They want to build a society that has a larger consumption component. Over 52% of the economy last year was due to service to this tertiary area, and they want to grow that. They said, well, with our internal demand and our internal production capabilities and these new productive forces, which are basically about technological innovations and things like this, we think that we can create a good economy that can withstand the kind of uncertainty that is created by the United States, or by Europe, or by other entities, or by wars, conflicts, etc.—things that China can't control. So, this is the line they're taking.

But it's unusual at this point because of the great uncertainty in the world, and everyone else's emphasis on economics, economics, economics. China is saying, economics serves the people, we're going to concentrate on building the confidence of our people, knowing that we can defend ourselves, knowing that we can produce enough food and consumer goods and everything that we need to make a good society, infrastructure, and start taking care of a lot of the social welfare issues. They're talking about pension reform, enlarging healthcare, a healthy society. This is the first time that a nation has codified—that means they put a code together that equates the environment with a human right. In essence, that people have the right to clean air, clean water, an environment that is healthy, and access to education. And it isn't surprising for a socialist society, but it is perhaps novel to countries like the United States and elsewhere, where they just assume that if you have a robust economy, that there's a trickle-down effect, and maybe there are a few less poor people.

So, a very different approach, as you pointed out, something worth learning from. Even if you don't agree with the Chinese system, why not study it? Why not go to China, walk around at 4 a.m. in the morning without any fear of being mugged or anything like that? It wouldn't even enter your mind.

Zepp-LaRouche: I agree that the social aspects are the most important, but still the economic figures are mind-boggling. For example, Chinese foreign trade has been up 18.3% in the first two months of this year. The total goods trade volume was $1.12 trillion. And still, the West has headlines saying: "foreign investment massively withdrawing." And, for example, in 2025, there were 70,392 new direct investments in China. That's why I said it's almost two different universes when you read that.

Federal Government/Guido Bergmann

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Beijing, China, speaks to Chinese President Xi Jinping, Feb. 25, 2026.

Germany is now obviously rethinking, because with [U.S. President Joe] Biden, there was the pressure of decoupling and de-risking—and the EU is still saying that. But I think in Germany, the industry is clearly recognizing that it is to their advantage to cooperate with China. When [German Chancellor Friedrich] Merz traveled to China, he brought a large delegation of 30 top CEOs of some of the top industries, as well as leading "hidden champions" from the Mittelstand [medium-sized industry]. And there, I thought that China has offered a very interesting new model, whereby they offer joint research and development—Volkswagen has created such a center in Hefei—and then have basically a joint export to global markets. I think that that is a perfect way of helping, which totally goes against the idea that China is this brutal imperialist force trying to drive people out. They're reaching out with a helping hand, and giving German industry the chance to relearn their old virtues, because China is now doing what Germany used to do, even though Germany has abandoned it. So, isn't that a new model for all Western countries, even the United States?

Tangen: Yes. I mean, cooperation, you have different niches. China is doing this themselves. In areas where they can't compete, where there's a high quotient of labor, they're actively encouraging Chinese companies to go abroad, partly because of the lower costs. Unfortunately, those are sometimes offset by problems, logistics, supply chain, and things like that. But, those companies have figured out ways of dealing with that.

This is also because, in order to trade with the United States and other countries, they can have Chinese inputs, but the final product has to read that it's from another country in order to avoid these tariffs, and things like this.

So, yeah, China is doing this. It's a model which should have been embraced a long time ago. During COVID, it was China who said, "Look, we'll build factories wherever they're needed to make the vaccines so we're not sending them." And Europe and America said, "No, no, we're not going to build any factories outside. We're just going to—you just buy them from us." But there are shortages, things like this. You had a lot more need than you had ability to produce. And the answer was to charge more in some cases.

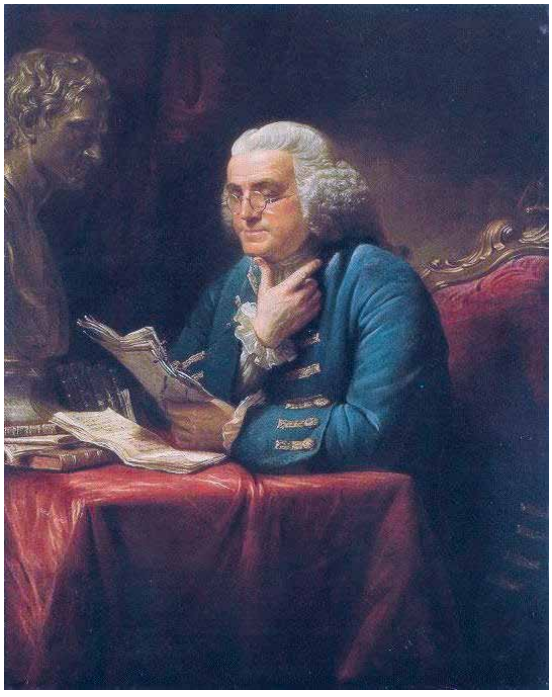
So, there's a different perspective. China believes that the pie can get bigger if we cooperate, that countries can find niches where they can shine. For instance, Germany with its educational attributes, skilled learning with the apprenticeship programs and schooling, they're perfectly positioned for higher tech, higher precision elements of the production cycle, e.g. not doing the production line, but doing the machines that make up the production line, things like that. Keeping an edge, keeping ahead of all the competition, not just China, but the United States, everything. It is a competitive world.

And Germany has been able to do that. So, there's a reason that 40% of its economy is related to exports. And this is something where I think there was too much belief in brand. "We have the brand." And I knew a lot of people from the German car makers, and they'd always stress the brand. And I said, yes, you have the brand for now, but a brand stands for quality, innovation and value. And that can change if your competitors start offering something. They said, "oh, can't be, we have the brands, that'll never change." So, I think there's maybe, I think they rely too much

on brands, not enough focus on consumers.

Franklin, Confucius, and a Bridge to Understanding?

Zepp-LaRouche: The interesting thing is that the German economist Friedrich List is among the most well-known economists in China, and he has been studied a lot. And actually, if one looks at Friedrich List, he was in the United States in the 19th Century for several years. Very interestingly, he wrote about the difference between the American System of economy and the English system, meaning that the American System of Alexander Hamilton is focused very much on the furthering of the creativity of the people, because they are the ones who come up with scientific and technological breakthroughs, and that leads to productivity in the economy, versus the idea of free trade, where you buy cheap and sell dear. So, Friedrich List wrote a lot about that, and if you look at that, you could actually come to the conclusion that what China is doing is much more the American System of economy, and that the Americans are now following the British or English system of economy. Isn't that a funny thing?



Benjamin Franklin, painted by David Martin. Franklin studied the moral and ethical theories of Confucius and spoke highly of them.

Tangen: It's a funny thing, but I don't think there could be much debate about it. In fact, if you go back and you read the newspapers during the 1800s—everything that America says about China, the Europeans, especially the British, were saying about America. They lie, they cheat, they steal, they take our intellectual property, they're trying to destroy our industries. At that time, the British had many monopolies, but one of them was the cloth monopoly. So, in essence, all cotton, yarns, etc., would have to go to England, and then they'd be woven into the cloth and materials, and then they would be sent out to wherever to be made into clothes, etc. And what the United States did was they actually would go and buy up British knitting factories and weaving factories, dismantle them overnight, and then ship them out to America. But they weren't satisfied with just getting those things. It was against the law, by the way. What they would do is they would improve them.

So, you had a number of incremental innovations, which made them more productive, and gradually that destroyed the monopoly that Great Britain had had. Obviously, [the British] were buying low, selling high, and they were doing very well at it. But that kind of monopoly will always attract others who see an opportunity to deliver a better value.

Zepp-LaRouche: Benjamin Franklin was a fan of Confucius. As a matter of fact, he studied the Confucian moral and ethical theory and modeled his own ideas on that. Wouldn't it be a good idea if, when President Trump goes to China, either at the end of this month or next month, that this tradition of Benjamin Franklin and Confucius could somehow elevate the discussion between those two leaders?

Tangen: You're making the assumption that he can read! I mean, during interviews, it's been clear that he refers to the Bible, yet he cannot point to any particular passage in the Bible. He was asked repeatedly by the right wing—and this was a softball—"well, tell us, how does the Bible inspire you?" "Oh, it's a good book." "Can you tell us a few of your favorite passages?" "Yes, it's a great book. It's all good. It's all good."

Obviously, he hadn't read it. And the same thing with the Constitution; he's asked, "well, what do you think of the Bill of Rights?" He points to a copy of the Constitution, and he says, "Oh, it's all good. It's all there. Right there, you can read it." He doesn't read. According to his own sister, who was caught on tape on a telephone conversation, he cheated his way through school. He paid people to take his exams, and he was a horrible student and a horrible person.

So, the idea that he's going to be interested in higher philosophical thoughts or entertaining this idea that there's a responsibility to society that comes along with talents and ability and power and money, it just isn't going to work. He was busy buying distressed bonds. His son, Barron, reputedly bought $50 million worth of oil stocks just two days before he announced the war. His [President Trump's] wealth has increased by $4 billion in the first year alone. These are not the marks of somebody who's really interested in any kind of philosophical approach that talks about responsibility….

So, I'm just saying that this hope that Donald Trump will become a humanitarian as he approaches 80 is, I think, naïve.

Zepp-LaRouche: Well, you may call it naïve, but on the other side, you know—

Tangen: Oh, I don't mean you! I just mean anybody who thinks that. I would hope, I mean, I hope—but I'm not going to rely on it.

Zepp-LaRouche: No, no. I fully agree with you on much of the analysis. But still, there remains the question, given the fact that, in my view, we are in an unprecedented crisis, because I do not think that we are just in a cyclical crisis or just some regional crisis. I think we are in an epochal change, because behind all of these regional crises, in my view, is the fact that the Global South is determined to end 500 years of colonialism. And because of the rise of China and the Belt and Road Initiative and their global initiatives, they are now in a position to actually take serious steps to overcome their underdevelopment by putting the value chain in their own countries; by going in the direction of building up their own industries and so forth. And the West, including, unfortunately, most of Europe, not all of Europe, but many European heads of state and governments, they are not yet willing to acknowledge that.

If you would ask the average European, "Are you a racist?" they would say absolutely not. But if you look at the policies, they are as racist and colonialist as you can possibly think. Not everybody is like that—you have [Prime Minister Pedro] Sánchez from Spain, [Prime Minister Robert] Fico from Slovakia, [Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor] Orbán, and many others as well.

But, I think that the real problem is: In this incredible moment, it's almost like mankind is morally tested. Can we find the fitness to survive or not? And the reason why I'm looking for bridges is not necessarily that I disagree with you on the reading habits of President Trump, but I always look for where there is a bridge. How can you elevate the situation in such a way that one does not end up in an Armageddon or abyss? And there, China also is all the time trying to find a harmonious way of solving problems, like the four initiatives of President Xi Jinping. I think the four initiatives, China's four global initiatives [for development, security, civilization and governance], go in the same direction. You don't find immediate agreement by the West, but especially the Global Governance Initiative, in my view, is the only attempt by any government in the world to rediscuss and reframe the international relations in such a way where the interest of every single country on the planet is taken care of. And that is very much in the tradition of the Peace of Westphalia, which after all ended 150 years of religious war.

So maybe it's a little bit naïve, but if you don't have a certain amount of, you know, childlike naivety in not losing your ideals—you know, that's a demand by [German poet of freedom] Friedrich Schiller, who said when you are getting old, you should never give up on the ideas of your childhood. And I think that does much better than to become cynical. And I'm not saying you are cynical—by no means—but I think—

Tangen: Sometimes I am. When I'm staring at nuclear Armageddon being waged by somebody who says it's God's will and they want this to happen, I get very cynical.

But let me just say that there is a way, and I've been saying this for some time, and that is the Global South, and I hope Europe. And obviously, everybody except probably the United States and Israel, who have no interest. I mean, you've seen the votes at the UN—they [the U.S. and Israel] don't care. It's the world versus two. And literally, they just continue. You have an apartheid genocide going on in Gaza. 70,000 people, nearly 80% were women and children—I don't know what you say; you cannot have a better world if you have actors who are determined not to act in the world's interest.

I would love to think that there's some way to bring them inside, but I can only see one. And that is for the world to unite. It may not be through the UN; it could be through the UN, I don't really care. It doesn't have to be an agreement on anything in particular. Like the four

initiatives you talked about, it would be based on values, not ideology. And those values would say that if the United States and Israel want to promote these wars, they want to break up all these things, they're out. And if the rest of the world, the 85%, or actually, it would be almost 95%, if Europe would join in, would say to the U.S., "Look, we don't care what you do in terms of your people, if you want to put tariffs on things, that's fine, that's up to you. You and your voters, we're not going to interfere with that. But you're not going to pit us—the rest of the world—against each other in some sort of crazy idea that we're going to bid against each other for your favor. This is not the *Hunger Games*. We're not here to serve America. We're here to live together." Right?

So I think the only way that you get, in the next three years—after that, I think there's going to be a pretty marked change, even after the midterm elections, assuming Donald Trump allows them, or doesn't try to overturn them—that will be the opportune time for the world to pick a point and just say, "we've had enough," and to gather around.

Now the United States, and Donald Trump in particular, his nickname is Taco. Trump always chickens out. If he's confronted with 95% of the world, he'll just declare victory and say, "okay, I'm taxing everybody, 10, 15%," basically what the Supreme Court has already said. But then it's uniform across the board. And the rest of the world can go on, and they can just ignore what he does and what happens. The United States will be a U.S. concern between the voters and whoever they want to vote for.

The Importance China's System Has for the World

Zepp-LaRouche: But I think for that to happen, an important ingredient would be that people in Europe, and the United States as well, really would get a more clear picture of what China is. Because as long as people—

Tangen: But this isn't about China. Yes, China is the greatest, but this is the rest of the world we're talking about, it's not China versus the United States—

Zepp-LaRouche: No, no, no. But please let me explain. I was in China for the first time in 1971. That was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. And nobody can tell me anything because my whole life experience has been to observe the unbelievable, unprecedented economic miracle and social miracle in China. And I always have a sense of tremendous *injustice* when I hear China described as a "dictatorship," as an "autocratic system" and so forth.

Because for me, the criteria is: Are the people happy? Are they content or not? And in Germany, maybe 10% of the people would say that they are happy. And that's probably an exaggeration. In China, I have again and again asked students, professors, other people, and they generally are so optimistic. They have an attitude of getting things done. They're future oriented. And that, for me, is a sign of the quality of the system, of the government, because it should be for the people and not for some abstraction.

Therefore, I think that if people would understand that China is doing something beneficial, not only for China, but for humanity as a whole, they would change their view in taking an attitude of what they want and what they think they can accomplish. So in a certain sense, I'm arguing that for your solution to come into being, it requires my approach.

Tangen: Well, the power of propaganda is quite large, as you know, and it's been used throughout history, in many cases, for evil ends. You missed something when you described me earlier. I was also in politics in the United States. I spent a fair amount of time on Capitol Hill. I was born in Washington, D.C. My two law partners, and there's only three of us in the firm, were secretaries of state for the state of Wisconsin. So, I was very, very aware of the politics, and I know where it comes from. In American politics, it's from the bottom up. You represent your constituents. But in order to rise up, you have to get coalitions behind you. You have to make deals. America isn't about abstractions. It is about special interests—and you make deals.

I used to run elections for candidates, not for money, but because I needed to get certain things done. And I can tell you, all it was, was a bunch of deals: sometimes it was unions, sometimes it was business groups, real estate associations, or the teachers' union, etc. These were people who either had money, or they had boots on the ground; people who could distribute flyers, do door knocks, mobilize people to get buses and cars to take people to the election booths.

So, things start very locally. But then if you want to rise, you have to cater to the party, you need the party's support, and that support comes at a cost. You have to

agree to the party platform, and the higher you go, the more you have to agree. So, people always ask me, "Well, how is it possible that Donald Trump and some of these other characters, who don't seem like the best of the best, are the only choices that we have?" It's because the parties push people—not Donald Trump, he was an aberration, he was a reaction to what I'm describing here—they push people who are not leaders. Their whole career was agreeing to whatever the party position was.

So, no, they're not qualified as leaders. Many of them aren't qualified to even do the jobs they're in. They don't have any background. They don't understand how government works. They think they have common sense, but they have nothing. And they come into a very complex situation and they either throw up their hands or they just start attacking it or planning their next move upwards with the theory that somehow if they're in charge, everything will work out.

Donald Trump was a reaction to that. Both parties had, in essence, lied to the people. They had never done anything for them. In 1972, 61% of the United States is middle class. And it's a middle class where, if you're working at a factory, you can actually put your kids through school, you can have a house, you might even have a second house, you have a car or two. Now fast forward to 2024—if you use the same metrics, only 40% of the people are middle class.

And yes, people will say, "Oh, there was an increase in the upper class," but it doesn't equal that 20%, not even close. And the fact is, middle class now means that you have one car, you're living basically hand to mouth; 60% of people do not have $400 in case of emergency. To give you some idea, if you need to call an ambulance and it's not covered by your medical, which probably you're not very well insured if you don't even have 400 bucks, that could easily be $800 to $2,000 just for the ambulance ride. And then you start getting into the hospital and they're going to start demanding that you show how you can pay for this if you don't have insurance. This means that 60% of America is one catastrophe away from a downward cycle that could lead to homelessness. And we have over 700,000 homeless already.

This is the richest, most powerful country on earth. How is this all possible? You start looking at the number of people who are functionally illiterate. Only 40% of Americans read above a sixth-grade level. And it's not that that last 60% all read at a sixth-grade level—some of them are functionally illiterate. It doesn't mean they're stupid; it just means for other reasons they haven't been [educated].

So, this is America as it is. And saying that, "Oh, we're going to get people who are not leaders to come forward and take the plunge"—which is what you're saying, I wish it was possible. But I don't know anyone who could. Can you point to anybody who you think could do what you're talking about, who would have that kind of wisdom?

Zepp-LaRouche: Since you're asking me that question, we have a very outstanding woman, Diane Sare, who, because of the kidnapping of [President Nicolás] Maduro and the invasion of Venezuela, decided to declare her candidacy for U.S. President. And she's right now building up her campaign with the intention to find many like-minded people. And there is actually a growing movement of independent candidates. Obviously, it's minuscule as compared to the power of Wall Street and Silicon Valley and the military-industrial complex, but on the other side, the economic life of Americans is exactly as you described. And I think that that is a factor which President Trump also has to eventually recognize, that his MAGA base could vanish overnight because he was elected to be the peace President, and now he's the war President.

So, given the fact that we are also sitting on a financial bubble of $2.4 quadrillion outstanding debt, we are potentially in front of a financial crisis much worse than 2007-2008. We are in uncharted waters, and this is a period where the power of ideas is much more important than in times when things go normally, and you can't do much. But when you have such epochal changes like those we are experiencing right now, this is the period where a lot depends on whether enough people of goodwill get together and follow a plan. So, I'm excited.

Tangen: Yeah, but—look, I was in politics, in America. The cards are stacked against any independent party. The system was rigged that way. If you have an independent candidate, you have to get on the ballots in all these states. They all have different procedures, the number of votes that you have to get and all this type of thing. It takes a huge amount of money to mount that kind of effort. So, if you're small, if you have great ideas, it doesn't matter. That's the problem with America, is that great ideas don't matter because they don't

have the means in order to push it, because those special interests with the means are going to stick with either Tweedledee or Tweedledum.

Zepp-LaRouche: That has been the case. I can only say Diane Sare already succeeded to get on the ballot as a senatorial candidate. She was the only one who managed in three weeks to get 45,000 signatures. The system was rigged in New York so that nobody would get these signatures. She did. And I'm not saying it's not an uphill battle, but America has its 250th anniversary of the War of Independence.

Germany is in a similar situation. We used to be probably the most culturally advanced country in the world and then plunged into the pit of the 12 years of National Socialism. So, countries are not just what is in the present. And I have not given up on Germany recapturing its greatness of Leibniz, of Beethoven, Bach, of Schiller. My contemporaries know almost nothing about these people, but I hope that it can be revived.

Tangen: I don't say you should give up hope, but—I always dealt with: What's possible? We're right now, as we were discussing earlier, we are in a very, very precarious economic position globally. Twenty percent of all the oil in the world has been cut off. Oil [demand] is inelastic. This is a big problem. When people are facing these kinds of odds, they tend to get very selfish. They're thinking, "What's in it for me? I have to protect myself." Sometimes leaders emerge who can capture their imagination, who can present a vision of change, of unity. And I would love to see that, but it is very, very difficult until you either have the wherewithal for people to take responsibility for what they do, or you have the leadership.

China is a country that has the leadership. Xi Jinping has anticipated almost everything that has happened since he came into office. I remember giving a lecture about the sovereign internet, the idea that countries would be responsible for what came into their country, because it could be dangerous, and what went out of their country, because that could also be dangerous. And this was back in 2014 or something, and it had just been mentioned. And people got really upset with me. They said, "Oh, this is a communist conspiracy to ruin the information highway that's out there." I said, "No, it's a very pragmatic approach to it." China is saying, let's figure out how to make this work, because you need data, you need exchange of information. But there's a privacy concern for individuals. And then there's security concerns by nations. Pretending they don't exist isn't going to help. And so, what you end up doing is by ignoring it, you make the problem worse, and then you get a pendulum swing the other way.

China has been trying, as you pointed out, many, many, many times to say, "Hey, maybe there's a different way of looking at things. Maybe there's a more positive way, a way in which we all win, win-win solutions." But once again, it comes down to—if I'm not willing to listen, if I think China is evil, I'm not going to listen to China. And if my government is putting out propaganda on a by-minute basis, telling me that all these things are horrible, that China is horrible, of course my opinion is going to be horrible. That's why it was so telling when the whole thing with TikTok happened, and people got onto something called Little Red Book, Xiaohongshu, and they just started talking to ordinary Chinese people, and they were amazed! "Oh, these people are nice. Oh, they don't even swear. Oh, they're telling me about—it's safe, they can walk around at 4 a.m. in the morning. Oh, they're hopeful. They think their government's pretty good. I never realized this."

And there was this epiphany, and that is starting to take hold throughout the world. You're seeing an upswing in the regard for China. A lot of it is because it's stable, and it's not pushing wars and things like that, as opposed to the United States. But a lot of it is just people are suddenly getting to know China. COVID had a marked effect: it isolated everybody. And the only thing that people had was the propaganda that they were being fed….

A lot of [U.S. funding] is dedicated to propaganda. There's numerous papers, exposés, investigative journalists, just admitting that what we do is we use the National Endowment for Democracy to destabilize anything that has to do with any country that we don't like. They're happy to announce that they have 72 regime change operations, and that only goes up to the mid-80s. Since that time, we've engaged in a lot more, and we're probably looking at well over 100 right now with all the things that we've done.

So, this idea that you have the right to change other countries, for your own benefit—America First—that has to disappear before somebody can come to the table and be reasonable. I don't know how you can *make* them be reasonable. And the only reason the U.S. traditionally comes to the table, is when there's no other

choice. As they say, America always does the right thing—once it's tried everything else. And I think that is, to a certain extent, true.

And I'm hoping—and this is a funny thing—I'm hoping that Donald Trump is the force that brings America to its senses. And I do really feel Germany has been such a leader in cultural things and making it a place of learning. I mean, you still have all the traditions there. *Those* are the traditions you should be mining. These are areas where Germany could really, really move ahead.

But I'm sorry, I look at the people that you have in your government, Merz, Scholz, all these people, I'm not impressed. They seem to just be so mealy mouthed—one second this way, one second that way. I mean, where's the vision? Where's this idea of making Germany a leader by example? This is where Germany always had the respect. Not so long ago, my father studied at Heidelberg. Why? Because he was studying mathematics, and a large part of mathematics was in Germany because of the work of the leading mathematical scientists and things like this.

Zepp-LaRouche: Maybe I should invite you to come to Germany and give a lecture tour, reminding people of that! I think that would be exactly necessary.

Tangen: This is what I don't understand: Where is the pride? I have a lot of German friends who come to or live in China, and they say, "Ah, it's not that good. People are upset, people aren't as friendly. It's not like the old days." I said, "it's not like the old days because you don't push the things that really matter. You were a paragon of what really matters."

I always ask people, they always concentrate on money, "Who was the richest guy in 1938?" No one can tell me that. And I say, Van der Rohe, who was an artist, and also an architect. These are people who matter; people who create things, people who advance knowledge. These are the people we really remember—yes, we do remember some war mongers, and things like that—but actually, in the positive sense.

Zepp-LaRouche: Unfortunately, we are coming up on time, but I want to just tell you that what impressed me the most about the Chinese way is when you have a President, Xi Jinping, who wants to have as a goal of society, to have a culturally advanced society, where the spirit of science, and art, and aesthetic education is affecting the whole society. That is, in a certain sense, the ideal of the German Classical movement, of Humboldt, of Schiller. And therefore, I really would like to invite you to come to Germany, and we should talk to the Germans more in the way you just said.

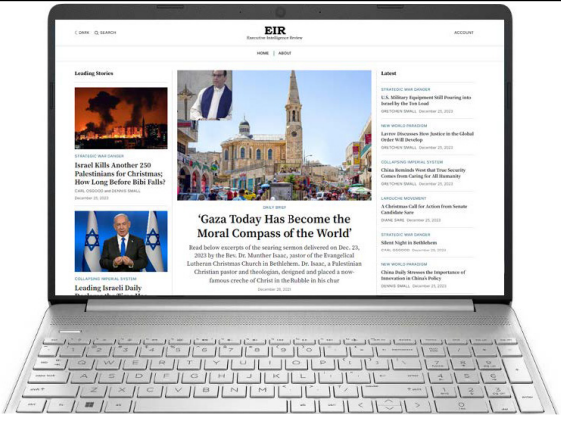
But unfortunately, I have to come to an end. I just want to give you the last word. Do you have anything else you would like to say?

Tangen: Yeah, I agree with that. I didn't want to be cynical. I just worry that the United States is not in a position where it wants to create peace in the world, to lead by example. But it doesn't mean that *we* give up on it. We express the ideas, and we back candidates who bring hope. And that's all we can do. As they say, for evil to triumph, all that is necessary is for good people to do nothing.

So, let's do so.

Zepp-LaRouche: Thank you very much in that spirit, and I hope to continue this discussion sometime soon. Thank you so much.

Tangen: Thank you.



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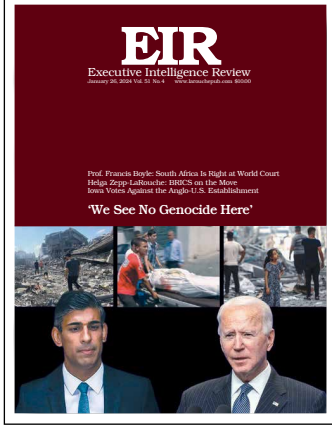

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