



Prof. Mearsheimer – The War in Ukraine, Israel's Genocide, Trump's tariffs and China

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Glenn Greenwald (GG): Good evening, it's Friday, April 4th. Welcome to a new episode of System Update, our live nightly show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. Eastern, exclusively here on Rumble, the free speech alternative to YouTube. Whatever else one might wanna say about the first two and a half months of the Trump administration, there's no denying that there is essentially no such thing as a slow news day. Virtually every day brings some major new event, often multiple ones in the realms of foreign policy, wars, economic policy, free speech, and constitutional and civil liberties issues. Even for a show like ours that is on every night – or every night-ish – it is impossible to cover everything that deserves coverage. With that difficulty in mind, we are thrilled to have one of the most knowledgeable and clear-thinking voices anywhere in our political discourse. He is Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Chicago, John Mearsheimer. Professor Mearshimer really doesn't need an introduction, especially for viewers of our show who have seen him on many times over the past several years and is always one of our most popular, and I would say, enlightening guests as well. We have a whole range of topics to cover this evening, including the ongoing Israeli destruction of Gaza, the decision by President Trump to restart President Biden's bombing campaign in Yemen, the broader threats of Middle East war, what is going on in the war in Ukraine, remember that, as well as the terror policies that President Trump has announced and what it might mean specifically geopolitically for the U.S.-China relations. Professor Mearsheimer is also the author of the groundbreaking book *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, as well the highly influential 2014 article in *The Journal of Foreign Affairs*, entitled *The Crisis in Ukraine is the Fault of the West*. So we are very excited to welcome him. We will have him in just a second and as I said, he's one of our most popular and enlightening guests. And he will be here very shortly.

Before we get to all that, we have a few programming notes: first of all, we are encouraging our viewers to download the Rumble app. If you do so, it works both on your Smart TV and your telephone. If you download it and you activate notifications – which we hope you will – it means you can follow all the programs you most like to watch on this platform, and once

they begin live on Rumble you will be notified by link or text, however you want. You just click on the link and begin watching – it really helps the live viewing numbers of your program and therefore the free speech cause of Rumble. As another reminder, System Update is also available in podcast form – you can listen to every episode 12 hours after the first broadcast live here on Rumble on Spotify, Apple and all the major podcasting platforms. If you rate, review, and follow our show, it really helps spread the visibility of our program. For now, welcome to a new episode of System Update, starting right after this break.

All right, we previewed the discussion that we're about to have with Professor John Mearsheimer, so I just want to get right into that. Professor Mearshimer, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. It's always great to see you.

John Mearsheimer (JM): [00:17:33] Great to be here, Glenn.

GG: You know, I actually thought about this morning and this afternoon, starting by talking to you about the free speech crisis and the kind of assaults on academic freedom taking place in American academia. And I, of course, want to get to that with you. But I realized afterwards, it's almost impossible not to begin with the ongoing atrocities in Gaza because the scale of it, the horror of it, the fact that the United States is directly responsible for it, I think really requires that it be the first topic that we talk about. So I guess my question is to you – and we've talked about before – what you think the Israeli motives might be in essentially destroying all of Gaza, destroying civilian life in all of Gaza. To me, it seems like there's no doubt any longer what their intentions are. They're saying it. There's really only really one possibility. I'm just interested in your view of what that is.

JM: Yeah, I think there is only one possible goal here, given what they're doing, and that is to ethnically cleanse Gaza. And what they are trying to do is make Gaza unlivable. And that, in their story, will force the Palestinians to leave. But other than that, I can't see what possible motive they would have for continuing this offensive.

GG: You know, I've seen the sentiment around a lot. I've heard it from people I like and trust and am colleagues with and friends. And I certainly feel it the same way. It's like, at some point, you just almost feel like you're out of words, out of horror and disgust and rage to express the more you see. And I do think it's gotten worse in terms of the resumption. You could probably compare it to the early couple months where there was just indiscriminate bombing and huge numbers of people killed. We're kind of back to that – but on some level, even worse when you add in the purposeful blockading of any food getting in, the use of mass starvation as a form of collective punishment and driving people out, forcing them between starving to death or leaving and giving that land of theirs to the Israelis. How do you compare what we're seeing in Gaza to other atrocities and war crimes and the like that we've seen over the last several decades?

JM: Well, I think this is a genocide, and I would put it in the same category as what happened in Rwanda, what happened in Cambodia, and what happened in World War II with

the Nazi Holocaust. I mean, the basic goal here is to kill a huge number of people in the Palestinian population, and that I think easily qualifies as a genocide. And in fact, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both done lengthy reports that lay out the case for genocide, and I find those cases compelling. So I think this is a lot like those other cases.

GG: I know a lot of people, even people who might be uneasy or even critical of what the Israelis are doing in Gaza, nonetheless, have a very kind of visceral, almost primal opposition to applying the word genocide to what the Israelis are doing in Gaza. And they may say things like, look, if their goal were to just wipe them all out and eradicate them, they have the weaponry to do so and they have not done that yet. And I guess some people at the same time say, does it really matter if this is called a genocide? I know you've used that word before, you just used it again. What is your understanding of exactly what a genocide is? How do we recognize that? And why does it apply? I guess why is it important to use that term in this case?

JM: Well, there's a clear-cut definition in international law, which was by and large established as a result of the Nazi genocide in World War II. And it involves focusing on killing a large portion of a particular population. And that population could be based on ethnicity or religion or what have you. but the point is that what you're aiming to do is kill a huge chunk of a particular population. Now, that can happen rapidly, it can happen slowly, but does that really matter? If you were to kill three million people in a particular group over five years, would that be any different than killing those people over five months? I think the answer is no. And I think you therefore really can't compare genocides with one another, the same way you can't compare apartheid in one system with apartheid in another system.

Over the years, many Israelis have argued to me that Israel is not an apartheid state because it's different from South Africa. But the point is comparing Israel to South Africa doesn't deal with the question of whether or not Israel is an apartheid state. You have a general definition of what an apartheid state is. And then you have to ask yourself the question, does South Africa and does Israel fit with that category of apartheid? And the same thing is true with a genocide. There's no question that there are fundamental differences and, I would note, fundamental similarities between the Nazi holocaust and what's going on in Gaza. But the fact is that there are also fundamental differences. But if you look at the definition of genocide, you can categorize what's happening in Gaza as a genocide. And as I said, if you're looking at what Human Rights Watch and what Amnesty International have done on this count, they lay it out that this is genocide.

GG: One of the things that is so ironic – I guess, you can use a sort of lighter word than is merited, about what is happening – is that so much of the international law and the conventions that emerge, including the Geneva Conventions, the new Geneva Conventions that emerged after World War II were specifically designed to prevent things like the Holocaust from happening again. And one of the prohibitions that the world agreed to was a prohibition on collective punishment. The Nazis would go to France, and if there was somebody in the resistance in a certain town, they would say turn them all over, we're going

to kill 20,000 of the people in the town without respect to whether they actually did anything. It's collective punishment. We're gonna punish this town if it produces somebody who was working against us or has in some way taken up arms against us. And there's a war crime prohibition on collective punishment among a whole, using food as a weapon of war and mass starvation and the like, all the things the Israelis are doing. And I kind of get the sense – and maybe this is actually a pervasive propagandistic success – that when people talk about, say, the Nuremberg Trials or war crimes or even the phrase "Never Again", they seem to think that what it means is these are principles to protect Jews and only Jews and not the rest of humanity, and therefore you cannot have a genocide perpetrated by Jews. Only against them. Or you can't have collective punishment and war crimes perpetrated by Jews – only against them. Do you think that is a kind of common ethos in the West?

JM: I think deep down inside most Jews do believe that, that the word genocide cannot be applied to anyone other than the Nazis and what happened between 1941 and 1945. But Glenn, let me say a word about collective punishment and use my discussion of that term to distinguish between how I think the genocide against the Jews evolved and how this genocide in Gaza evolved. I don't think collective punishment –

GG: Just to be clear, when I was talking about collective punishment, I wasn't necessarily using it as how the Holocaust evolved. There was a lot of collective punishment there, but even, like I said, in places like Nazi-occupied France against the French resistance and the like, it was used there. But I'm definitely interested – I just wanted to be clear about what I was saying – but definitely I'd like to hear what you have to say with this distinction.

JM: Okay. I think with regard to the Nazi Holocaust, from the get-go, the aim of collective punishment was not at play. The aim was to annihilate all of European Jewry, or at least that portion of European Jewry that the Nazis could capture. So it wasn't collective punishment at all. I think the way the genocide in Gaza has evolved is different. I think after October 7th, the Israelis concluded that if they really punished the civilian population in Gaza, that that would cause that population to leave. So I don't think the initial goal was to murder huge numbers of Palestinians. It was definitely to inflict massive punishment on the Palestinian population and to make the place unlivable. But what happened is that the Palestinians didn't leave. And the Israelis, therefore, had to constantly up the ante, which is another way of saying they had to consistently up the bombing campaign. And the end result is that over time, I believed it morphed into a genocide. As I said at the time, I didn't think in the fall of 2023 that it was a genocide, but by late 2023, given that the Israelis had been unable to drive the Palestinians out and were continuing to punish the population and were increasingly frustrated and therefore increasingly ramping up the punishment, it morphed into a genocide. And of course, it's just gotten worse and worse over time.

One would have thought that once the ceasefire was in place – this was the day before President Trump was inaugurated, January 19th of this year – that we had put an end to the genocide and we would then just have to deal with the suffering in Gaza and hopefully ameliorate that to the point where fewer people would die than we thought would happen if

the genocide continued. But then Trump began to talk about what his view was of Gaza, and he basically gave the Israelis the green light to start the campaign of genocide all over again. And that, of course, is what's happened. And the Trump administration has said hardly anything about what the Israelis are doing. And the media and leading politicians in the West have said hardly anything. So the Israelis, they're pretty much free to do anything they want to the Palestinians and hardly anyone, except for a handful of people like you and I will stand up and say that this is fundamentally wrong and has to stop.

GG: One of the things I had discussed with you several times, and I think we haven't had you on since the November election, although if we did, we certainly haven't have you on since the inauguration, since the Trump presidency began – we talked several times during 2024 about what you thought might be the likely impact of Trump's election on these wars in the Middle East. And I think there was a sense that we know for sure what will happen if Joe Biden wins or Kamala Harris wins, which is a continuation of the status quo. They made no efforts for a ceasefire, you know, occasionally made some noises about concerns for humanitarian ends, but really never used their leverage in any real way to back that up. But the issue of Trump was always, well, you really don't know what you're going to get. I mean, he talks a lot about how he prides himself on being the first American president not to involve the US in a new war. He obviously was the one who facilitated that ceasefire and seemed to take a lot of pride in it. And yet, now he's in office and he restarts Joe Biden's bombing campaign in Yemen, which I want to talk about, which you could count as a new war, a continued and escalated war. And then clearly he gave the green light to the Israelis, not just to unravel his ceasefire, but to go all in on whatever they wanted to do. What do you make of the expectations that you had of the Trump administration and throughout 2024 versus the reality that we're now seeing?

JM: I thought there was some chance that he would try to shut down the war. This is before he came into office. And I thought that in large part because he made much of the fact that he intended to be the president for peace, that he was not a warmonger and that he is going to shut the war in Europe, shut down war in the Middle East. And then, of course, he forced Netanyahu to accept the ceasefire, which was initiated the day before Trump was inaugurated, January 20th of this year. And that gave one hope, because the cease fire had three stages. But the second stage looked like it would really put an end to the conflict, that the Israelis would leave Gaza, and you'd have a ceasefire that would last for a long time. But of course, the Israelis refused to go to the second stage of the ceasefire. The Trump administration put no pressure on the Israelis. And indeed, the Trump administration blamed Hamas for the fact that they had not gone into the second state. And that, of course, was not true. But anyway, Trump has disappointed us, and he's no different than Genocide Joe was.

GG: You know, I think that – and again, we saw this several times in the first term starting in 2017 – obviously Trump's not a pacifist. I mean, he escalated bombing campaigns he inherited from Obama in the way he said he would against ISIS and Syria and Iraq, et cetera, but you know, you really didn't see this kind of militarism expressed. Now he's back in, he's utterly unconstrained, at least in his mind, I was just reading today, some Republicans in the

White House saying basically in response to all this uproar about the collapsing stock market or the declining stock market that he just doesn't care. He doesn't care about negative reactions from the public, doesn't care about negative reactions from the media, he feels like he got a mandate, he's going to do what he wants and that's what he's setting out to do. And so, I guess, on one level, he seems to be in charge. It seems like he is determined to make sure that his will is carried out a lot more so than in the first term where I think there was a lot of sabotage, kind of undermining, around him. This time he seems to really have had a plan, or people with him did, to make sure that everything that happens is because he wants it to happen. So what do you think accounts for that change? Why did he get into office right away and start bombing Yemen and give the Israelis the green light to go wild, even wilder than they were before and now threatening Iran with some sort of annihilation if they don't give the kind of deal that he wants on nuclear weapons?

JM: Let me answer that, Glenn, by making a general point about Trump and then specifically answering your question. I think that in his first term, he was not a radical president. I think he pursued one radical policy, and that was that he drastically altered our policy toward China. He abandoned engagement with China, and he pursued containment. That was the one, I think, radical shift in policy, both foreign and domestic, that took place in his first term. And as many people have said, and as Trump himself has acknowledged, the Deep State basically boxed him in, much the way it boxed Obama in. When he came into office this time, I think because he had had four years to really think about it and think about how to deal with this issue, he came in with the thought in mind that he was going to get his way. And I think you see this, by the way, in the people that he has relied on to execute his policies. Elon Musk, for example, and Steve Witkoff. I think Musk is the key person, the key right-hand person for Trump on domestic policy. And Witkoff is the right-hand person on foreign policy. Neither one of these individuals is part of the Deep State. Neither one of these individuals is part of the Washington establishment. They're outsiders, they're Trump's buddies, they are the kind of people he can trust. He doesn't trust Marco Rubio and people of that sort. So what he did was he brought in his own team, and he set out to pursue a radical policy, both at the foreign level, foreign policy level, and at the domestic level. And if you just laundry list a lot of the policies, it becomes manifestly clear that that's the case.

First of all, with regard to tariffs. Secondly, with regards to the whole notion of conquering territory, like Greenland, the Panama Canal. Third with regard to transatlantic relations. Fourth with regard to relations with Russia. Then, if you switch down to the domestic level, his approach towards dealing with the judiciary, his approach toward dealing with the Deep State, his approach toward dealing with immigration, and his interest in wrecking universities. These are truly radical policies across the board. You didn't see this the first time around. But this time he's unleashed the dogs. And he has lieutenants –Witkoff and Musk – who are working with him in this regard. So, at a very general level, I would say you do not want to underestimate what a transformational president he intends to be. And given that he's just in the beginning of a four-year term, one can only wonder what this is all going to look like four years from now. So, that's my general point. My specific point is I don't understand what he's doing in the Middle East. I understand what is doing with regard to Ukraine. I don't

understand what's he doing with regards to the genocide. I don't understand what it's doing with the regard to the Houthis. And I don't understand what he is doing in regard to Iran, because these are all losing policies. He would have been much smarter to force Netanyahu to stick to the ceasefire, which would have meant no fight with the Houthis and he would have been much smarter to work out a deal with the Iranians. But getting involved in a shooting match with the Iranians and with the Houthis at the same time you're supporting a genocide does not make sense to me.

GG: Well, I suppose one might say that in order for it to make sense, one might go and read your 2007 book called *The Israel Lobby*, because I do think, at least for me, my big concern throughout the 2024 campaign and then the election was, and I had a very similar idea as you did, which is I thought the ceiling for Trump could be higher, but the kind of floor could be lower, whereas I just thought Kamala was going to be a disastrous continuation of how things were. And my concern was that one of his biggest donors was Miriam Adelson, and he said openly in the campaign you know, Sheldon and Miriam Edelson – Sheldon when he was alive – they were the people who came most to the White House, other than people who worked there. They were there the most. And every time they were there, they would ask for things for Israel, and I would always give it to them. And he kind of joked and said they would come back two weeks later and ask for more and I would say, come on guys, give me like a few weeks of breathing room. And he boasted that he gave them the Golan Heights, which is more than they even asked for. And he said during the campaign, we're going to "Make Israel Great Again", and we're going to "Make America Great Again". And then he also, as diverse as the cabinet is in many respects, the one litmus test that everybody had to pass in order to be appointed to any kind of significant position was indisputable, unbreakable support for Israel. And I'm just wondering whether you think this is coming from him himself or the influences around him.

JM: Well, I think, obviously the influences around him matter. You and I both know how powerful the lobby is. So there's no question that he's getting pressure there. I don't think Trump cares very much about the future of Israel. I think Trump is an America First president. I personally think what's going on here, I can't prove this, but my sense is that Trump is pursuing a radical agenda as I described. And there are a lot of very controversial issues at play on that agenda. And it does not make sense, given that agenda, for him to pick a fight with the lobby over Israel. It's just much easier to let the Israelis do what they want, make the lobby happy, not get any flack from people in the lobby, and if anything, create a situation where the lobby supports you, and it doesn't get in the way of pursuing your radical agenda. So I think that by and large, that explains what Trump is doing.

GG: Yeah, and it was interesting, the dynamic in the Republican primary, there were a lot of the hardcore people in the Israeli lobby, the sort of Neocons, who never trusted Trump, who didn't think he was reliable, and they were almost entirely aligned behind Ron DeSantis. I mean, you can go back and just look at who those people are, and you'll see that they really thought Ron DeSantis does care about Israel a lot more than Trump does. And then it was only once it became apparent that DeSantis had no chance of winning did they kind of start

squirming their way into Trump's world in order to make sure that he was on their side with those things and I guess that is the calculation. Maybe this is a little naive, but everyone sees what we're seeing, everyone sees the same videos we're seeing, everyone understands exactly what the Israelis are doing in Gaza. It's not just the United States that's been paying for and arming that war. There's also a lot of countries in Europe doing the same – providing logistical support as well, in the case of the UK, throughout the EU, lots of countries have given money and military aid to Israel. Is there any prospect at all that whatever you might call the international community outside of the United States could ever look at this, and through some kind of desire not to have this on their legacy and conscience that they just sat through this and kind that gave tacit approval to it or said nothing, might finally say enough is enough?

JM: [00:40:58] Well, I don't think you're going to see that in the West. If you look at the situation in Europe, it's every bit as depressing as the situation here in the United States. I mean, everybody talks about Western values, and we often get up on our moral high horse and talk about how wonderful we are in the West compared to everybody else. If anything, this support of the genocide across the West shows that that claim is a bankrupt one. I think there's much more criticism of Israel outside of the West. But that really doesn't resonate in any meaningful way. I think the one country that has gone to the greatest lengths to try and rein Israel in is South Africa. And South Africa has paid a price for that. The United States has been giving South Africa, especially since Trump came into office, all sorts of problems because the lobby and Israel have been putting pressure on Trump to make it clear to South Africa that it made a fundamental mistake pushing the case of genocide in Gaza in the International Court of Justice. And I think other countries look at what's happened to South Africa and it has a deterrent effect. They just say to themselves, do I really wanna get out front on this issue and criticize Israel? And here we're talking about countries outside the West, because as I said, countries inside the West are a hopeless cause. So you have this situation where the only people who are today helping the Palestinians in Gaza are the Houthis. The only reason the Houthis are attacking shipping in the Red Sea is because the Israelis have started the genocide up again. So if there is anybody who deserves credit for helping the Palestinians in Gaza, it's the Houthis.

GG: And look what they're getting as well, a massive bombing campaign aimed at them precisely for that reason. Let me just say, on that question of South Africa – I meant to say this earlier when you were talking about the differences with South Africa apartheid, but the similarities as well. I took my kids to South Africa last year. We spent a couple of weeks there. We met with some officials. There's a lot of amazing museums with all this residual signage and mementos of apartheid. And you go and you look at it and you immediately recognize a lot of similarities between how apartheid was carried out in South Africa and how it's being carried out in the West Bank. And by the way, there are a lot of senior Israeli officials who have long said it's apartheid, including the former head of the Mossad, just a month before October 7th, and lots of other Israeli officials too. And it's interesting because South Africa, even going back to Mandela and Bishop Tutu were among the most vocal supporters of the Palestinians and critics of Israel because they identify so much with that

cause. And of course that is the reason why they've taken the lead in filing these war crimes charges against Israel. Let me ask you about the Houthis. Did you want to say something about that?

JM: I just want to say, Glenn, it's very important to understand that a number of South African Jews who were involved in the anti-apartheid movement before apartheid collapsed have said that the apartheid system in Israel is worse than the apartheid system in South Africa was. Second, and this is a very important point, it's important to emphasize that Jews in the West, and this includes the United States, of course, have been incredibly vocal in their opposition to the genocide, and that's true in Europe as well. So it's important that we don't come away from this discussion thinking that it's Jews who are supporting the genocide because many Jews are opposed to the genocide. And of course the point I'm making here is if you go back to South Africa many Jews were opposed to apartheid in South Africa.

GG: Yeah, if you look at police arrests of pro-Palestinian protesters in Germany or protesters against the Israeli destruction of Gaza, so often they're German Jews. And you see the police coming and arresting German Jews because of their protesting against Israel, dragging them away all in the name of fighting anti-Semitism or protecting the Jews. It's incredibly perverse. Let me ask you about – when we get to the academia discussion, we're going to talk about that a little more, and I obviously always emphasize how many Jewish students participated in these protests, because that's deliberately obscured – let me ask you, though, before we get to that about Yemen and the bombing campaign there. The United States has been bombing Yemen pretty much for 20 years now, without stopping. The Obama administration worked with the Saudis for an all-out war against the Houthis, and then Trump, in his first term, bombed the Houthis. Biden bombed them all throughout 2024. They seem to be very resilient. It's amazing how you can watch a political movement like Trump supporters say, no more wars in the Middle East. And the minute – he posted a video today of about 20 people in Yemen standing around and a huge bomb went off and they were all killed. And there were all these Trump supporters saying, yeah, get the terrorists, get the terrorists! It's amazing how you get people to sign onto a war instantly just by saying, we're killing terrorists. What do you think are the dangers and geopolitical implications of what the Trump administration says is going to be a sustained ongoing bombing campaign?

JM: What's very important to emphasize, Glenn, and there was a big piece in The New York Times today that said that individuals from the Pentagon have been briefing Congress that the policy against the Houthis has not been succeeding. And we have been eating up huge amounts of ammunition. And this is undermining our position in East Asia where we're determined to contain the Chinese. So Trump can say that we're on the verge of winning a decisive victory against the Houthis. He can say it in public, and he'll convince his supporters of that, I'm sure. But the fact is that's not what's happening, and that's what people in the Pentagon are telling people in Congress behind closed doors. So we in the past were unable to defeat the Houthis. We are unable to defeat them now. And Trump can bomb them from NATO kingdom come and the end result is going to be the same. The Houthis are going to remain standing.

GG: Before we get to some of the domestic issues, I want to ask you about what you alluded to just a minute ago, which is the transatlantic relationship, NATO, the way in which the Trump officials are being quite open about their contempt for the Europeans – and even when we got a glimpse of what they were saying in private with that Signal chat, J.D. Vance in particular, but a lot of other people as well, were just spewing overt contempt at the Europeans. Trump has obviously harbored that for quite a long time, not just because he perceives, I think justly, that they don't pay their share of share, and the United States fights their wars and protects them while they have a healthy welfare state, but also because, the people in the European capitals tend to look down on Trump, look down the people around him and I think that's part of it. Do you think the last couple of months have ushered in a lasting permanent and fundamental transformation of the relationship between the US and Europe?

JM: Yes. I think that Trump is determined to significantly reduce the American commitment to NATO or the American commitment to Europe. I don't think he's going to eliminate it completely, but he wants to greatly reduce our presence in Europe. And he wants to let the Europeans take care of their own security or be principally responsible for taking care of their own security. And he wants the Europeans to deal with the Ukraine problem. And there are a variety of reasons for this, one of which he wants to pivot to Asia, as do most people in the national security establishment because they understand China is a bigger threat than Russia is. In fact, Russia's not much of a threat at all. So when you marry that strategic logic with the fact that Trump and his vice president, J.D. Vance, have contempt for the Europeans, and then you marry that with the tariffs that we've now put on the Europeans, it's hard to see how the NATO alliance is going to be anything more than a hollow shell four years from now.

GG: But do you think that is a valid premise, namely that NATO was important when it was necessary to contain the Soviet Union to protect Western Europe against incursions by Moscow? Obviously the Soviet Union hasn't been around for several decades now, and therefore the rationale for NATO and especially the need for the United States to pay far more than the Europeans do for their defense, that essentially the moment has come to stop these kind of handouts to the Europeans and force them to defend themselves – I mean, do you find that convincing or valid?

JM: Yes. The fact is, Glenn, I was in favor of pulling out of NATO and pulling out of Europe after the Cold War ended, and certainly after the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991. The purpose of the NATO Alliance was to contain the Soviet Union. I thought that made eminently good sense. During the Cold War, I fully supported it. But once the Soviet Union went away, what was the purpose of staying in Europe? I would have brought the forces home and I would've concentrated on what Barack Obama called "nation building at home". I think that was much more important. I think presidents have a principle responsibility to the American people. The idea that American leadership involves us policing the entire world, having forces in every nook and cranny of the planet and trying to run everybody's politics, I think is a prescription for disaster. So I would have gotten out of here.

GG: Yeah, it is ironic, too, that the national security establishment has been saying we need to pivot away from the Middle East to Europe. That goes all the way back to Obama and even before. That was Obama's foreign policy – we need to get out of the Middle East so we can focus on Asia. And obviously, the more wars you finance in the Middle East and the more wars you start in the Middle East, the more that goal is going to get impeded. And it was true for Obama as well.

JM: Yeah, that's exactly right, and I don't know if I already said this to you, Glenn, but if you look at the piece in The New York Times today that talks about the bombing campaign against the Houthis and how much ammunition that we're expending against the Houthis, the point was made in the article that it is hindering our efforts in the Pacific. It's hindering our efforts to deal with China. And it just tells you that from an American point of view, if you think that containing China is important – and the Biden administration and now the Trump administration both believe that is the case – then what you want to do is you want to reduce your footprint in the Middle East. You want to greatly reduce your footprint in Ukraine so that you can pivot fully to Asia. But in fact, what's happened is we've gotten deeper and deeper into the Middle East. Go back to our earlier conversation about starting a war with the Houthis and thinking about starting the war with Iran and backing the Israelis to the hilt. That's not getting out and diminishing our footprint in that region. In fact, if anything, it's just the opposite. And in Europe, I mean, Trump does want to get out but he's not been very successful so far and there's not a lot of evidence he's going to be successful anytime soon. And all of this is making it more difficult to deal with the Chinese.

GG: I just have a couple more topics I want to just cover with you in the time we have left. You mentioned earlier this kind of massive attack by the Trump administration on colleges and universities. You obviously care a great deal about academia. You work in academia, you have pretty much your adult life. It's something that I know you value. You've spent a lot of time here before talking about your ardent belief in free speech and how the attacks on protests are eroding it on campus, but now we have something in a different universe than what we saw in 2024. Not only these deportations of law-abiding legal immigrants in the United States for the crime of criticizing or protesting Israel, but also demands now that colleges and universities adopt this radically expansive definition of hate speech and antisemitism to include all sorts of criticism of Israel – including now outlawing something you said earlier which was comparing and contrasting Israeli actions with the acts of the Nazis. That is something that wherever this expanded definition of antisemitism is adopted, which essentially could get you expelled if you're a student, potentially fired if you're an academic. But then on top of that you have you know this whole kind of climate where speakers are being disinvited if they're going to talk about Gaza. You have Middle East Studies programs at Columbia being put under receivership at the demands of the Trump administration. At Harvard you have the Middle East studies director and associate director forced out because they're not pro-Israel enough. What do you make of all of this in terms of the future of free speech and academic freedom in American academia?

JM: Well, it's a disaster. There's just no question about it. I mean, not only is free speech being attacked here, but I think that the Trump administration is bent on badly damaging universities. It's bent on wrecking them. When you come into a university from the outside, the way the administration is doing, and you dictate how that university is run in all sorts of ways that are completely antithetical to the way our great universities have been run for a long, long time, you are threatening the existence of some of the most important institutions, not only in the United States, but on the planet. I have a number of friends who are not Americans, who come from foreign countries, who can't believe what we're doing, because they think that American universities are the most wonderful institutions in the world. This is not to say that our universities don't have problems, they do have problems and those problems need to be addressed. But nevertheless, to bring a wrecking ball in and take places like Harvard and Columbia and Princeton and Penn, and now they've added Brown to the list, and take the wrecking ball to them, in my mind is really just crazy. Why would anybody do this? But again, as I said to you before, Glenn, you do not want to underestimate how radical Trump is.

GG: Yeah, well, I mean, just to make the argument that I hear often from Trump supporters and defenders of all this, which is: yeah, universities used to be an epicenter of innovation and research and produce cures, it created the internet. Marc Andreessen, a prominent Trump supporter who obviously was instrumental in the creation of the internet with Netscape, told The New York Times that it was basically Al Gore, despite all the mockery he got, who really did lead the way in getting funding for key institutions to do the research that ultimately led to browsers and to the internet. That's been the history of American academia. The argument now is look, now they're just hotbeds of left-wing ideology and gender studies and sociology. And beyond that, they can do whatever they want, but not if they're getting federal funding. If they're getting federal funding, they have to kind of align themselves with the ideology of the federal government or they don't have to get federal funding and they can do what they want. What do you make of that?

JM: Look, I think there's no question that the political center of gravity in universities is too far to the left and needs to be pushed back towards the center. It's not as dire a situation, by any means, as critics on the right make out. But I would come at this whole issue from a different perspective. I wouldn't focus simply on the inventions that come out of universities. I would focus on the phenomenon of critical thinking. What universities do is they teach young people to think critically. Most young people have not figured out by the time they graduate from high school how to think critically, how to read a book and pick it apart and figure out what the author's argument is, and how to counter that argument. And what universities are really good at is teaching young people – whether you're in the hard sciences, the humanities, or in the social sciences – to think critically.

And free speech, of course, is inextricably bound up with critical thinking. You want people to be free to ask any questions that pop into their mind. You want them to be free to make arguments that disagree with arguments that you, the professor, are making. This is what the enterprise is all about. It's what makes it such a wonderful enterprise. It's why people from all

around the world are so interested in coming to universities. And what the Trump administration is doing, and of course, the Israel lobby is playing a key role here, is undermining this process by undermining critical thinking, by making it impossible to state your views on particular issues for fear that you'll be thrown in jail or you'll be dismissed from the position that you're in. So this is really a huge mistake on the part of the Trump administration, and it is a huge mistake on part of the Israel lobby. They should absolutely not be doing this. It is not in the interest of Israel supporters to pursue these kinds of policies on university and college campuses.

GG: I still remember the excitement I felt when I got to college and started exploring things and getting exposed to ideas that I had never previously known had existed. And not only that, but being encouraged, not just allowed, but encouraged to question every piety, every orthodoxy – I got in a lot of debates with professors who had been studying these issues for a long time and they encouraged that. You challenge them and you have these exchanges of ideas. And what amazes me about it is you have all these people who talk about preserving our nation and its kind of founding values. And you go back to the Enlightenment, which is essentially what gave birth to the American founding, the Enlightenment ideals and values. There was all this kind of, not just discussion about the supreme importance of free speech and free discourse, but also having a place where all taboos and all pieties get picked at and questioned – which is academia. And this has been central to the American founding and the American way of life for centuries and it's amazing to me to watch people who say that they are devoted to preserving the American life and the American values to be so supportive of this full frontal attack on this, all for the benefit of a foreign country.

JM: I agree with you. Just to come in from another perspective, Glenn, the fact is that we live in a remarkably complicated world, and it's hard to figure out what's going on. As you pointed out at the top of the show, it's harder to keep up with the news because there's a new issue every day on a new subject. And so we collectively are having lots of trouble just trying to make sense of the world that we operate in. What I think we do at universities is we teach critical thinking, which is what allows students who then become adults, young adults and older adults – we teach them to think critically about the world. We teach them how to try to make sense of the world so that they can navigate the world and make them better citizens. And I think this is just a very important function that we serve. And I think it, again, just is foolish in the extreme for the Trump administration and the Israel lobby to take the wrecking ball to that enterprise.

GG: Just a couple of last questions before I let you go, obviously what's on everybody's mind are these quite aggressive tariffs that Trump has imposed, but the two countries with the greatest economic power who are now close to a full scale trade war are the United States and China. That's one of the reasons why things kept kind of being tumultuous today because China announced their retaliatory tariffs against the United States. We saw some of this in the first Trump term, a kind of – you could call it a trade war, retaliatory tariffs, but nowhere near to this extent. What do you think are the implications, not necessarily economically, if you don't want to talk about that, but more geopolitically in terms of the US-China relationship?

JM: Yeah, I don't know what the economic implications are, to be honest. I'm not an economist.

GG: Right. That's why I pointed that out.

JM: Yeah. I really don't know what to make of it. I think geopolitically, it will exacerbate tensions with China. I think we have a security competition here, and we have competition that involves sophisticated or cutting-edge technologies. So there's military competition that's been set in play and this sophisticated technology competition that has been set in play. And then you add to that the tariff war, the trade war, and it's just going to make relations worse. I think with regard to the Europeans, it's going to make our relations with the Europeans worse. There's no question about that. And I think from Trump's point of view, that's not a bad thing, because it will help him work out a divorce with the Europeans, which I think he's interested in facilitating. But I don't think these tariffs are going to improve or help relations with the Europeans in any way. I think the most interesting question, from my point of view, and here we're talking about the geopolitical dimension, is what effect these tariffs have on the countries in East Asia that we would like to be on our side against China. If you look at the tariffs on Vietnam, for example, one would think that Vietnam is a country that the United States would want to woo away from China and have good relations with. But I think the tariffs are up around the 45% level with Vietnam. And there are all sorts of other countries, of course, in Asia, like the South Koreans, the Japanese and the Taiwanese who are going to feel these tariffs as well. So I worry that relations with our East Asian allies will be negatively affected by the tariffs.

GG: All right, last question. I think every time you've been on in the last three years, the war in Ukraine has taken up certainly a good part of our discussion, if not the bulk of it. Now it's kind of reduced to a footnote at the very end. I almost thought about letting you leave without asking you, but I would feel bad if we didn't talk about Ukraine at all, because it is, despite people not paying attention to it, an ongoing major war still. President Trump has seemed to take some meaningful steps to try to forge a kind of framework for a deal that could wind down that war, but so far there's not really much evidence that it's happening. I think he made some progress, but obviously the war is still ongoing. The Russians just had a new conscription order to, I think, call up another 130,000 or 140,000 like that, new troops. Where do you think things are with Ukraine and the possibility of Trump being able to facilitate an end to it?

JM: It doesn't look good. I mean, it may be the case that there's movement behind closed doors and we just don't know about it. But out in public, it does not look hopeful. The real problem here is that the Trump administration desperately wants a comprehensive ceasefire. We want to stop the shooting right now. And then we tell the Russians what we will do once we get the ceasefire – we will begin negotiations on the final peace settlement. The Russians have exactly the opposite view. Their view is we don't want a ceasefire now because we're in the driver's seat on the battlefield. And indeed, we expect to win big victories in the spring

and in the summer and further improve our situation on the battlefield. So a ceasefire now makes no sense for us. What we want is we want negotiations on what the final settlement looks like. And once you, the Americans, sign on to what the final settlement looks like – that's another way of saying once you, the Americans, agree to our principal demands, Moscow's principal demands, we will then agree to a ceasefire.

So you have two fundamentally different approaches to how to move forward. And the question you have to ask yourself is who's going to win in this tug of war? And the answer is the Russians are going to win because they're in the driver's seat. They're simply not going to agree to a comprehensive ceasefire. And they're going to continue militarily fighting on the battlefield. And they are going to continue marching forward. And I believe, Glenn, that at some point the Ukrainians and the Europeans, who are a huge obstacle to getting any kind of a peace agreement at this point will come to their senses and realize that prolonging this war makes no sense from Ukraine's point of view because they're just going to lose more territory and more Ukrainians are going to die. And hopefully then Trump will be able to move in and get some sort of negotiations going where we can finally put an end to this war either through a final peace agreement or by causing a frozen conflict.

GG: Alright Professor Mearsheimer, for those of you listening by the way, we're going to do a segment taking questions that we've gotten throughout the week from our Locals members, so stay tuned for that. It was great to see you. I really appreciate talking to you and it's always good to be able to cover so many topics like we did tonight and I hope to see again shortly.

JM: Likewise and thank you for having me on, Glenn.

GG: Absolutely.

JM: I thoroughly enjoyed it.

GG: Have a great evening!

END

Thank you for reading this transcript. Please don't forget to donate to support our independent and non-profit journalism:

BANKKONTO:

Kontoinhaber: acTVism München e.V.
Bank: GLS Bank
IBAN: DE89430609678224073600
BIC: GENODEM1GLS

PAYPAL:

E-Mail:
PayPal@acTVism.org

PATREON:

<https://www.patreon.com/acTVism>

BETTERPLACE:

Link: [Click here](#)