



Jeffrey Sachs: The War in Ukraine and the Missing Context & Perspective

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza and today I'll be talking to Professor Jeffrey Sachs about the war in Ukraine. Jeffrey Sachs serves as a director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, where he holds the title of university professor, the university's highest academic rank. Jeffrey Sachs is also a world renowned economist, bestselling author, innovative educator and a global leader in sustainable development. Jeffrey is also known for his work in advising governments worldwide on economic reforms as well as working with international agencies on debt, poverty reduction and disease control. Jeffrey Sachs, thank you so much for your time today.

Jeffrey Sachs (JS): Great to be with you, my pleasure.

ZR: Before we get into the war in Ukraine, I would like to start with some context and examine why Russian integration into the political and economic realm of the West failed. Many former foes of the US, for example, Japan, Vietnam, Germany, were either integrated economically or politically or both. You have a unique insight as you advised the economic teams of the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and even Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma in the past. Could you provide some context to why the West failed to integrate Russia or vice versa?

JS: Well, I think the US wanted Russia to integrate in a way that was subservient to US power, and Russia wanted to integrate as an independent nation that was itself a geopolitical power. And this is really the clash. The United States believes itself to be the unipolar superpower, the unique superpower of the world. Countries that disagree with that, most importantly China and Russia, become perceived by the US as anti-American rather than pro multipolarity. And so this is really the fundamental difference. Of course, the US mindset transcended the events of the late eighties or early nineties. The whole Cold War was viewed

as confrontation with Russia. And I would add that Britain's hatred of Russia goes back centuries for a lot of reasons. And so Britain was already rabidly russophobic in the 19th century. And a lot of what we see in the rhetoric and in the British media today is a kind of replay of the Crimean war drum beats that occurred in the middle of the 19th century. You would say it's almost humorous if it weren't so tragic and deadly. But a lot of the same points and rhetoric and ugliness that one sees in the comment pages even of what I think of as sophisticated media like the Financial Times, is pretty simplistic and ugly and very russophobic.

ZR: You were tasked to implement economic reforms in the former Soviet Union as well as Russia during the nineties, what happened there when you asked for economic assistance in ensuring that these market reforms take place? How was the response of Washington back then?

JS: Well, just to be clear, I wasn't tasked with implementing anything. You know, I'm an adviser. I had no power role. But they saw me as possibly a channel to Western finance. And I told them that I would try to be a channel to Western finance. Why? Because I believe that when a country is in financial trouble, the international financial system should help that country to get out of trouble. Both as a basic matter of morality and ethics and as a win-win proposition for global cooperation. My guru in this is John Maynard Keynes, who wrote famously, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, in 1919. And his argument was that the harsh Versailles settlement with Germany would lead to future disaster. It's one of the prophetic books of the 20th century. When I was both a student and practitioner of finance, I took my cue from John Maynard Keynes: Don't be nasty to the defeated power or to the country that is down on its luck. Things that go around, come around, go around. And if it's bad one day for somebody, it could be bad for you the next. It's better to be co-operative. I tried in the early 1990s to mobilize Western financial support for Gorbachev's reforms-complete failure. Then President Yeltsin's team asked me. Similarly, I was a complete failure in mobilizing support. Basically not on economic argument grounds, my economics is good. It was good at the time. What I had recommended for Poland in financial terms was adopted because Poland was on our side and I recommended debt relief. I recommended emergency stabilization funding, and it worked. It wasn't just the theory, it worked. So when I recommended the same thing with Russia, I thought, Well, I've already shown that these ideas make sense and they do make sense. But Washington rejected them not because of the economic debate which it was sometimes portrayed, but because of the geopolitics. Which is, yes, Poland is on our side, of course, we will help, but they are on the other side. So of course we won't help. And it is almost as simple as that.

ZR: Let us move to a fundamental debate that has failed in the German corporate media regarding Ukraine. We have also interviewed a wide range of experts from Noam Chomsky, Chris Hedges, Vijay Prashad, Peter Kuznick on this matter, so it would be interesting to get

your view as well. Denazification and Demilitarization were reasons given by the Russian state to justify its war in Ukraine. Do you think these reasons had any legitimacy?

JS: Look, the core of this is the clash between the United States and Russia. That clash goes back to 1992 when the neoconservatives took over American foreign policy. This was originally Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz in the administration of George W Bush senior. But there are a lot of neocons around. Madeleine Albright was a neoconservative. Hillary Clinton was a neoconservative. Victoria Nuland, who was assistant secretary of state during the Maidan in 2014, is now the undersecretary of state for political affairs. She's a neoconservative. And so what happened was the US foreign policy, starting in 1992, aimed for US dominance, sometimes called full spectrum dominance. That in every region of the world the US should be able to blow away -figuratively I hope it is- its opponents and antagonists, and to have geopolitical dominance through military, financial, economic, technological and other means. And in 1992, that was the view, and it looked like: Who could rival us?! Russia's down on its knees. China is a poor rural country. Well, of course, it was never realistic. The world is never dominated by one country in all of history, though there have been empires, of course, that are powerful. But there's always going to be rivalry and always multipolarity in some sense. And that's especially true in the 21st century. Russia did not buckle under the US view. China even less so. I would say both of them say, No, we don't want a US led unipolar world. Now, the US began to implement this in the 1990s with NATO enlargement. Anyone that knows the archival record knows that it wasn't just a loose verbiage, but it was a decided policy of Germany and the United States to promise to Gorbachev: No NATO enlargement to the east. And not just to the east, the GDR, but to the east. And so a lot of what's said right now is just typical US government spin. But the archival record is actually very extensive. Then in the mid 1990s, Clinton started saying the same to Yeltsin. No, no, we're going to have a partnership system. We're not going to have NATO enlargement. But then Madeleine Albright pushed the neocon agenda; we're expanding NATO. And it created a big division inside the US because there are some normal, non neocons inside the US, and I'm one of them and said: No, NATO enlargement is a bad idea. And Bill Perry, who was the secretary of defense of Clinton, came close to resigning over this issue. George Kennan, who was our greatest statesman, scholar of the 20th century vis-a-vis Russia, said this is the new Cold War. It was back in 1997 that he said that. Then many events followed. The US led alliance bombed Belgrade in 1999, broke Serbia apart deliberately as part of its geopolitics and as per neocon ideas went to war with all of Russia's allies in the Middle East, overthrowing Saddam Hussein, overthrowing Gadhafi, trying to overthrow Assad. So this was a very expansionist period of the US; trillions of dollars spent on expansionist wars. And in 2014, the US was part of the successful effort to overthrow Yanukovich. This is absolutely clear, although we don't know every bit. We know a lot and I know a lot from my own knowledge about these events. The US played a role in overthrowing a president of Ukraine who was basically pro-Russian, but basically trying to keep some kind of stable equilibrium between the two sides through neutrality of Ukraine: Yes, we want the West. Yes, we want to keep relations with Russia. Very fragile, because the

US is pushing NATO enlargement and Russia is saying, Hell no. And this is what was happening. Yanukovich was overthrown and a western Ukraine, highly nationalist government was brought into power. And at that moment Putin did what he warned George Bush Junior he would do at the Bucharest summit in 2008. Putin said to George Bush: You expand NATO, we take Crimea back. Don't do it. But the US doesn't listen. So we went to this direct clash; war in the Donbas. And then, you know, sad to say, the Minsk Agreements were breached. Germany and France were to be the guarantors. But I don't know if Mrs. Merkel, Chancellor Merkel, is speaking exposed as an excuse or telling what she thought at the time, but it's dreadful. What we do know is that the Ukrainians walked away from the Minsk Agreements- after signing. My friends tell me: Jeff, how could you ever expect us to honor that? That's trash. I say: Yes, you have an agreement. Oh, an agreement. And we're supposed to take this with a straight face. And Germany was a solemn guarantor. Uninterested. In the meantime, the US poured in billions of dollars of armaments. By the end of 2021, Putin said to Biden: Look, here are the red lines and the number one red line is NATO enlargement- by far, by the way. And the US said: We're not going to talk about that. Our door is open. Which is a ridiculous idea. We're not talking about trade. We're talking about military alliances. What's this open door of military alliances in history that you don't care who your neighbors are allied with, where the military bases are, what the weapons are? This is crazy rhetoric, I'm sorry to say, so provocative and dangerous. The invasion started in February 2022 but the war, everyone should understand, started in February 2014. The war did not start in February 2022 and this is not the West reacting. The United States started in 1992 to break the agreements that it had given to Gorbachev. Why? Because they felt they could. That's it.

ZR: For me it is quite clear that you are providing understanding and the role that the West played. But in German media and political discourse, this would be quickly labeled as justifying the war or spreading Russian propaganda. Why do you think it is so difficult for Western media outlets and politicians to differentiate between understanding the role we played in this conflict that could perhaps help us learn from our mistakes and build a better foreign policy going forward versus justifying Russia's actions?

JS: We need diplomats. Unfortunately, we don't have diplomats in Germany and in the United States right now because the foreign minister of Germany and the secretary of state of the United States are not engaging in diplomacy. They're engaging in war. This is different. Diplomacy is to sit down and talk to your counterpart, to understand these issues. I was invited to give a talk to the G20 foreign ministers last year online, when they were meeting in Bali. I said to them, You are the diplomats, meet with each other. I don't think that foreign minister Baerbock met with foreign minister Lavrov, though they were in the same room. We need diplomacy. There is no way out of this mess without diplomacy. And if the diplomats want to be the ministers of war, then we should have those who want to be diplomats engaging in diplomacy. And we need that dialog. I am in everyday dialog with multiple sides. I hear from the Russian point of view, I hear from Turkey as a mediator. I hear from

Ukrainians. I hear from Western governments. I hear from the United States. I hear from Brazil, China, and others. There are important views that need to be explained. And we're not getting that at all. And the media has forgotten its role. The media's role is not to quote unnamed senior officials. That is not the role of the media. The media's role is to scrutinize, to express doubt, to ask hard questions, to challenge authority, because it's not surprising that at war our governments tell tales. They want to present narratives. They want to hide facts. They want to hide hard truths. But the media, what is the media for? Is it just for advertising revenues? Is it just for having the ability to have a cup of coffee with the senior government official? Or is it to scrutinize and express doubt? Where is the German media on Nord Stream, for example? Here a major piece of infrastructure was blown up- I believe, most likely by the United States or the UK, but on the western side: Quiet, silence. When I said this on American television, I was immediately cut off. By the way, all of the circumstantial evidence points in that way. Sweden- incredibly- says, Okay, we've investigated, but we're not going to share the results of our investigation with Germany. Members of the Bundestag ask, We want to know the facts. The German government says, No, you cannot know the facts. This is a security issue. We're supposed to take this?! We call ourselves democracies?! And this is the level of discourse?! And I mean, look, there's a lot of media and you're part of it and it's great. We're having a wonderful open discussion and points of view that are very hard to express actually in the mainstream. But this mainstream media has lost its way. I can't tell you how disappointed I am every day in The New York Times. Because I grew up with The New York Times and I used to read it for the Pentagon Papers,, for telling the lies about Vietnam, exposing them for telling the lies of the Nixon administration. Now all it is is a mouthpiece for the government. You don't get anything different. I can't even publish an op-ed on sites that I was probably the main contributor in many cases. Because the mainstream media lost their sense of their role, completely. It's absolutely troubling and strange.

ZR: I want to go through some counter arguments with you that are usually made. For example, the first part, NATO was also stationed in Poland and Latvia that have borders with Russia, and they have coexisted somewhat peacefully. NATO was not planning an intervention. And the second counter argument that is made is, Ukraine is an independent and sovereign state and has a right to make military deals with anyone it pleases, including NATO. How would you respond to these two arguments?

JS: I would say that, first of all, NATO is often an aggressive force, almost an expeditionary force of US foreign policy. Bombing Belgrade in 1999 was completely unjustified. The actions that NATO took in Libya, in my opinion, completely unjustified and far exceeded the UN mandate. And the United States foreign policy is based on regime change. So how much trust can there be, especially after events like the Maidan? The United States is not a peace loving country. It is a power seeking country. Not surprisingly perhaps, I'm told by smart cynics, Well, isn't that always the case? And maybe it is. But then let's not kid ourselves with the rhetoric that is used. The United States has overthrown dozens of governments. It

definitely contributed to the overthrow of Yanukovich. It definitely tried to overthrow al-Assad in Syria and was a major provocation of the war there. And I know this from the inside, not just from the outside. So I just want to be clear that I know from top people involved in these issues, what I'm discussing right now. So this is one thing, this idea of this peace loving da da da da da da is not what a military alliance is. This is a military alliance that serves military and geopolitical purposes, and it should show restraint. In my opinion, by the way, just to put it clearly, when the Warsaw Pact was disbanded by Gorbachev, I think NATO should have ended. That's my own view. We should have gone to OSCE. We should have gone to a European security arrangement. But we did not, because the neocons in the United States said, Okay, now's really our chance. And I was at a conference recently in Eastern Europe where a NATO spokesman came in. It looked almost like a Star Wars event. He was in full uniform and there was a screen in the back and he talked about how NATO plays a vital role in the Black Sea region and it will be crucial for Eurasia- or something like that. I said, Oh my God, what is this? It's almost like a cartoon. I don't want to hear that. I was at an economics conference, by the way. I don't want to see NATO officials at an economics conference. So this is really an important point. And because this is a military alliance, it's not true that you just get to choose who you have your military alliances with. There's a concept called externalities, which is that your choice may have adverse consequences for the one next door. Should the US have a NATO base in the Sea of Azov? Well, Russia doesn't think so. By the way, I don't think so. I don't think it's prudent and I don't think it's smart of Ukraine to not recognize that it's in a delicate balancing act and should be prudent and careful. And I'm living and experiencing- well, I'm seeing the success of neutrality in many places. Let's just put it this way. And in my view, you should be careful in this world and you recognize that military alliances are dangerous because they lead to wars often. We should not have these military alliances. We should not be expanding military alliances in Asia to counter China. These are dangerous provocations. If you want really a historical analogy; it is maybe 1910. All these alliances were built, well, and then a trip wire was crossed in 1914 and the world was never the same again. Let's avoid that.

ZR: In December last year, there was a lot of voicing for diplomacy stated by French President Macron. Even President Biden, the German chancellor, for example, even spoke to Putin for an hour on the phone, reportedly. How is it that the tone has completely shifted since the start of the new year? To begin the new year NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg said and I'm quoting him here: " Weapons are- in fact- the way to peace." Now we're seeing all sorts of weapons from our vehicles, artillery, and patriot defense systems being committed to Ukraine. And the UK has now upped the ante by sending the Challenger two battle tanks. All eyes are on Berlin now. All the pressure is on Berlin. Tomorrow, they're meeting. All the defense ministers are meeting at the Ramstein Air Base, and it is expected that Germany will at some point capitulate to all this pressure and send also battle tanks, known as the Leopard 2. What advice would you give to leaders of this conference if you were participating as well? And do you think advanced offensive weapons could change the tide of war?

JS: The advice I would give to leaders, period, is: Sit down and start talking. Most importantly, President Biden and President Putin. And how can we have an approach that does not also include negotiations? This is mind boggling. You see, it's quite interesting. Our top general in the United States, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Mark Milley, said, Now is the time to negotiate. The next day, Victoria Nuland, who is our neocon in chief in the State Department, said, No, no negotiations. The whole idea is to bat down at all times any possibility of discussion. The only thing that's allowed in the narrative is war. Negotiations, not even to be tried. So aside from all the weapons systems and whatever one thinks, open negotiations. And understand, by the way, and it's quite clear, Chancellor Scholz said to Putin, at the beginning of all of this: NATO won't enlarge on my watch. He said, Yes, you're chancellor of Germany, what about NATO itself? How long are you going to be there? And the point is very simple. This is, first of all, a US led alliance. This is a 30 year US project to expand NATO. President Biden's only words on this are: The door is open. The United States repeats at every occasion that Ukraine will become a member of NATO. What the Europeans could say clearly, to Biden is: Come on, you have put us in a terrible bind. You are crushing our industry, you're bringing us closer to war. And all over something that should not have happened at all, which was this intention to expand NATO. Because when that was put on the table in 2008, Germany was against it. France was against it. I know. I talked to the leaders then. But they don't say it publicly. They don't admit the truth. And then the media obscures all of this history. So my recommendation is: Open negotiations.

ZR: To my last question. According to the United Nations, 7000 civilians have been killed since the war started, including 433 children. Most recently, 30 to 40 civilians were killed when a Russian missile hit a high story building in the city of Dnipro. Given that Russia and even Ukraine are not signatory of the International Criminal Court, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock recently called for a special tribunal to be set up at The Hague that should pursue Russian leadership for its crimes in Ukraine. So this is a two part question. A) Should the West play the role of moral authority? And B) Will a special tribunal assist in resolving the conflict and bring justice?

JS: No and no. This is just provocation. Let's end this war. Let's understand that both sides are party to this war, that there were tremendous Western provocations, that there are terrible outcomes in wars- but committed by both sides- that there is propaganda up the wazoo, as we would say, and hype and so forth. So let's have serious negotiations. And frankly, let's have some diplomacy from Germany. Diplomacy, that means diplomacy to sit down with counterparts in Russia, to talk, to learn, to understand, to find a path to peace.

ZR: Jeffrey Sachs, bestselling author and well-known economist, thank you so much for your time today.

JS: Great to be with you. I appreciate it.

ZR: [00:29:59] And thank you guys for tuning in today. Please join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. Youtube is shadow banning our content, our information will not be able to reach you if you do not make this transition. And also to donate, even if it's just \$1 via PayPal or Patreon, your contribution will help us to continue our independent journalism going forward. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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