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CAROUSEL JEFFREY D. SACHS RUSSIA-UKRAINE

Jeffrey Sachs Explains the Russia-Ukraine War

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By Jeffrey D. Sachs / The Cambridge Union

This is an excerpt from a longer discussion held by The Cambridge Union with Professor Jeffrey Sachs responding to a question regarding U.S. involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Let me just explain in two minutes, the Ukraine war. This is not an attack by [Vladimir] Putin on Ukraine in the way that we are told every day. This started in 1990, February 9, 1990. James Baker III, our Secretary of State, said to Mikhail Gorbachev, NATO will not move one inch eastward if you agree to German unification, basically ending World War II. And Gorbachev said, that's very important. Yes, NATO doesn't move, and we agreed to German unification. The

US then cheated on this, already starting in 1994 when [Bill] Clinton signed off on, basically a plan to expand NATO all the way to Ukraine.

This is when the so-called neocons took power, and Clinton was the first agent of this. And the expansion of NATO started in 1999 with Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. At that point, Russia didn't much care. There was no border other than with the Konigsberg but other than that, there was no direct threat. Then, the US led the bombing of Serbia in 1999 that was bad, by the way, because that was the use of NATO to bomb a European capital, Belgrade, 78 straight days to break the country apart. The Russians didn't like that very much, but Putin became president. They swallowed it. They complained. But even Putin started out pro-European, pro-American. Actually asked maybe we should join NATO, when there was still the idea of some kind of mutually respectful relationship.

Then 9/11 came. Then came Afghanistan, and the Russians said, yeah, we'll support you. We understand to root out terror. But then came two other decisive actions. In 2002, the United States unilaterally walked out of the anti-ballistic missile treaty. This was probably the most decisive event, never discussed in this context. But what it did was trigger the US putting in missile systems in Eastern Europe that Russia views as a dire, direct threat to national security by making possible a decapitation strike of missiles that are a few minutes away from Moscow and we put in two Aegis missile systems. We say it's defense Russia says, How do we know it's not Tomahawk nuclear tip missiles in your silos? You've told us, we have nothing to do with this. And so we walked out of the ABM Treaty unilaterally in 2002 and then in 2003 we invaded Iraq on completely phony pretenses, as I've explained.

In 2004-05, we engaged in a soft regime change operation in Ukraine, the so-called first color revolution. It put in office somebody that I knew, and was I was friends with, and am kind of distantly friends with, the president [Viktor] Yushchenko, because I was an advisor to the Ukrainian government in 1993, '94-'95 and then the US had its dirty hands in this. It should not meddle in other countries elections. But in 2009, [Viktor] Yanukovych won the election, and he became president in 2010 on the basis of neutrality for Ukraine. That calmed things down, because the US was pushing NATO, but the people of Ukraine, on the opinion polls, didn't even want to be in NATO. They knew that the country is divided between ethnic Ukrainian, ethnic Russian. What do we want with this? We want to stay away from your problems.

So in February 22, 2014, the United States participated actively in the overthrow of Yanukovych, a typical US regime change operation, have no doubt about it. And the Russians did us a favor. They intercepted a really ugly call between Victoria Nuland, my colleague at Columbia University now, and if you know her name and what she's done, have sympathy for me, really. Between her and the US Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, who's a senior State Department official 'till today, and they talked about regime change. They said, who's going to be the next government? Why don't we pick this one? No, [Vitaly] Klitschko shouldn't go in. It should be [Arseniy] Yatseniuk. Ah, yes, it was Yatseniuk. And we'll get the big guy—Biden—to come in and do an attaboy, they say. You know, pat them on the back. It's great. So they made the new government, and I happened to be invited to go there soon after that, not knowing any of the background.

And then some of it was, in a very ugly way, explained to me after I arrived, how the US had participated in this. All of this is to say the US then said, okay, now NATO is really



going to enlarge. And Putin kept saying, Stop, you promised no NATO enlargement. It's been—by the way, I forgot to mention, in 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, seven more countries in the not one inch eastward. And then, okay, it's a long story, but the US kept rejecting the basic idea: don't expand NATO to Russia's border in a context where we're putting in goddamn missile systems after breaking a treaty. 2019, we walked out of the Intermediate[Range] Nuclear Forces Treaty.

In 2017, we walked out of the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], the treaty with Iran. This is the partner. This is the trust building. In other words, it's completely reckless US foreign policy. On December 15, 2021, Putin put on the table a draft Russia-US security agreement. You can find it online. The basis of it is no NATO enlargement. I called the White House that next week after that, begging them: take the negotiations! Putin has offered something, avoid this war. Oh, Jeff, there's not going to be a war. Announce that NATO is not going to enlarge. Oh, don't worry, NATO is not going to enlarge. I said, Oh, you're going to have a war over something that's not going to happen? Why don't you announce it? And he said, no, no, our policy is an open door—this is Jake Sullivan—our policy is an open door policy, open door for NATO enlargement. That is under the category of bullshit, by the way.

You don't have your right to put your military bases anywhere you want and expect peace in this world. You have to have some prudence. There's no such thing as an open door that we're going to be there and we're going to put our missile systems there, and that's our right. There's no right to that. We declared in 1823, Europeans don't come to the Western Hemisphere, that's the Monroe Doctrine. The whole Western Hemisphere, after all. Okay. Anyway, they turned down the negotiations. Then the special military operation started, and five days later, Zelensky says, okay, okay, neutrality. And then the Turks said, well we'll mediate this. And I flew to Ankara to discuss it with the Turkish negotiators, because I wanted to hear exactly what was going on. So what was going on was they reached an agreement with a few odds and ends. And then the United States and Britain said, "No way! You guys fight on. We got your back." We don't have your front, you're all going to die, but we got your back as we kept pushing them into the front lines, that's 600,000 deaths now of Ukrainians since Boris Johnson flew to Kyiv to tell them to be brave. Absolutely ghastly.

So when you think about your question, we have to understand we're not dealing with, as we're told every day, with this mad man like Hitler coming at us and violating this and violating that, and he's going to take over Europe. This is complete bogus, fake history that is a purely PR narrative of the US government, and it doesn't stand up at all to anyone that knows anything. And if you try to say a word of this, I got completely cut out of the New York Times back in 2022, after writing my whole life, columns for them. Oh, I'd send this. Okay. And by the way, online, it's not even space. You know, there's no limit, they could publish 700 words. They would not publish, since then, 700 words for me, about what I saw with my own eyes, about what this war is about. They won't do it. We're playing games here. So God forbid a nuclear power comes at us. I don't know what's going to happen, but we came at them.

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Jeffrey D. Sachs

Jeffrey D. Sachs is a University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, where he directed The Earth Institute from 2002 until 2016. He is also President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and a commissioner of the UN Broadband Commission for Development. He has been advisor to three United Nations Secretaries-General, and currently serves as an SDG Advocate under Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Sachs is the author, most recently, of *"A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism"* (2020). Other books include: *"Building the New American Economy: Smart, Fair, and Sustainable"* (2017) and *"The Age of Sustainable Development,"* (2015) with Ban Ki-moon.

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