

An analysis from the US

Student Protests, Israel-Gaza & Ukraine

“If we grasp these problems sensibly, we can solve them all”

Interview with Professor Jeffrey Sachs* conducted by Zain Raza, acTVism staff**



Jeffrey D. Sachs
(Picture Gabriella
C. Marino, 2019)

Zain Raza: Thank you for tuning in today, and welcome back to another episode of *The Source*. I'm your host, Zain Raza. Today I'll be talking to Professor Jeffrey Sachs about the war in Ukraine, as well as Israel's assault in Gaza. Jeffrey serves as a director for the Center of Sustainable Development at Columbia University, where he holds the rank of university professor, the institution's highest academic rank. He's also a world renowned economist, bestselling author, innovative educator, and a global leader in sustainable development. Jeffrey, welcome back.

Jeffrey Sachs: Great to be with you. Thanks.

Let's begin our conversation on the massive student protests taking place across the United States, demanding an end to US support for Israel, which they believe is enabling a genocide in Gaza. What began with an encampment at Columbia University has now spread nationwide to include University of Texas, Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, UC Berkeley, University of Michigan, Brown, Harvard, and many others.

Mass arrests and heavy police crackdown have also begun, and there were reportedly violent clashes on the UCLA campus yesterday. As someone who lives in the United States and has taught in a number of these universities over the

past decades, could you provide your assessment of what's really happening there?

What's happening is the students are seeing a profound injustice and war crimes being committed in Israel's war in Gaza, and they're protesting. And that's good. And I'm really thrilled to see that. What's also happening is that this runs against the official power narrative of the United States, which at the governmental level, backs Israel without any redlines at all, and provides munitions on a daily basis that has enabled this genocidal action to continue until today. And with the threat of, what Israel promises, if I could put that word in, to be an invasion of Rafah, where Israel told the people of Gaza to go for their safety and now is preparing a massive military action. So the students see all of this. The officialdom doesn't want anyone to see this. The officialdom just wants people to shut up. They want quiet, and they put pressure on the universities. The donors put pressure on the universities, a lot of pro-Israel Jewish donors, non-Jewish donors. But pro-Israel has been part of American foreign policy for a long time without restraint.

During this whole period, it's been inappropriate, to put it mildly, because Palestine has not had political self-determination that the whole rest of the world knows it should have. And so the US backing has been terrible. The US has not been an honest broker. It's been a completely dishonest broker during this whole process, enabling Israeli extremism. But now that it's out in the open, that there's a war in front of all of us, that we see daily children being killed by American bombs, we see universities in Gaza being blown up, we see hospitals being destroyed, we see apartment blocks being destroyed. We see whole families of dozens of people and extended families all dead because of this. Students see it with their own eyes. Officialdom says don't look. Well, to hell with that. And then they're in their last resort, now. If we can't convince you, which they can't, if they can't make the public blind to this, if they can't stop the *TikTok* feed, well, they're going

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Like here at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) on 1 May 2024, students around the world are protesting against the situation in Gaza, which has been untenable for months. (Picture EPA/CAROLINE BREHMAN)

to send in the police. And that's what's happening right now. It's really amazing. It's terrible.

Whenever the majority of the German media reports on these protests, they include the label anti-Semitism. For example, they state that there were a number of incidents where protesters chanted the river to the sea quote or dead to Zionism and Israel, and even endorsed the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, which is considered anti-Semitic in Germany. They also referred to a number of Jewish student organizations that claim that they fear for their safety. What do you make of these accusations? Are Jewish students at risk in the United States?

No. There may be individual incidents, but there are Palestinian students really at risk. There are Asian students at risk. America, unfortunately, has violence in American society. But this is not about anti-Semitism. This is about Israel's actions in Gaza. This is about the complete failure to find a political solution to this crisis in Israel and Palestine for the last 57 years, since the 1967 war.

To call this anti-Semitism is just either a profound category error to misunderstand what this is about, or a deliberate obfuscation. But this is not about anti-Semitism. This is about being

against Israel's policies, which, as the South African government has rightly said in its application to the International Court of Justice, is in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention, or arguably is which the court has to finally adjudicate. But what the ICJ said was it's plausible that Israel is in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

“This is not about anti-Semitism”

That should help people in Germany understand. The International Court of Justice has said that Israel is in plausible violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Think about it. Listen to that. Hear that. That's absolutely shocking, stunning, and not about anti-Semitism. It's about mass deaths in Gaza, which arguably are perhaps even as high as 100,000; some people say more. The official count is 35,000. There are thousands of people under the rubble. There are tens of thousands more who have died, not by a bomb and so not counted in that first number, but because there isn't food, there isn't water, there isn't health care, there isn't shelter. So come on. This isn't about anti-Semitism. This is about genocidal actions in front of our eyes. And you better be out there protesting this. The German government is also providing armaments, protests that.

Don't worry so much about anti-Semitism, worry about an ongoing slaughter that's taking place.

You already mentioned the role of the United States. Let me recap some of its actions over the last month. The United States vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council aimed at granting the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations. US Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood informed the Security Council that the veto, quote, "does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood, but is an acknowledgment that it can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties", unquote.

Furthermore, the Israeli government fears that the International Criminal Court may soon issue arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, that may include Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over its actions in Gaza and the blocking of humanitarian aid. The United States dismissed these arrest warrants by stating that the ICC has no jurisdiction to charge Israeli officials with war crimes. "Reuters" also reported that the US, for its first time in recent memory, reached a conclusion that five units of the Israeli Defense Force are responsible for human rights violations that have included extrajudicial killings, torture and physical abuse. Despite this, Washington arrived at the conclusion that it will not proceed with sanctions.

Why does the United States refrain from sanctioning Israel? Is it because the United States has interests in the region, or are there interests behind the scenes that are dictating US foreign policy?

First, I hope everybody knows American foreign policy is not based on principle. It's based on power. It's not based on consistency, it's based on hypocrisy. It's not based on international law, it is based on what the United States wants to do. Let's not be children in this. Let's not listen to all those nice words of the US. Let's look at actions. The US engages in war all over the world. It overthrows governments. It arms its allies. It has proxy wars. It blows up pipelines. It does many, many things.

Maybe the German government doesn't want the German people to hear so clearly what its lead ally does. But this is American foreign policy. America is the major imperial power in the world. By imperial power, I mean that it chooses governments in other countries. It overthrows governments that it doesn't like. This is

not a mystery. This is not some conspiracy theory. These are simple facts that are laid out in voluminous measures available for anyone to understand.

But we have an official narrative, which is a kind of pattern or just a melody line, which is for children. Even children would figure this stuff out. So there is no consistency in this. This is about power. Now, why does the US want to assert its power through Israel? That's a complicated question. Of course, there is an Israel lobby. There are reasons for that. But the United States military also likes its base in Israel, that Israel is its launchpad in the Middle East. That's been true for a long time. Does it get anything good out of this? Well, this is another story. My view is, American foreign policy is a disaster. Top to bottom.

Do we really need the war in Ukraine? And by the way, unless we're children, this was not an unprovoked war by President Putin. Come on. This is a war provoked by NATO enlargement. And anyone who knows the history about this knows this. But you're not supposed to say this, I know, in polite company. But in any event, this is what this is about. This is about power.

"Your ally is not abiding by international law"

The US security state has been tightly knit with Israel for decades, even as Israel has run an apartheid state which has brutally suppressed the Palestinians, which has brutally denied political self-determination, which has turned every so-called peace process into an endless game where there's no peace and there's no end result of a state of Palestine.

So to come back on the substance to what you ask, it's pathetic that the US says we want a two state solution, but we vote against, as the only country in the Security Council, we vote against UN membership of Palestine, though Palestine qualifies for UN membership. That was decided all the way back in 2011 when Palestine first applied. And then they have the gall to say yes, but it's got to be determined by the two parties saying, in other words, Israel can veto it. Why should Israel [be able to] veto Palestine's membership in the UN? That's absurd. So the whole claim is absurd. Very frustrating, by the way.

You know, there was a vote in the General Assembly: Should Palestine have political self-determination? Every UN country voted yes except

for four countries. Out of the 193, four opposed Palestinian self-determination. Israel? Well, duh, the United States. And then two others, Micronesia, which by law is bound to vote with the US because it's in a compact with the US and it's got 110,000 people, bless them, and they have to vote with the US. And then the fourth country that opposed was Nauru. I like Nauru. It's got 12,000 people.

All the rest of the world said that Palestine needs self-determination. So please understand your ally. Your ally is not abiding by international law. Your ally is not abiding by consistency. Your ally is not abiding by values. What's the value of slaughter? Are you kidding? Your ally is not very intelligent because they think that the only way to keep Israel safe is to kill all the people in Gaza, and that that's how you're going to do it, rather than have a diplomatic approach.

But your ally is also the one that blew up *Nord Stream*. Your ally is also the one that led to a war in Ukraine because over the objections of your smart leaders in 2008, *George Bush junior* pushed the commitment that NATO would enlarge to Russia's border, and knew how reckless that would be and did it anyway. Now your politicians, Oh, they're silent. Don't say a bad word about the United States. Mass media, don't say a bad word about the United States. But is this really leading to any solutions? Or is it leading closer and closer to World War three? I would say the latter.

In the German media, there's this narrative that, if the West fails to support Israel, Israel will be attacked by its Arab neighbors and it will fail to exist; that it's the only liberal democracy, and it needs the protection, from the Western states, especially given into account what happened with the Holocaust. What do you make of this narrative? And secondly, can you talk about how, sort of a solution can be implemented to provide security for both the Palestinians and the Israelis?

The narrative is so foolish. I can't believe anybody, much less a grown up, would make such a claim. Don't people look at any facts? But I can tell you, I spend my days with diplomats in the Middle East. I've been to the Middle East several times in recent months. I spend my time at the United Nations. There's no truth whatsoever to that claim. Exactly the opposite. Exactly the opposite. What the Arab states have said since

2002 is there can be peace and normalization of relations with two states. They've said it very clearly, very explicitly. They're ready and eager to work for Israel's security as part of two states. This is so clear, so plain. In November last year, after Israel's invasion of Gaza, the Arab and Islamic leaders met in Riyadh and they issued a declaration which anyone can find online.

“But are we negotiating? No. Are we even trying? No.”

It reiterated the Arab Peace Initiative and reiterated the commitment to normalization, security for Israel and for Palestine, and peace in the region based on international law and two states. So where does the media get the right to say the opposite of the truth? Where do they claim it? Do they not understand anything? Or does someone in the intelligence services tell them, No, you have to say this, or someone in the United States government says you have to say this or this is the position of the German government?! I don't think it is. On this issue, the German government says a two-state solution. It voted. It wants this. So where does the media get this idea? It has no bearing whatsoever. The way to solve issues like this is: sit down and negotiate. And if the negotiations don't lead to credible, monitorable, defensible outcomes, okay, then they failed. But are we negotiating? No. Are we even trying? No. We're just seeing these unilateral claims that have zero merit and are the opposite, the opposite of what the Arab and Islamic countries are saying right now.

Let us switch our attention to Ukraine. After months of delay due to domestic political differences, the US Congress was finally able to pass a comprehensive \$95.3 billion foreign aid package, which included \$61 billion to support Ukraine in its war against Russia, \$26 billion for Israel, and humanitarian aid for civilians in conflict zones around the world, including Gaza, and \$8.12 billion to, quote, "fight Communist China", unquote, in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly for Taiwan.

As far as Ukrainian aid is concerned, most of the funds will go to replenish US stockpiles and purchasing US defense systems. One notable difference, however, is their Army Tactical Missile System, also known as ATACMS. Until now, the US has sent ATACMS with a range of 160km. Now, for the first time, they will send ATACMS with a range of 300km, which, according to many

military analysts appearing in the German media, will make a significant difference in favor of the Ukraine military.

While visiting Ukraine, NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg also talked about Ukraine's NATO membership by announcing, quote, "Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO. Ukraine will become a member of NATO. The work we are undertaking now puts you on an irreversible path towards NATO membership so that when the time is right, Ukraine becomes a NATO member straightaway", unquote.

In your view, will this aid package, including longer range missiles as well as the promise of Ukraine to join NATO, finally drive the Russians out of Ukraine?

Look, what this will do is one of two things. Either it will destroy Ukraine, or it will destroy the world. That's our choice. Russia is not going to have NATO on its border. There will be a nuclear war before that. Again, any grown up knows these basic facts, but our politicians don't like to say it because this is a US project that goes back 25 years. The US project is: We can force our way through to expand NATO around, surrounding Russia and the Black Sea and Russia can't stop us. This is a project that goes back to Brzezinski in 1997. This is a project that goes back to the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008. This is a project that goes to the US backed coup over *Yanukovych* in February 2014. This is a project that goes to March 2022, when Ukraine and Russia were going to sign a peace based on neutrality, and the US and Britain said no.

"Would it be so bad for Ukraine to be neutral and at peace?"

And *Boris Johnson*, who I can't even say the words in polite company what he is, but anyway, what he did say recently is: Oh, we can't let Russia win, quote unquote, because this would be the end of Western hegemony. Okay, you want to fight about Western hegemony? We'll have World War three. Western hegemony is some absolutely crazy idea that the West runs the world when the world doesn't want to be run by the West. You know, we've had maniacs in the past that wanted to run the world.

Boris Johnson says, Yeah, this is about Western hegemony. Who wants Western hegemony? I want security, I'm sure Germany wants security. Do we want to run the world?! And anyone that thinks that the US is going to succeed in getting

NATO into Ukraine doesn't understand that we're courting nuclear war as we continue to push this.

Now, Jens Stoltenberg, I've known him for 30 years, he's a fool to be saying these things because he's gambling with my life. He's gambling with your life. He's gambling with all our lives. It's time to shut up on this. NATO is not going to Ukraine because we're going to have a nuclear war before that happens. But most likely we're going to have a destroyed Ukraine before that happens. It's simple. This is not complicated. And after all these years, people should figure this out. You know, at the beginning, maybe it was confusing, but the propaganda has been said over and over again to the point where it's complete nonsense and Stoltenberg goes out and says the same nonsense every day.

And he even said, you just look it up online, he said, this is a war over NATO enlargement. He said that. He said Putin didn't want NATO, we gave him NATO. So yeah, this is a war over NATO enlargement with the country with 6000 nuclear warheads that has already beaten the hell out of Ukrainians because it's a bigger country and a more powerful country. We keep sending Ukrainians to their death rather than settling this thing by saying, you know what? Would it be so bad for Ukraine to be neutral and at peace? What is the matter with our politicians? So deceitful, so stupid that they don't know the way to peace. And they put us all at risk every day through this kind of empty blather and rhetoric. And \$61 billion what? It's going to kill tens of thousands of more Ukrainians. It's going to delay peace. It's going to mean Russia will take more territory, not less. What are we doing? Can somebody act like a grown up in this?

«If we behave like rational adults, of course the world could be peaceful, secure and prosperous»

To my last question, you've mentioned nuclear war. We are seeing an escalation of wars around the world, Ukraine, Israel-Gaza, and now we're seeing Iran and Israel. Do you have any hope and optimism for the future?

Of course I do. Because if we understand these issues rationally, we can solve all of them. I testified in the UN Security Council last year. I went through four wars. I said they can all be stopped directly, immediately, today. The Ukraine war could end today. It just requires a call from Biden

to Putin to say, you know, that NATO enlargement is a bad idea. Let's call off this war. That's it.

The war in Gaza could end today. The US votes for a Security Council resolution that makes Palestine 194th member state. It says to these religious nationalist extremists in the Israeli government, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and Galant and others, Sorry, your dream of Greater Israel is over. There are going to be two states, and that's how it's going to be and we're not going to arm you anymore to fight Gaza. Oh my God, this war could end immediately. So, am I pessimistic? No, because I believe that we can reason. I bemoan the current situation where the adult politicians are scared. They don't speak the truth. They tell me things in private, then they

say the opposite in public. They're scared of the United States. I think the US is on a delusional course because it really believes in US hegemony. Is that what Germany is in for? US hegemony? I don't think so. So if we behave like rational adults, of course the world could be peaceful, secure and prosperous. So I'm optimistic.

Let's leave this interview at that note. Jeffrey Sachs, well-known economist and bestselling author. Thank you so much for your time today. Great to be with you. Thank you.

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