



Prof. Mearsheimer – Gaza Ceasefire, Ukraine War & Escalation with China

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Chicago, Professor John Mearsheimer, who is with us tonight. He's the author of numerous books and articles, which have been highly consequential, which we'll skip over. We've gone over those many times before. We want to get to as many things as possible with the limited time we have with him tonight. Professor, it's great to see you. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us tonight.

John Mearsheimer (JM): Glad to be here, Glenn, as always.

GG: Absolutely, we're glad to have you. So obviously I'm just gonna begin by asking you what your reaction is to this ceasefire agreement and what I guess President Trump and others are trying to pitch as not just a ceasefire agreement, but a longer term enduring agreement that will bring peace between the Israelis and Palestinians and according to President Trump peace in the broader Middle East. What's your general reaction to the agreement?

JM: I think so far, Glenn, we have a ceasefire that involves a hostage exchange. And I think that is a good thing because it's stopped the genocide. And also I think it's wonderful that these hostages have been released and these prisoners from Israeli jails have been released. So that's the positive side. But there are two big questions left. One is: is the ceasefire going to stick? And number two: are you ultimately going to move beyond a ceasefire and get a meaningful peace agreement? And let me take them in reverse order. There is virtually no chance that you're going to get a meaningful peace agreement here, because there's no agreement on a two-state solution, and there's no alternative to a two-state solution. So the idea that President Trump has produced a meaningful peace agreement that's going to fundamentally transform the Middle East is delusional. The interesting question is whether or not this ceasefire will stick or not. And I would note to you that we had a similar ceasefire and exchange of hostages between January 19th and March 18th of this year. You remember, President Trump was inaugurated on January 20th. And on the 19th, Steve Witkoff went to the Middle East – this is right before Trump moved into the White House – and Witkoff got Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire. It lasted for two [one] months. It lasted until March 18th.

And you had an exchange of hostages. In fact, 33 Israeli hostages and five Thai hostages were released during that period. But then the Israelis violated the ceasefire and restarted the genocide on March 18th. So the question we have to ask ourselves, looking at the present situation, is whether or not that's likely to happen again.

GG: So that's something, of course, we spent the last couple of weeks talking about and being concerned about – those parallels. And at the time in January, Prime Minister Netanyahu was saying in Hebrew in Israel to his, you know, far right cabinet members, but also in Israeli media that they had no intention of ever proceeding to phase two. They were very open about the fact that to them this was nothing more than a ceasefire agreement to get as many hostages back as they could, and that their intention was to do exactly what they ended up doing, which was start invading and bombing Gaza again whenever they decided that the moment was right for that. And President Trump did very little to try and prevent that. In fact, according to Netanyahu and others in Israel, that was the deal with Trump all along. I guess the difference, and maybe I'm just looking for one as a way of finding some optimism in what has been one of the most horrible things to have to observe in our lifetimes, is that this time President Trump has really kind of staked a claim to the fact that this is a peace deal, that this is a ceasefire that will end the war. He was asked about exactly what I just raised on Air Force One flying over there, which is look, Israeli's officials have been saying this is not the end of the war, and President Trump said it is the end of the war. And he repeated himself four times very emphatically. And I guess you could make the argument that if that did happen, if that were to happen, namely that the Israelis start attacking the Palestinians again in Gaza, that it would be so much of a blatant failure for President Trump given all the fanfare that he created around himself regarding this deal, that he would be very incentivized not to allow that to happen. What's your view of that theory?

JM: I think that's a plausible argument, Glenn. I think that's the most optimistic spin you can put on it. But I would make two points in response. One is you never want to underestimate how clever Prime Minister Netanyahu is at manipulating the system so that it looks like Hamas, not Israel, is driving the train. You can loathe Netanyahu, but one has to admit that he is a master politician. Second point I'd make is that if push comes to shove, if Netanyahu gets into a real fight with Trump on moving forward, who do you think is going to win? And I would bet a lot of money that Netanyahu will beat Trump because of the power of the lobby. I don't think that Trump would be willing, if push came to shove, to stand up to Netanyahu. So I think that eventually – I hope I'm wrong, I hope the story you tell is correct – but I think eventually the Israelis will break the ceasefire. My final point to you on this is that you don't want to underestimate how deeply committed Netanyahu is to defeating Hamas, to decisively defeating Hamas, and to ethnically cleansing Gaza. I mean, that's what's been going on for the past two years. The Israelis saw this war or this genocide as an opportunity to cleanse Gaza. And they failed. They failed to cleanse Gaza, and they failed to defeat Hamas decisively. Hamas is still there. So I think Netanyahu, for those two reasons, also has a powerful incentive to go back after Hamas and after the Palestinians more generally.

GG: And just to be clear, what I propounded in my question to you is a theory that I'm hoping is true, but don't by any means think is true. I think it's plausible as well. But I certainly understand all the obvious pitfalls here. One of which is, and I wanted to ask you about this is, you have this flank of Netanyahu's government, which to me is really just Netanyahu, the fact that they're more extremist or whatever is more theatrical than anything else. I suppose they are a little bit, but far more close to Netanyahu than far away, which is the Ben Gvir and Smotrich faction. And in the past, over the last couple of years, and even before that, any slight concessions that Netanyahu seemed ready to make or was forced to make to end the war, to have a ceasefire, would threaten to take down his whole government, which they have the ability to do. His government depends upon their participation in his coalition. And here you have what looks to be, as you said, at least the cessation of hostilities without achieving not just the stated aims of the war, which is disarming Hamas, but also the real aim of the war, which is cleansing all of Gaza of Palestinians or putting them in concentration camps so that the Israelis can take it for themselves. And you don't really hear very much disturbance from Ben Gvir and Smotrich and these other far right leaders, almost leading me to believe that once again Netanyahu is telling them, don't worry, these goals are still the goals we're going to achieve. Well, what do you think explains the fact that they seem okay with things so far?

JM: I think that there have to be private conversations where Netanyahu has assured them that he will start the genocide back up and that he will end up not only defeating Hamas but cleansing Gaza. There's another point to be added here, Glenn. I think that Netanyahu understood that Israel needs a timeout here, and it needed a timeout for two reasons. One is that the IDF, the Israeli military, was in terrible shape. You want to remember that the Israeli chief of staff, who was hand-picked by Netanyahu, was adamantly opposed to the recent offensive in Gaza City. He believes, the IDF chief of staff, that the army is exhausted. They're having a great deal of difficulty in getting reserves to report for duty. So given the state of the army and given the brutal fighting that would be involved in doing more cleansing in Gaza, I think there was a lot of pressure on Netanyahu to cease the war for the time being. And I think that that mattered a lot. The other thing is, Netanyahu has been taking a tremendous amount of heat from a large number of Israelis who are primarily concerned about the hostages. They wanted the hostages back. And by agreeing to this deal, not only does Netanyahu get a time-out in terms of his exhausted military, but he also gets the hostages back. And that issue is now off the table. So once he starts the genocide again for the purposes of cleansing Gaza, he'll be in better shape than before this ceasefire went into effect.

GG: Right. It reminds me a little bit of what happened with Iran as well, which is, they kind of stopped that war after a short period of time, relatively speaking, declared victory, when in reality the United States and Israel were desperate to end that war because they just didn't even have enough anti-ballistic missiles and other defensive equipment to stop the Iranian missiles that were pounding Israel. And in Trump's words, Israel got hit very hard. And it kind of gave them an excuse to say, okay, we won and now they're rebuilding all those defensive stockpiles and seem ready to lay the groundwork to attack Iran again, which I want to talk about in a second – but let me, you know, if you look at the pictures of Gaza,

which of course we have all seen and we're seeing even more now that the Gazans are at least for the moment freer than they were a couple of days ago with the bombardments and the military there, to show us what Gaza City looks like, to show us what used to be their homes look like. I mean, the Israelis engaged in a deliberate policy of absolute destruction, destroying as much of what stood in Gaza as they possibly could, so that you have two million people, give or take, whatever however many of the Israelis officially ended up killing, who are in a place that is basically absolutely uninhabitable in terms of any kind of civilian life. What's going to be done in terms of governability, in terms of rebuilding, and who is going to do it? I mean, how do you just leave two million people in a place filled with rubble?

JM: This is a great question. Let's just come at it by talking about what the political order is going to look like moving forward. In other words, who's going to govern Gaza? What the Palestinians want, and this of course includes Hamas, but not only Hamas, is the Palestinians want self-determination, which is another way of saying the Palestinians want to govern Gaza. But that's not going to happen. You're going to have this peace board headed up by Donald Trump, presumably including Tony Blair, that's basically going to be overall responsible for running Gaza. And then underneath it, you're going to have a bunch of Palestinian technocrats. But there's going to be no Palestinian political organization or political institution that runs Gaza. It's going to be run by the colonial powers. I don't like using the phrase "neocolonialism", but this looks like neocolonialism. It's the British and the Americans basically telling the Palestinians what their politics will look like. And then to the extent the Palestinians get back in the game, it's in the distant future, after the Palestinian Authority, which runs the West Bank, of course, is re-educated, it then will be in a position to administer or to govern the West Bank.

Now, the problem here is who's deciding that it's the Palestinian Authority that will run the West Bank? Is it the Palestinians themselves? No, it's the colonial powers. It's the British and the Americans. And furthermore, they say that the Palestinian Authority has to, in effect, be re-educated. It has to be taught how to run Gaza before it can assume responsibility for taking that task on. This is crazy, right? The Palestinian Authority is basically an institution that does whatever the Americans and the Israelis want. It's why the Palestinian Authority has no legitimacy among most Palestinians. The idea that you're going to re-educate or that you have any need to re-educate this group, and then you're going to put them in power a couple of years down the road, really cuts against the whole idea that the Palestinians in Gaza will determine their own future. But of course the way we have set this up is the Palestinians are not going to determine their own future, and this is going to lead to unending trouble.

GG: Just on that though, I mean, in general, when you have colonial powers or colonial administration, you need a force of colonial military power that subdues the population. And then you set up a colonial regime that you control, but lurking in the background is always the fact that you have superior military power so that if they don't submit to colonial rule, there's gonna be a heavy price to pay. How are the United States and Tony Blair going to administer Gaza without having any kind of armed agents there to enforce their will?

JM: They're going to have armed agents. It's called the International Stabilization Force. Right? And the International Stabilization Force is composed of armies from the Arab and Islamic world. And they're going to be responsible for maintaining order. They, of course, are not going to be in political control. Actually, Trump and Tony Blair and whoever else is at the top with those two individuals will be in charge of the political direction that Gaza takes. But with regard to your important question is to who will provide stability, it will be the Arab and Islamic forces. Now the problem here is that there have been no arrangements made to build that force. This is a very complicated issue. You have to build this and you have to build the Board of Peace around Donald Trump and Tony Blair and whoever else is there. And then you have to coordinate how the Board of Peace and the International Stabilization Force is going to work and how this relates to the Palestinians down below in the broader society. None of this has been worked out. But again, once it's worked out, it's still not going to work very well for two reasons. One is there's no Palestinian self-determination, and number two, the Israelis are going to be itching to exploit this situation so they can get back to ethnically cleansing Gaza.

GG: Well, I mean, I guess that's the other part of the question, which is in this incursion into Gaza City, there were numerous IDF soldiers who were killed in various ways. You see Hamas immediately emerge to try and reassert control over multiple places in Gaza. There's some factional warfare, an Israeli backed militia, but Hamas is very much still very much present and armed, at least to the extent that you need to be in order to control a place like Gaza. I mean, is there just going to be this immediately subdued force where the Palestinians just accept Qatari and Emirati and Jordanian troops under the control of Donald Trump running Gaza? I mean, it seems like the whole point of what this conflict has been about was that they're willing to fight anyone in order to maintain their right of self governance. Why would they look at this kind of newly constituted body any differently than they look at, say, the Israelis?

JM: The answer is they won't. I mean, your comments are right on the money. And Hamas has made it clear that they are willing to give up their arms, but only to some political authority dominated by the Palestinians. In other words, Hamas is not going to give its arms up to a political authority that's dominated by Donald Trump and Tony Blair. It's not going to give up its arms to this international stabilization force. It will only give up its arms in the context of some sort of Palestinian political entity. And this makes perfect sense. Hamas would be crazy to give up its arms to this International Stabilization Force which will be in cahoots with the Americans who are in cahoots with the Israelis. So this is just not going to work. They're not going to be able to disarm Hamas. And you want to understand that the Israeli Minister of Defense, Mr. Katz, has said that not only does Hamas have to give up all its arms, but it has to destroy the remaining tunnels. And it's quite clear that somewhat over 50% of the tunnels still remain intact. Hamas would be crazy to allow the Israelis or for them to allow anyone to destroy those tunnels and take away their arms and leave them vulnerable to the Israelis. So it's just not going to happen.

GG: You know, I think a lot of people today and over the past couple of days, while it became apparent that this is likely to happen, have a hard time understanding how to react. Because on the one hand you see Israelis who have been kept in Gaza in captivity for two years in very harrowing conditions, reuniting with their families, and any decent human being is happy to see that. And then you have, you know, two thousand or so Palestinians who've been kept in Israeli dungeons, many of them for many years, many of them for months, most of whom have never been charged with a crime. I consider them hostages as well. They've had no due process. And you're seeing them reunite with their families as well, and these are very moving scenes. You're happy that's happening, and you're also, as you said at the start, very happy that this genocide, at least for the moment, has stopped, that the people who are living in Gaza aren't going to be bombed in their tents and incinerated to death and watch their children's limbs blown off and all the other horrors that we've seen, at least for now. And it's hard on the one hand not to feel good about that. On the other hand, we've watched a genocide, like an actual genocide for the last two years, one that is unspeakable in terms of the depths of its horrors and criminality. And today you watch all these Western leaders go to Egypt and kind of commemorate, I guess what they would say they're commemorating is the end of this, but they were all participants in it, and there's obviously no movement at all to hold those responsible accountable in any way. And it's kind of hard to just swallow the fact that we just watched this happen and now we're all supposed to move on and kind of applaud the fact that the people doing it decided to stop for a while. How do you kind of react, I guess emotionally or intellectually, to this mixed bag of incentives?

JM: Well, when I watch President Trump in Jerusalem today extolling the virtues of Prime Minister Netanyahu, I say to myself that these are two war criminals. These are two people who are responsible for a genocide. If we were to have Nuremberg II trials, both of them would be found guilty and probably hung at the Nuremberg II trials. Again, what has been taking place since I would argue December 2023 in Gaza is a genocide. And President Trump has been in office for almost nine months now, and he has been helping the Israelis execute that genocide. There's just no question about it. He is guilty of genocide. And of course, it goes without saying that Netanyahu is guilty. Yet these two are today being treated like conquering heroes. What does that tell you? It makes one feel sick to his or her stomach. How else can you think about what's going on here? There's just no accountability. But that's just the way it is at this point in time. And I would imagine that down the road there will be no meaningful accountability.

But let me make one other point, and that is that I think that once journalists get in there and see what has been done, and once journalists get in there and talk to people in Gaza, and the world gets a better sense of exactly what happened – I mean, we now already have a very good sense, because a lot of this was available to see on platforms like TikTok and so forth and so on. But once we get journalists in there and the full story begins to come out, it could be the case that there's so much dismay around the world that it makes it almost impossible for Israel to start the genocide again. That is a possibility. Am I saying that that's likely? No, not at all. But one hopes that as people document what has happened here, and more and more voices join in the chorus, just how absolutely horrific this is becomes noticeable to

more and more people, and more and more pressure is brought on the Israelis and on the Americans and on the Europeans, who are all complicit in this, complicit in this genocide to shut it down permanently.

GG: I mean, I guess I have a real question about that, which is if you look at public opinion around the world, clearly it has turned against Israel in a generational and arguably an irreversible way in a lot of cases on in terms of popular opinion. And that has certainly been true in the Western states on which Israel most relies, including in Western Europe and the United States. And you were talking earlier about the military imperative for Israel to shut down the genocide for a while to give the time for their military to breathe and and rebuild. And maybe there was some similar PR or or image problem that was getting out of control as well. And they hope that by now making it act look like they voluntarily stopped and got their hostages back and stop once they got their hostages back, that they hope that it'll relieve the pressure on Western leaders that really did not want to do it. It was like pulling teeth to start doing things like recognizing a Palestinian state, and starting talking about suspending arms to Israel. I think Western elites are very eager to get back to their comfortable pro-Israel place, a place where they're comfortable because of domestic political incentive. They have their own Israel lobby, the US certainly does. And I think they're calculating that this pause, no matter how long it lasts, no matter what it entails, will at least relieve that intense pressure to isolate Israel. And probably Israel thinks that as well. Do you think that's likely to happen?

JM: Well, I think there's no hope for the elites. I mean, the elites in the West have proven quite conclusively that they're morally bankrupt. There's no question there. You want to remember the Biden administration was as deeply involved in this genocide as the Trump administration is. So I don't have much faith in the elites in the West. But I do think that pressure from below matters here. And I do think that Trump was feeling pressure. If you look at what's happening inside the Republican Party, where people are turning on Israel, you look at what's happening inside the Democratic Party, and you look at what's happening in Europe, these general strikes in Italy, public opinion in places like Germany have changed in quite drastic ways. I saw a recent poll that said 62 % of Germans believe that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. That's really quite remarkable. So I think that the elites are feeling pressure. And my hope, and it's just my hope, Glenn, and maybe I'm just guilty of wishful thinking here, but my hope is that it becomes clearer and clearer to people as to what Israel has done in Gaza. I mean, it's absolutely horrific what they have done. It's just hard to believe. And I think that the more information that comes out in that regard, the better, because it will allow all of us to sort of wrap our heads around it in better ways than we're able to do now. But who knows in the end?

GG: Now you mentioned the involvement of the Democrats, of Joe Biden. You had the same thing in the UK, you had full-scale UK support for Israel under the Tories, and then it switched to labor and it continued, you know, every bit as much the same. It really doesn't matter when you stay within these establishment parties, they're going to be pro-Israel. But you did have Biden and then Kamala Harris obviously defend full-scale US support for what Israel was doing in Gaza, took no real steps to use any leverage to stop them, made clear that

they defended it, they supported it, they had State Department officials every day standing up and justifying it. And they've fed it and funded it and fueled it and protected it and armed it and diplomatically protected it for 13 months until they were out of office. And now you have Trump who did the same, except, as you mentioned, the first thing he did was engineer a ceasefire that lasted a couple of months, and now nine months, ten months into office, he also engineered a ceasefire. So looking at Trump in terms of the role that he has played, on the one hand, obviously he funded and fueled and gave the green light to one of the worst genocides of our lifetime, I think the worst of the 21st century, it's hard to give him any credit when it comes to Gaza because of that. But on the other hand, I have to tell you, I find it almost impossible to imagine Joe Biden or Kamala Harris having caused or forced the Israelis to stop what they were doing in a way that Donald Trump just succeeded in doing. So is there a place in some, I guess, kind of twisted relative way that you give him some credit for bringing about an end to this for however long that end lasts?

JM: Yeah, I think it's wonderful that he created this ceasefire and this hostage exchange, as we talked about at the beginning of the show. I think it's wonderful. But that doesn't absolve him of responsibility for the genocide. As I said, if you had a Nuremberg II set of trials, he would be found guilty. There's no question in my mind. He has fueled the genocide. He's played a key role in keeping the genocide going. Biden got it going by supporting Netanyahu from the beginning. And I find it hard to imagine that Biden would have done with Netanyahu what Trump has done, and I'm glad Trump did it, but that doesn't absolve him.

GG: I just want to ask you a little bit about what led Trump to this place. We talked before about why Israel might have agreed to it, and how it benefits Netanyahu. But on the other side, it does seem to me like Trump got tired of this war. Like he really felt like, look, this has gone on for too long, it's impeding me in a lot of ways, it's harming me politically, it's splitting my base and my coalition. And I want an end to this. And he's very much into this idea that he deserves the Nobel Peace Prize and this, I think, he thinks is a major mark in that competition that he intends to win. It seems to me like the tipping point, and I'm interested in your thoughts on this, was when the Israelis attacked Doha without I guess telling the Qataris or really Trump in advance, at least not with enough time to do anything about it, if you believe the Trump administration at least. I think Trump really loves the Qataris. I think he sees them as a place where he can do a lot of business, both for the country and for himself personally. He sees the Emirates and the Saudis, he loves those Persian Gulf dictators. Even today when the Emir of Qatar went to Egypt, he sort of said, "this guy has unlimited money, just unlimited money", which for Trump is the highest compliment. And it seems like he wanted the world to see he was genuinely angry about that. They released that humiliating photo of Trump holding the phone while Netanyahu read the apology to the Emir of Qatar. Do you think that was a significant precipitating event in Trump kind of losing his patience with Netanyahu or are these tales that they've been trying to tell going back to Biden of a US Israeli riff just kind of mythical more than anything else?

JM: Well, let me just say, Glenn, I do believe your description that Trump was getting sick and tired of this conflict and wanted to shut it down is correct. And that was my point why I

think public opinion has mattered here, and it will matter even more if people see what has really happened in Gaza. So I think bringing pressure to bear on Trump did matter. Now, what exactly happened in Doha? You want to remember that the Israelis were not attacking Doha because they wanted to attack Doha. They were trying to kill the Palestinian negotiators. Just think about what that says. The Israelis wanted to kill the Palestinian negotiators. They did not want to negotiate a deal. Trump was enraged because he wanted to negotiate a deal. Why? In part, probably because he wants a Nobel Prize, but also because he wants to put this one beside him. As you said in laying out that optimistic scenario before, which hopefully will prove true, Trump is doing everything he can to say that this is the final stage in this conflict, and now we're going to have peace. The war is over, the war is over, the war is over. He's trying to create momentum here. He wants to put this conflict in the rearview mirror. There's no question about that. Because again, I think he's feeling heat from down below. And the Israelis, of course, undermined him when they tried to kill the negotiating team for the Palestinians. So he then redoubled his efforts, and we are where we are today. But the question you have to ask yourself is whether you think the Israelis will try to undermine the ceasefire, which I think they certainly will, and whether you think Trump will be willing to get tough with them and tell them they cannot do that. And there I don't think it's going to happen. I hope I'm wrong, but I think when push comes to shove, Netanyahu has Trump wrapped around his little finger.

GG: Yeah, I mean, I think that is the biggest cause for concern at the end of the day is basically all of this hinges on both the ability and the willingness of an American president to tell the Israelis no and to mean it about a thing that the Israelis absolutely want. And it's very hard to place your money on that bet, having watched how things work for the last forty, fifty years, as you know better than anybody, and believe that Trump will be willing to do that. In fact, I'm sure you saw Trump's speech in the Knesset, and it was a very strange passage – I wonder what you make of it – where he kind of singled out Miriam Adelson. And he kind of mocked her in a way, almost like he has some resentment toward her. He said, oh, look at her, she's all sitting there like she's so innocent, when in reality she has sixty billion dollars in the bank. Sixty billion. He sort of emphasized it like calling out her wealth, and you know, kind of muttered, like, oh, actually, I think she's saying, no, no, it's a lot more than that. It probably is. And he kind of complained about the fact, while of course saying, I love you, Miriam, I love you, but he was clearly complaining that she's constantly in the Oval office. She was when Sheldon Adelson was alive too. And they were demanding things one after the next for Israel. And he's talked about this before. And he always gave it to them, but he always describes it with a sort of resentment. Almost like he knows he's captive to them. He knows that when they demand something he has to do it, and he's kind of angry about it. And the fact that he vented that today, you could read it two ways. One is, you know, Trump is tired of them and that was his way of showing that he's done with that and that he's sick of them, he's calling them out. But I think the more plausible interpretation of that is that people resent those who control them, and it seemed like he was expressing resentment toward this control that he continues to labor under.

JM: I think you're exactly right. I mean, as you know, I wrote with Steve the book on the Israel Lobby.

GG: I do know that.

JM: And when we wrote the book and we talked to all sorts of people, they tell you that the lobby is relentless. They call the White House all the time, representatives of the various organizations. It's relentless pressure on the president. It's relentless pressure on Congress. The fact is that Israel is a strategic albatross around their neck, okay? And now it's a moral albatross around their neck. We're now complicit in the genocide, and we're pursuing a policy vis-a-vis Israel that is not in our strategic interest. Given that circumstance or those circumstances, it's absolutely essential that you have a lobby that works overtime to create a situation and maintain a situation where we give Israel unconditional support. You just want to think about that. The United States gives Israel unconditional support, despite the fact it is a strategic and a moral liability. This is truly remarkable. This tiny country, how does this happen? It happens because you have this incredibly powerful lobby that works overtime. It's just relentless. And somebody like Trump, and I'm sure his predecessors, I've had people tell me that Barack Obama felt this way, get sick and tired of being constantly pestered by the lobby to pursue policies that are in the national interest of a foreign country, not the United States. And I think what you see is that occasionally Trump lets his exasperation out, and you see it on public display.

GG: Yeah, I mean you go back to the tapes of Nixon and there are passages where he talks about this too. Where, yes, an American president wants to maintain an alliance with Israel, but at the same time, occasionally they diverge and it's the job of the president despite domestic pressures – that's how he put it publicly. But privately, his exasperation was expressed in all sorts of profane ways, and this is something that's been going on, and it's hard to see how this can come to an end. All right, let me ask you a couple questions more about this before we cover a couple of other topics. I know it seems like 50 years ago at this point, but it was really only two years ago, right before October 7th, as you well know, Israeli society was basically on the verge of a political civil war, if not an actual civil war, over a whole bunch of issues, primarily control of the power in the hands of the judiciary and the power of judicial review, which many Israelis see as a linchpin of their democracy that Netanyahu and his allies were trying to remove. But you also had all the corruption charges against Netanyahu. When President Trump went today, he told the Israeli president, I'm not even sure if he has this power, that he should pardon Netanyahu. He said, who cares about these corruption allegations? And Netanyahu has been politically unpopular for quite a while. He was booed when Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner went to speak there. But as you say, Netanyahu is an incredibly shrewd political operator. And I wonder now that the pressure is off of him with regards to the hostages' families and all of these protests that were taking place, bring our hostages back, the sense that Netanyahu was continuing the war for his own interest at the expense of the hostages, which obviously was true. What you see in terms of his political future. I mean, is there gonna be any pressure on him now? Meaningful pressure? Dispositive pressure to step down and to transfer power to somebody else?

JM: I don't think so. I think, Glenn, that Netanyahu is not an outlier when it comes to cleansing the Palestinians out of Gaza and ultimately out of the West Bank as well. Inside of greater Israel, as you know, there are roughly the same number of Palestinians as there are Israeli Jews. And this is just unacceptable to the Israelis. The Israelis have said to themselves and sometimes to the outside world in the past that a Palestinian population that represented 20% of the overall population was acceptable. And inside Green Line Israel – that's the Israel that was created in 1948 and that existed before the 1967 war when they got the occupied territories – inside Green Line Israel, the Palestinians were about 20% of the population. But now you're in a situation where in greater Israel it's about 50-50. And if you look at birth rates, it's likely that the Palestinians will overtake the Israeli Jews moving forward. And the question is, how do you deal with that situation? Because you want to understand that when you have those kinds of numbers and you want to maintain Jewish superiority, you end up with an apartheid state. And of course, Israel is an apartheid state. And the Israelis understand what happened to South Africa. They don't want to remain an apartheid state. So the question becomes how do you solve that problem? Now you could turn Greater Israel into a true democracy, but if you did that, you wouldn't have a Jewish state anymore, because again, there will be more Palestinians than Israeli Jews. So the end result is that you get this apartheid state. And they see this conflict as an opportunity to solve that problem, to take Israel out of the ranks of apartheid states and to do that by ethnically cleansing Gaza and then the West Bank. And this is a view that is widely shared by Israelis. So it's not a policy that if Netanyahu continues to pursue it is going to be terribly unpopular.

The question you have to ask yourself is what are the costs? And up to now the principal costs of pursuing that policy of ethnic cleansing was that you couldn't get the hostages back. And furthermore, not only were you not getting the hostages back, you were actually killing those hostages. I mean, all this firepower dumped on the Palestinians who have hostages in there means that some hostages are going to die. So Netanyahu had to deal with this huge movement that was opposed to him that wanted to end the war, not because they were against ethnic cleansing, but because they wanted the hostages back. Well, now the hostages are back, and he, Netanyahu, is free to pursue ethnic cleansing, which I don't think is a terribly unpopular policy. And to take this a step further, and this just shows you what horrible shape Israeli society is in, to make ethnic cleansing work, you have to commit genocide. Genocide is the instrument that's designed to drive the Palestinians out. It's to kill so many Palestinians that they have no choice but to leave. And the argument is that eventually the West will accept the fact that the Palestinians will have to leave and they'll force Egypt and Jordan to take those Palestinians. So this is the Israeli strategy. It's a genocide strategy. And I think most Israelis will not have any problem with executing a genocide. And they'll be perfectly happy to get rid of the Palestinians to ethnically cleanse, because that solves the apartheid problem. And now the hostage issue is off the table. So I think one could argue, if anything, the Israelis are more likely, not less likely, to restart the genocide.

GG: Right. I didn't mean to imply at all that the opposition to Netanyahu is caused by concern about the Palestinians or opposition to what Netanyahu has been doing in Gaza,

especially now that the hostages are back. They don't care at all about the Palestinians. They've more than made that very clear. Poll after poll shows that. I guess what I'm more asking is that it seems to me like if you have a brand that becomes sullied in terms of its image, one of the things you want to do is change the face of the brand. I remember one of the very first article, one of the very first classified documents that WikiLeaks obtained and and disclosed, before anyone really knew who they were, there was in 2006, 2007, a big movement in Western Europe against the war in Afghanistan, and several Western European governments that supported the war in Afghanistan, had troops supporting the US mission there, lost in their elections in favor of parties that were in favor of pulling out. And the CIA was very worried about this and what would happen if we lose Western Europe and how will we keep our mission in Afghanistan? And and they wrote this secret memo, the CIA did, basically suggesting that the best hope to maintain support for the war in Afghanistan and Western Europe would be to have Barack Obama win in 2008, because then you replace this kind of evangelical right wing face of George Bush with a face much more palatable to the Western Europeans – Barack Obama. The policy doesn't change. The war in Afghanistan continues. But you have a new fresh face who's now the kind of spokesperson for it in front of the world, and the world looks differently at it and says, oh, there's a new there's a new face there, there's a new voice that isn't yet unsullied. I don't know. It seems like if I were advising the Israelis, I would suggest that that might be a good policy, especially when you consider that a lot of Democrats now for the first time who are criticizing Israel always go out of their way to do so by making clear that their problem is not Israel itself, but Netanyahu. You know, Bernie Sanders does that in every speech. He says, "No more weapons to Netanyahu, no more weapons to this far right government of Netanyahu". It seems like there's benefits to getting rid of Netanyahu, even though the policy continues as is. Do you see those benefits?

JM: I think if the policy continues as is, everybody will see that the policy is continuing and they will be appalled and there will be tremendous pressure on Western elites to shut the genocide down. I don't think you can fool people the way you're describing. Let me make two points about how I think the Israelis think about this issue. The first is I think, and this is not completely inconsistent with what you were saying, and this is not to say you would agree with this, but I think they believe they can take over Western media in meaningful ways. They can buy up TikTok....

GG: CBS News, CNN, Paramount.

JM: Yes, exactly. Yes. God knows what will be left when they're done. But their basic view is they can control the discourse. And you want to remember, until the coming of the internet, they really did control the discourse in very important ways. But the discourse has gotten away from them. So they believe that they can rescue the situation by buying TikTok, CNN, you name it, okay? And the question you have to ask yourself is do you think that will work? And I think that will backfire because so many people know what's happening. And there'll be alternative platforms anyway. But the second way they continue to do these things, despite all the criticism, is there's a deep-seated strain in Israel and in large portions of the American

Jewish community that basically say this is just good old fashioned anti-Semitism: "This is what you would expect. You get into a war and they're blaming the Jews. What do you expect? And we just have to sort of hunker down and deal with that. It's just been that way for thousands of years. Nothing has changed. But the most important thing is that we do what's best for us." And I think that's actually a quite powerful argument. I think it's dead wrong, and it's not an argument that should be made, but it is made and it is quite effective. And it allows many Israelis and many American Jews to support these heinous policies.

GG: Yeah, I have to tell you, whenever we cover this issue of Larry Ellison and the Ellison family and the pro-Israel lobby buying up all the media outlets, putting Barry Weiss in charge of CBS News – a lot of these seem like desperation moves. They are not even subtle. And I hear a lot of people saying: oh, I'm glad, finally there's going to be some space in the American media that's not completely anti-Israel – and it's like oh, yes, the American media has been notoriously controlled by Muslim and Arab voices who are fanatically opposed to Israel, and finally, there will be some space in American corporate media where we have some ownership by people who are pro-Israel, finally, after so many decades that's what we're going to have. But I do want to just push a little on that because I do think that that's going to backfire. We don't have a centralized system of information control anymore the way we did, you know, even ten years ago with the [inaudible] cable where it was much more centralized than now. At the same time, the internet is very vulnerable to a lot of censorship, to a lot of information control. And if it were just buying CBS News and buying Paramount, all these kinds of dinosaur legacy media brands, I would say this is a very obsolete strategy. But the US Congress closed TikTok and enforced the sale of TikTok precisely because they were so concerned that a lot of the young Americans were getting too much information about Israel that they're not supposed to have. And now you have TikTok in the hands of Larry Ellison and Trump's other allies who are all fanatically pro-Israel – are you pretty confident that's not going to work?

JM: Well, let's just unpack this a bit more. What's going on here, Glenn, is that Israel is more dependent on the United States for its security today than it has ever been in the past. In the beginning, Israel prided itself on being in a position where it provided for its own security. Yes, it might buy armaments from Czechoslovakia, France, or the United States, but Israel had these powerful military forces that could take care of themselves in wars against the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Jordanians, you name it. Those days are long gone. Israel is, and I'm not exaggerating here, super dependent on the United States for its security. It's really quite amazing. What that means is that anything that threatens the bond or anything that threatens the special relationship between the United States and Israel at this point in time is going to mortify Israel's strongest supporters in the West. And this is what's happening here. The lobby is scared stiff about what's happening to public opinion on Israel in the United States. And as you were saying before, it's not just in the Democratic Party, not just on the left-hand side of the political spectrum, it's on the right-hand side of the political spectrum as well. People like Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens and Steve Bannon and Charlie Kirk, of course, were moving in that direction as well. These people are hell on wheels for the lobby and for Israel. So the lobby has been forced out into the open in ways it was never in the past.

It is out there for everybody to see. And it's engaged in plain smash mouth politics. It's shut down TikTok. It's buying up all these media outlets.

GG: It forced on colleges and universities a whole wide array of rules that you'll be punished if you express any kind of criticism of Israel or prominent Jewish people or whomever, just clamped down right in the open on the free speech rights of Americans on our colleges and universities in defense of this foreign country.

JM: Exactly. They got three presidents fired!

GG: Ivy League presidents.

JM: Ivy League presidents, fired! This is truly remarkable. This is the greatest threat to free speech in the United States that I think we've ever seen. It's certainly the greatest threat to free speech on academic campuses. It's really quite remarkable. And it's largely due, not exclusively, but largely due to the lobby. And again, the question you want to ask yourself is what's going on here? They weren't doing this 20 or 30 years ago. They're doing it now because Israel is in desperate straits. It's in desperate straits because it's not doing well against its adversaries. And it's heavily dependent on the United States. And there is some evidence that American support for Israel is withering away and may get worse with the passage of time. Because again, if we go back to the earlier part of our conversation, what you and I were effectively saying is that in all likelihood, we're of course hoping we're wrong here, but in all likelihood, the genocide is going to start up again. Well, if the genocide starts up again, this is just going to further wreck Israel's reputation in the West and around the world. This is a disastrous situation. And Israelis and American Jews, not all American Jews, but some American Jews can say this is just anti-Semitism. But at a certain point, that argument becomes ridiculous. This isn't anti-Semitism. What the Israelis are doing in Gaza is absolutely horrific. And those people who oppose it are on the right side. So I think if this continues, the genocide continues, more damage will be done, and the lobby will be forced to behave in even more ruthless ways. And I think for the future of American liberal democracy, that is a big negative.

GG: To put that mildly. I also want to ask you about Ukraine, but I know you have to head out, so I just want to make sure I get to that, but I just have one more question, which is about the West Bank. The Trump administration came in with people like Mike Huckabee as the US ambassador to Israel, saying things like, "No, we don't recognize the West Bank. We consider this the biblical Israel and we favor Israel's annexation of it". I think at some point in the last month or so, Trump for the first time came out and just adamantly said there will be no annexation of the West Bank, period. Israel will not annex the West Bank. My guess is that when Trump talks about this broader peace that he envisions for the Middle East or that he's promising, again, it begins with normalization by his favorite countries in the Persian Gulf, and they basically said if Israel annexes the West Bank, there's no way politically we can justify normalization. And hearing that he says there's no normalization, I guess on the one hand that sounds good for a president to be that adamant about it. On the other hand, the

Israelis are effectively annexing the West Bank more aggressively, more rapidly and more violently, more savagely than ever before. I mean, they're just burning down entire neighborhoods, unleashing the IDF on people, letting settlers just murder whoever they want and releasing them from custody the next day. What is the near term future of the West Bank that you see? And do you think part of this deal was to kind of give Israel carte blanche, even more so to do what they want there?

JM: Well, I think the basic Israeli goal is to make the West Bank unlivable. And of course, what they're doing in Gaza is making Gaza unlivable. And the idea is if Gaza or the West Bank become unlivable, then the Palestinians there will leave. The problem is, there is no place to go. I mean, this is the problem that they face in Gaza. The Israelis thought initially, this is in the fall or early winter of 2023, that they could smash the Palestinians with airpower, with artillery, inflict massive punishment on the Palestinians. And they would flee across the border either to Jordan or to Egypt. Of course, that didn't work. And Egypt and Jordan have gone to great lengths to say that's not going to happen. So what the Israelis are doing in the West Bank is they're making life as close to unlivable as possible for the Palestinians, but there's no place for those Palestinians to go. So if you look at what's happening here, the Israelis have ended up, despite all the horrors of the past two years, especially in Gaza, but also on the West Bank, they've ended up with the same demographic situation today that they had back in early 2003, on October 6th, 2003.

GG: 2023.

JM: 2023, sorry.

GG: Yeah.

JM: I think from an Israeli point of view they think they have to find a way to get them out. But short of a major war that allows them to push the Palestinians out of the West Bank, I don't see how they do it.

JM: All right, let's move to Ukraine. I kinda can't even believe that we – I've been talking to you about this war for four years now, and you know, Donald Trump came in and seemed determined, I believe, to end the war. It's just that he was obviously deluded about the leverage and power that he would have over the Russians to basically order them to stop, and they would just say, oh, okay, we'll stop when you tell us to, maybe with a few concessions. The Russians clearly see it as a lot more important than Trump understood. And I think clearly now Trump is in the place – he formerly blamed Ukraine, he kind of goes back and forth – he's clearly in the place now where he seems to blame the Russians and sees Putin as being [01:08:38] [inaudible] [0.0s] or whatever. Zelensky's coming to the White House, I believe on Monday, next Monday, and Trump is openly talking about supplying them with Tomahawk missiles, long range missiles that could strike deep inside Russia and that would be provided to the Ukrainians specifically for that purpose. As you might expect, the Russians aren't taking that very well. Putin had Dmitry Medvedev again very explicitly raise

the prospect of a nuclear war in the event that would happen, especially because as he points out, Tomahawk missiles could be nuclear tipped and you don't really know until they land. And you'd have to assume they are if you're Russia, is his point. What is going on here? I mean I guess Trump's theory is that you have to put pressure on one side or the other, whoever is not moving and threaten them and maybe bomb them in order for them to want to end the war. Maybe it works with Israel, maybe it works with Gaza. I have a hard time seeing it working with Russia, but what do you think?

JM: The idea here is that Tomahawk missiles are the magic weapon. In other words, if we give the Ukrainians Tomahawks, they're going to be able to turn the situation around. As you know, Glenn, the Ukrainians are in deep trouble on the battlefield. The Russians are rolling them up. They're badly outnumbered in terms of manpower, the Ukrainians, that is, and they're even more badly outnumbered in terms of firepower. The Ukrainians are in desperate straits. And the idea here is we can rescue the situation. The Russian economy is in trouble, they're really not doing that well on the battlefield. And we bring in these magic weapons and we're going to turn it around. We heard this before with HIMARS. We heard this before with ATACAMS. We heard this before with F-16s. There's no magic weapon that's going to turn this one around. This one is going to be settled on the battlefield. And it's going to be settled with the weapons that both sides now have. So this is a pipe dream. But the question you want to ask yourself, in addition to what I just said, is whether or not Trump is going to give the Ukrainians Tomahawks. First of all, he's not going to give them Tomahawks. Trump has worked out an arrangement where the Europeans will give them Tomahawks, and the Europeans will buy those Tomahawks from us. Because Trump says, I'm shifting the burden of defending and paying for the defense of the Ukrainians to the Europeans. So the Europeans are going to have to get the Tomahawks to give them to the Ukrainians. I don't think that Trump is going to give them the Tomahawks. If I'm wrong and he gives them the Tomahawks, there are not many Tomahawks to give. I'm not sure even if the Ukrainians get their hands on the Tomahawks that Trump will let them use them. He understands the escalatory potential here. So I don't think he'll let them use them. If he lets them use them, he'll let them use one or two or three, and they're not going to make much difference. So I think this is just much to do about nothing. And it just shows you how desperate the West is. You want to understand here that as this war plays itself out, what we're going to see is that Ukraine, of course, is going to suffer a humiliating defeat. But so is NATO and so is the West. And this is why the West, especially the Europeans, are scrambling like crazy to find a magic way to rescue the situation. Because they understand that a Russian victory will have devastating consequences for them and for the NATO alliance. But the fact is it's too late. The war is lost.

JM: Last question for you. I just actually thought about this right before we came on the air, it just kinda struck me. I was like, oh, Professor Mearsheimer is the perfect person to ask this: the US has been talking forever, going back to the Obama years, even a little bit before about this pivot from the Middle East to Asia, focus on China, all that. This big multipolar competition that we recognize that we're in, specifically with the Chinese. And yet here we are spending all of this attention, all of this energy on this age-old Middle East conflict, and

all the top level of the US government and the media and our public and political discourse, all focused on the Middle East, and there's this big fanfare with Western Europe going and and regional powers going. And utterly silent and absent from all of this is China. And they seem perfectly happy to be totally silent and absent from this because they don't seem to think it's in their interests to be involved at all, let alone the extent to which the United States is. So in terms of again, our constant focus on Ukraine, this is what I mean by that we're talking about these same conflicts forever because we're Americans and our government is involved in them, and the Chinese, they're not, and they're off pursuing their actual interests. What do you make of this in terms of the impact on US-Chinese competition?

JM: Before I directly answer that question, Glenn, there's one other dimension that you didn't mention that matters here, and that is a potential war against Iran this fall or in the early years.

JM: Yeah, I rushed through to get to Ukraine and it definitely was on my list of what I wanted to ask you about what was the likelihood of that restarting again. So feel free to integrate that into your answer.

JM: Well, I actually think, and I can lay it out for you that we won't or the Israelis won't, in all likelihood, attack Iran. I go back and forth from day to day, but I think there's a good case that can be made that they won't attack Iran. But they may attack Iran. But if we do attack Iran, it just shows you the extent to which we're pinned down in the Middle East. In other words, it's not just Gaza. And the Israelis are involved in Lebanon, they're involved in Syria, they're fighting against Yemen, they're involved in the West Bank, and they're talking about hammering Iran again, and we will surely get sucked into that. So we are massively pinned down in the Middle East, and of course, we're massively pinned down in the Ukraine war. There's been all sorts of talk by the Russians as to whether the United States is at war with Russia. And all sorts of Russian leaders believe clearly that the United States is at war with Russia. That's a quite remarkable statement. I don't go that far. I say we're almost at war, but not quite at war. But the mere fact that we're almost at war against Russia over Ukraine, and we're deeply involved in the Middle East and all these various conflicts with the Israelis tells you that we are not able to pivot to Asia in any meaningful way. And the Chinese are benefiting greatly from this, because we are not able to pay enough attention and put enough resources into East Asia. There's just no question about that. And as I often say to my Chinese interlocutors, you should hope that the war in Ukraine goes on forever, and you should hope that Israel continues to fight wars and start wars forever, because that will keep the United States pinned down in those two regions and make it impossible for the United States to cause you any trouble in East Asia. And oh, by the way, if trouble starts in East Asia, you, the Chinese, will be at a great advantage against the United States, because so much of America's resources will have been devoted to those other two conflicts and not to containing China. So China will be in a much better situation as a result of our commitment to these other two regions.

JM: Yeah, luckily for China, the US always makes Israel's interests and concerns its priority. And I think you're seeing the manifestations of that as well as this crazy war in Ukraine. All right, I know you have to go. We are always super appreciative to hear from you. It's always very enlightening. I appreciate your time as always, and we hope to talk to you very shortly again.

JM: That'd be my pleasure, Glenn. There's plenty to talk about.

GG: There always is. There always is. Have a good evening.

END

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