



## John Mearsheimer and Jeffrey Sachs | All-In Summit 2024

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**Speakers:** One of the most influential and controversial thinkers in the world. He is known as one of the world's leading experts on economic development. One of the most famous political scientists in history.

**John Mearsheimer (JM):** We're talking about moral and political principles here.

**Jeffrey Sachs (JS):** I would suggest that all four wars could be ended quickly.

**JM:** Great power politics is now back on the table.

**JS:** If we are anything as a world community, we have to implement what we've said.

**David Sacks (DS):** I'm excited for this panel. We're going to talk about foreign policy. We have, I think, two of the most interesting, eminent and renowned thinkers about foreign policy. Professor John Mearsheimer from University of Chicago and Professor Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia. So great to have you guys here today. It's a big world and there's a lot of things happening. So let's just jump into it. The big news over the past week was that Dick Cheney endorsed Kamala Harris for president. I think for people who see the world in partisan political terms, this might have been surprising. But I don't think that you guys were that surprised by that. Do you see an underlying logic to this? Jeff, why don't I start with you?

**JS:** I think it's obvious there is basically one deep state party and that is the party of Cheney, Harris, Biden, Victoria Nuland, my colleague at Columbia University now. And Nuland is kind of the face of all of this because she has been in every administration for the last 30 years. She was in the Clinton administration wrecking our policies towards Russia in the 1990s. She was in the Bush administration junior with Cheney wrecking our policies towards NATO enlargement. She was in then the Obama administration as Hillary's spokesperson first and then making a coup in Ukraine in February 2014. Not a great move. Started a war. Then she was Biden's undersecretary of state. Now, that's both parties. It's a colossal mess. And she's been Cheney's adviser. She's been Biden's adviser. And it makes perfect sense. This is the reality. We're trying to find out if there is another party, that's the big question.

**DS:** John, what's your thought on that? Do you see any difference between Republicans and Democrats?

**JM:** No, I like to refer to the Republicans and the Democrats as Tweedledee and Tweedledum. There's hardly any difference. I actually think the one exception is that former President Trump, when he became president in 2017, was bent on beating back the Deep State and becoming a different kind of leader on the foreign policy front. But he basically failed. And he has vowed that if he gets elected this time, it will be different and he will beat back the Deep State. He will pursue a foreign policy that's fundamentally different than Republicans and Democrats have pursued up to now. And the big question on the table is whether or not you think Trump can beat the Deep State in these two established parties. And I'd bet against Trump.

**Chamath Palihapitiya (CP):** John and Jeff, but let's start with John. Can you actually define for me, I don't understand when people say Deep State what it is. I almost view the term comically. We have one of our friends in our group chat who we call Deep State, who is really in the Deep State, but we say it as a joke. But for maybe the uninitiated, what does it actually mean? What are their incentives? Who are they? Jeff, maybe you want to start or John, you want to start?

**JM:** Yeah, I'll say a few words about it. When we talk about the Deep State, we're talking really about the administrative state. It's very important to understand that starting in the late 19th, early 20th century, given developments in the American economy, it was imperative that we develop, and this was true of all Western countries, a very powerful central state that could run the country. And over time, that state has grown in power. And since World War Two, the United States, as you all know, has been involved in every nook and cranny of the world fighting wars here, there and everywhere. And to do that, you need a very powerful administrative state that can help manage that foreign policy. But in the process, what happens is you get all of these high level bureaucrats, mid-level and low level bureaucrats, who become established in positions in the Pentagon, the State Department, the intelligence community, you name it. And they end up having a vested interest in pursuing a particular foreign policy. And the particular foreign policy that they like to pursue is the one that the Democrats and the Republicans are pushing. And that's why we talk about Tweedledee and Tweedledum with regard to the two parties, you could throw in the Deep State as being on the same page as those other two institutions.

**JS:** There's a very interesting interview of Putin in Figaro in 2017. And he says, I've dealt with three presidents now. They come into office with some ideas even. But then the men in the dark suits and the blue ties, and then he says, I wear red ties, but they wear blue ties, they come in and explain the way the world really is and there go the ideas. And I think that's Putin's experience. That's our experience. That's my experience. Which is that there's a deeply ingrained foreign policy. It has been in place in my interpretation for many decades. But arguably, a variant of it has been in place since 1992. I got to watch some of it early on because I was an advisor to Gorbachev and I was an advisor to Yeltsin. And so I saw early makings of this, though I didn't fully understand it except in retrospect. But that policy has

been mostly in place pretty consistently for 30 years, and it didn't really matter whether it was Bush senior, whether it was Clinton, whether it was Bush junior, whether it was Obama, whether it was Trump. After all, who did Trump hire? He hired John Bolton. Well, the pretty Deep State. They told, you know, he explained, this is the way it is. And by the way, Bolton explained also in his memoirs, when Trump didn't agree, we figured out ways to trick him, basically.

**CP:** And what are their incentives? Is it war? Is it self-enrichment? Is it power? Is it all three?

**Dave Friedberg (DF):** Is there a philosophical entrenchment or is it just this inertial issue that like once a policy begins, it's hard to change and the system's just working with 10,000 people working towards it.

**JS:** You know, if I were lucky to sit next to the world's greatest political philosopher, which I am, he'd give you a good answer, the right answer, which is if you want to interpret American foreign policy, it is to maximise power. And he gives a, John gives an explanation of that. We have some differences, but I think it's a very good description of American foreign policy, which is that it's trying to maximise global power essentially to be a global hegemon. I think it could get us all killed. Because it's a little bit delusional in my mind. But not his interpretation of their idea, but the fact that they hold that idea is a little weird to me. But in any event, that's the idea. And every time a decision comes inside that I've seen, I'm an economist, so I don't see the security decisions the same way, but every decision that I've seen always leans in the same direction for the last 30 years, which is power as the central objective. So Clinton faced an internal cabinet, really, debate: Should NATO be enlarged?

**DF:** This is a post-Cold War phenomenon?

**JS:** Well, I'll let John take that.

**JM:** Two very quick points. First of all, I do believe that the people who are in favour of this foreign policy do believe in it. It's not cynical. They really believe that we're doing the right thing.

**DF:** I've met them. Yeah.

**JM:** Yeah. The second point I would make to you and this sort of adds on to what Jeff said, Jeff said power has a lot to do with this. And as a good realist, I, of course believe that. But it's also very important to understand that the United States is a fundamentally liberal country, and we believe that we have a right, we have a responsibility, and we have the power to run around the world and remake the world in America's image. Most people in the foreign policy establishment, the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, they believe that. And that is what has motivated our foreign policy in large part since the Cold War ended. Because remember, when the Cold War ends, we have no rival great power left. So what are we going to do with all this power that we have? What we decide to do is go out and remake the world in our own image.

**DF:** So that's a value point of view, though, right? There are values that they hold dear, that many do hold dear, that liberalism, democracy does ultimately, I believe I've heard this, reduce conflict worldwide, that there was an importance that we've never seen to democratic nations since World War Two go to war, and that there's a reason why we want to see liberalism kind of breed throughout the world. And it's our responsibility for global peace to make that a mandate.

**JS:** Let me step in for one moment.

**JM:** Just very quickly.

**DF:** And by the way, I'm, what do you call it, where you pull the spirits of the voice of others? But I'm just trying to...

**Jason Calacanis (JC):** Channelling.

**DF:** Channelling, that's the word.

**JM:** I want to be very clear. I am forever thankful that I was born in a liberal democracy and I love liberalism. But the question here is, do you think that we can run around the world imposing liberal democracy on other countries and in some cases shoving it down their throat, doing it at the end of a rifle barrel? And my argument is that's almost impossible to do. It almost always backfires; think Iraq, Afghanistan, so forth and so on. And secondly, you begin to erode liberalism in the United States because you built the Deep State, right? And you want to understand that a lot of the complaints here about cracking down on freedom of speech and so forth and so on are related to the fact that we have this ambitious foreign policy. Those two things go together in very important ways.

**DF:** What an irony.

**JS:** Let me disagree just a bit. Because we agree actually on the behaviour. And I've learned, I'd say most of that from you, that it's power seeking. Truly, John, in my work, 40 years overseas, I don't think the US government gives a damn about these other places. I don't think they really care if it's a liberal democracy, if it's a dictatorship, they want their right of ways. They want the military bases. They want the state to be in support of the United States. They want NATO enlargement. I know you've written and there are some who believe in state building. God, if they do, they are so incompetent, it's unbelievable.

**JC:** But Professor Sachs...

**JS:** I'll give you an example, if I could, just one, take one example. I'm a friend with one of the only Ph.D. Afghani economists, a senior person in the US academia over the last 30 years. You would think that the State Department, if they were interested in state building, would ask him one day, one moment something about Afghanistan. Never happened.

**CP:** One question.

**JS:** Never happened.

**CP:** One question.

**JS:** Never happened. He asked me, Can you get me a meeting with the State Department? They were completely uninterested. This is about power. You're too idealistic, John. They don't care about the other places. They may feel we should be whatever we want, free and so forth. But freedom; I've seen my with my own eyes the coups, the overthrows, the presidents, Democratic presidents led away. They don't care at all. This is Washington. Be a realist. Come on.

**JC:** Professor Mearsheimer, when we talk about power, there are other people in the world who are trying to accumulate power. We live in a multipolar world right now, and they have, in some cases, very nefarious or bad intent, and they do not have democracies. So it's one thing to, you know, tell people in Afghanistan you need to evolve to be a perfect democracy like the one we have here. I think we all agree that's unrealistic and insane and not practical. But what about the free countries of the world uniting together to stop dictators from invading other free countries? Is that noble? Is that a good use of power and a good framework for America to evolve to?

**JM:** No, I don't think so. I think that what the United States should do is worry about its own national interests. In some cases, that's going to involve aligning ourselves with a dictator. If we're fighting World War Two all over again, it's December 8th, 1941, you surely would be in favour of allying not with Adolf Hitler, with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union against Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany. Sometimes you have to make those kinds of compromises. As I said before, I love liberal democracy. I have no problem aligned with liberal democracy. But when you begin to think in the terms that you're thinking, you end up with an impulse to do social engineering around the world, and that gets you in all sorts of problems.

**JC:** Well, what I'm proposing is when dictatorships invade other countries, then we take action.

**JM:** It depends.

**JC:** Maybe to defend them.

**JM:** It depends.

**JC:** Yeah, of course.

**JM:** I mean, when Russia invades Ukraine, basically what you're saying is you want to go to war on behalf of Ukraine against Russia. Are you in favour of that?

**JC:** No, I would say diplomacy would obviously be what we'd want to exhaust. But if they do roll into other free countries, I think there's an argument for the free countries of the world to get together and say to dictators, we're not going to allow this.

**JS:** Could I come in here? Could I clarify a few things? Look, first of all almost all the time that we intervene, it's because we view this as a power situation for the US. So whether it's Ukraine or Syria or Libya or other places, even if we define it as defending something, believe me, it's not about defending something. It's about a perception of US power and US interest. And it's in the objectives of US global hegemony. And if we analyse the Ukraine conflict just even a little bit below the surface, this is not a conflict about Putin invading Ukraine. This is something a lot different that has to do with American power projection into the former Soviet Union. So it's completely different. Second, if we decide we're the police, which we do, you can't imagine how cynical bullshit we use to justify our actions. We used the cynical bullshit that we're defending the people of Benghazi to bomb the hell out of Libya to kill Muammar Gaddafi. Why did we do that? Well, I'm kind of an expert on that region. And I can tell you, maybe because Sarkozy didn't like Gaddafi. There's no much deeper reason except Hillary liked every bombing she could get her hands on. And Obama was kind of convinced, my secretary of state says: Go with it. So why don't we go with the NATO expedition? It had nothing to do with Libya. It unleashed 15 years of chaos, cheated the UN security Council because like everything else we've done, it was on false pretences. We did the same with trying to overthrow Syria. We did the same by conspiring to overthrow Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine in February 2014. So the problem with this argument is: We're not nice guys. We're not trying to save the world. We're not trying to make democracies. We had a committee, by the way, of all the luminaries you could mention, the neocon crazies, but they're luminaries, the Committee for the People of Chechnya. Are you kidding? Do you think they even knew where Chechnya is or cared about Chechnya? But it was an opportunity to get at Russia, to weaken Russia, to support a jihadist movement inside Russia. This is a game. But it's the game that John has described better than anyone in the world. It's a game of power. It's not that we're defending real things. If you want to defend real things, go to the UN security Council and convince others because the other countries are not crazy and they don't want mayhem in the world. But we play games, so they say, that's a game, Iraq, which was obviously a game before we went in; obviously Colin Powell could not move his lips without lying that day, obviously. And so they said, No. But if we're real about our interests, then you go to the UN security Council and then it's not just on us. It's actually then a collective security issue.

**JC:** Professor Mearsheimer, if we were to take Jeffrey's position here that we are exerting power for the sake of our reputation, and in fact, to weaken dictatorships, if I'm summarising correctly here, is that not a good strategy to weaken dictators around the world who might like to invade other countries? Is there a framing in which you could see that being for a world where democracy and people living freely has gone down in our lifetimes? Is that not noble? Is there not a justification somebody can make for – I'm not saying I have that, but I'm just trying to steal me on the other side of this. Is weakening dictators and despots a good strategy?

**JM:** It depends.

**JC:** Well, let's talk about the two that we have. You know, Xi Jinping, I think you wanted to get to eventually, and then Ukraine and Putin. Are these people worth trying to contain or even weaken?

**JM:** Well, in terms of China, I'm fully in favour of containing China.

**JC:** Okay, so containment check.

**JM:** Its containment. I'm not interested in regime change. I'm not interested in trying to turn China into a democracy.

**JC:** Not going to happen.

**JM:** Not going to happen. We tried it, actually, and I thought it was foolish to even pursue a policy of engagement toward China. With regard to Russia, I don't think Russia is a serious threat to the United States. And indeed, I think the United States should have good relations with Putin. It's a remarkably foolish policy to push him into the arms of the Chinese. There are three great powers in the system, the United States, China and Russia. China is a peer competitor to the United States, it is the most serious threat to the United States. Russia is the weakest of those three great powers, and it's not a serious threat to us. If you are playing balance of power politics and you're interested as the United States in containing China, you want Russia on your side of the ledger. But what we have done, in effect, is we have pushed Russia into the arms of the Chinese. This is a remarkably foolish policy. And furthermore, by getting bogged down in Ukraine and now bogged down in the Middle East, it's become very difficult for us to pivot to Asia, to deal with China, which is the principal threat that we face.

**JS:** David, could I just say, two thirds right? Perfect.

**JC:** So you gave him a B or a B + ?

**JM:** A -.

**JS:** I always give him an A -.

**JC:** Oh, is there grade inflation?

**JS:** I just wanted to add a footnote, which is that China is also not a threat. It's just not a threat.

**JM:** We're going to get to it.

**JS:** China is a market. It's got great food, great culture, wonderful people. A civilization ten times older than ours. It's not a threat.

**DF:** Well, as an economist, can you talk about the impact of a cold or hot conflict with China from an economic perspective, given the trade relations?

**JS:** Yeah, it would wreck California, for one thing. It would destroy the economy that you guys are making. Completely. This economy has been the biggest beneficiary of China's rise, probably in the whole world. So it's crazy. Maybe if you're worried, if you're really worried about whether a worker in Ohio has a particular job on a particular assembly line, then you can be anti-China. If you're worried about the tech industry, about California, about peace in the future, you should be pro-China. That's all.

**DF:** So why has it become so universal to assume that we are already in a state of conflict with China on not just party lines, but like almost any spectrum you could kind of like consider?

**JS:** John said it exactly right and he predicted it better than anyone in the whole world in 2001. He said, when China becomes large, we're going to have conflict. Because that's John's theory. And it's right as a description of American foreign policy that we are for power. They are big. Therefore they're an enemy. They're an enemy of our aspiration to global hegemony.

**DS:** Let John jump in here.

**JM:** Is it okay if I talk about this?

**DS:** Yeah, I mean, I think that – well it is interesting. I mean, you and Jeff, I think, arrive at similar conclusions about Ukraine, but different ones on China, right? Because Jeff is an economist and I think sees the world in fundamentally positive ways based on the potential for trade, economics, basically. Whereas you see the world as more of a zero sum game based on the balance of power. Why don't you just explain that difference?

**JM:** It is very important to emphasise, as David was saying, that Jeff and I agree on all sorts of issues, including Ukraine and Israel-Palestine, but we disagree fundamentally, as he just made clear on China. And let me explain to you why I think that's the case and then Jeff can tell you why he thinks I'm wrong. It has to do with security, whether you privilege security or survival or whether you privilege prosperity. And economists and I would imagine most of you in the audience really care greatly about maximising prosperity. For someone like me who's a realist, what I care about is maximising the state's prospects of survival. And when you live in an anarchic system and in IR speak, that means there's no higher authority, there's no nightwatchman that could come down and rescue you if you get into trouble, and this is the international system. There's no higher authority. In that anarchic world the best way to survive is to be really powerful. As we used to say when I was a kid on New York City playgrounds, you want to be the biggest and baddest dude on the block. And that's simply because it's the best way to survive. If you're really powerful, nobody fools around with you. The United States is a regional hegemonic. It's the only regional hegemon on the planet. We dominate the Western Hemisphere. And what China has begun to do as it's got increasingly powerful economically is translate that economic might into military might, and it is trying to dominate Asia. It wants to push us out beyond the first island chain. It wants to push us out beyond the second Island chain. It wants to be like we are in the Western Hemisphere. And I don't blame the Chinese one bit. If I was the national security advisor in Beijing, that's what



I'd be telling Xi Jinping we should be trying to do. But of course, from an American point of view, this is unacceptable and we do not tolerate peer competitors. We do not want another regional hegemonic on the planet. In the 20th century, there were four countries that threatened to become regional hegemonies like us, imperial Germany, imperial Japan, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The United States played a key role in putting all four of those countries on the scrap heap of history. We want to remain the only regional hegemon in the world. We are a ruthless, great power. Never want to lose sight of that fact. And the end result of this is you get an intense security competition between China and the United States. And it revolves around the concept of security, not prosperity. So what you see beginning to happen is that it's in all domains where the competition takes place, especially high tech, we do not want them defeating us in the high tech war. We are competing with them economically. We are competing with them militarily. And this is because the best way to survive is for us, the United States of America, to be the only regional hegemonic on the planet.

**DS:** So, Jeff, let me set it up for Jeff here. So, Jeff, you and John, I think, agree that the game on the board is power seeking. I think what John is saying is there are smart ways and dumb ways to pursue power. That containing China is a smart way, what we're doing in Ukraine is a dumb way. Whereas it seems like you're saying that all power seeking behaviour is bad. That's not the game we should be playing. We should somehow opt out of that. Is that kind of where you're going?

**JS:** It's not a bad way to say it, but I would put it in another way. I read a very good book, John's. And John described, I'm going to quote him, but he can quote himself afterwards. He said that "the regional hegemonies don't threaten each other, actually". Why? Because we have a big ocean in between. I deeply believe that China is not a threat to the United States. And I deeply believe the only threat to the United States, period, in the world, given the oceans, given our size and given the military, is nuclear war. I deeply believe we're close to nuclear war. Because we have a mindset that leads us in that direction. We have a mindset that everything is a challenge for survival and that escalation is therefore always the right approach. My view is that a little bit of prudence could save the whole planet. So why I don't like Ukraine is that I don't see any reason in the world that NATO has to be on Russia's border with Ukraine. I was, as I said, Gorbachev's advisor and Yeltsin's advisor, and they wanted peace and they wanted cooperation, but whatever they wanted, they did not want the US military on their border. So if we continue to push, as we did, we would get to war. John explained that better than anybody. We're now at war. And even this morning, there is further escalation. Blinken has said, Well, if the Iranians give these missiles, then we will give missiles to hit deep into Russia. This is a recipe. And then we had Bill Burns, the CIA director, say last week, an absurdity that he knows, but CIA directors never tell the truth, if they do, they lose their job. But he said, Don't worry about nuclear war. Don't worry about sabre rattling. My advice to you is worry a lot about nuclear war and so be prudent. You don't have to put the US military on Russia's border. Okay? And my advice to Russia and to Mexico, when I'm going to Mexico tomorrow, I'll give them a piece of advice. Don't let China or Russia build a military base on the Rio Grande. Not a good idea for Mexico. Not a good

idea for Ukraine. Not a good idea for Russia. Not a good idea for China. Not a good idea for the United States. We need to stay a little bit away from each other so that we don't have a nuclear war. By the way, I do recommend another good book, and that is Annie Jacobsen's *Nuclear War: A Scenario*. It takes two hours to read. The world ends in two hours in the book, and it's a very persuasive guide that one nuke can ruin your whole day as they say. And so my strong advice on this therefore is, recognise, China, first of all, is not a threat to the United States security. Big oceans, big nuclear deterrent and so forth. Second, we don't have to be in China's face. What do I mean by that? We don't have to provoke World War Three over Taiwan. That's a long, complicated issue. But this would be the stupidest thing for my grandchildren to die for, imaginable. And I resent it every day when we play that game. We have three agreements with China that say we're going to stay out of that and we should. And then China would have no reason for war either. And then on the economics side, let me just reiterate, because I was asked yesterday and there was some surprise, was it good to let China into the WTO? I said, of course, it enriched all of you, by the way. It enriched me. It enriched this country. It enriched the world, including enriching China. That's normal. Economics is not a zero sum game. We all agree on that. I believe that security doesn't have to be a zero sum game either. We can stay a little bit away from each other. And China does not spend its time bemoaning America being a Western hemisphere hegemon. They don't. That's not their greatest interest to bring down American power in the Western Hemisphere.

**CP:** Jeff, what about the energy?

**DS:** Hold on, let's let John respond to this.

**JM:** Just very quickly. Most of you have probably never asked yourself the question, why is the United States roaming all over the planet interfering in every country's business? It's in part because it's so powerful. But it's also because it's a regional hegemon, which means we have no threats in the Western Hemisphere, so we are free to roam. The great danger, Jeff, if China becomes a regional hegemonic and doesn't have to worry about security...

**JS:** Then they behave like us.

**JM:** Then they behave like us, that's exactly right.

**JS:** Can't we do better?

**JM:** But my point to you, Jeff, is let's prevent that from happening by preventing them from becoming a regional hegemon. We don't want them to have freedom to roam. You were talking about them putting military bases in Mexico. That's our great fear.

**JS:** It's not my great fear. They have no interest in doing so because they don't want to get blown up either.

**JC:** They do seem to have a big interest, Jeff, in Africa, India, Russia. And are...

**JS:** I am sorry, say again.

**JC:** China has a major...

**JS:** Doesn't have military bases there.

**JC:** Well they're building nuclear power plants and trade and they're building debt loads.

**JS:** Well, it is a big difference. I am all in favour of that. Let's go compete that way. I'm all in favour of that.

**JM:** But, Jeff, that's because they're not a regional hegemonic yet.

**JS:** Yeah, if you try to prevent them from being a regional hegemon, we're going to end up in World War Three. Because as you say yourself, this can absolutely spill over into war. I don't want it to spill over into war on the theory that maybe someday they behave differently. That's not a good theory for me, that part.

**DS:** So, John, can we contain China, prevent them from becoming a regional hegemon without directly defending Taiwan? I mean, isn't that where the rubber meets the road?

**JM:** No, it's not just Taiwan. I mean, one could argue, there are sort of three flashpoints in East Asia that you folks should keep your eye on. One is obviously Taiwan. Two is the South China Sea. And three is the East China Sea. And I think, David, that the place where a conflict is most likely today is not over Taiwan. I could explain why I think Taiwan is not a serious problem at the moment or for the foreseeable future. The South China Sea is a very dangerous place. We could end up in a war for sure, even if we did not defend Taiwan. So Taiwan, you don't want to overemphasise. I agree with Jeff that we definitely don't want a war and we certainly don't want a nuclear war. And he is absolutely correct that there's a risk of a nuclear war if war breaks out of any sort between China and the United States. Many of us in the audience remember the Cold War, and this was an ever present danger in the Cold War. But my argument is that this is inevitable. Because in a world where you don't have a higher authority and you care about your survival, you have a deep seated interest as any state in the system, to be as powerful as possible. And that means dominating your region in the world.

**JC:** There is one player on this chessboard that hasn't come up yet, and maybe we could skate to where the puck is going. You know, when you talk about the South China Sea, okay, sure, South Korea, Japan, Australia, all of those major players there, they're just a couple of hundred million people. But then China is in population decline. Xi apparently is self-destructing in terms of trade. It seems like containment is working pretty well there because of all the self-inflicted wounds. But the fastest growing country, the fastest growing economy, the quickest to develop is India. And they seem to have a very pragmatic approach. They'll buy cheap oil from Putin, and they are their own sovereign country with their own point of view. Would we not be really well advised over the next ten to 20 years to make that our priority and India's role in this? How do you look at them?

**JM:** Well, we definitely view India as an ally, right? It's part of the quad, which is this Rube Goldberg type alliance structure that we put together in East Asia that includes Australia, Japan, the United States and India. And India is smartly maintaining its good relations with Russia. The Indians understand, like Jeff and I do, that the Russians are no great threat. But from India's point of view, the real threat is China.

**JC:** Right.

**JM:** And there are two places where India cares about China. One is on the India-China border up in the Himalayas, where they've actually had conflicts, right? And there's a real danger of war breaking out. The second place, which is maybe even more dangerous, not at the moment, but will be over time, is the Indian Ocean, because the Chinese are imitating the United States. They not only want to be a regional hegemonic, they want to develop power projection capability. So the Chinese are building a blue water navy that can come out of East Asia through the Straits of Malacca, through the Indian Ocean, to the Persian Gulf. And once you start talking about going to the Indian Ocean, the Indians get spooked. And that's when the Americans and the Indians come together.

**JS:** Let's think of this from an engineering point of view, if we could. Why are the Chinese developing the navy? Because for 40 years, I've read essays on all of the choke points in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Indian Ocean against China. That's our policy, choke points. Look at the Malacca Straits. Look what we can do here. First island chain. This is American strategy. Can we keep the Chinese submarines out of the Pacific Ocean, first island chain and so forth. So of course, they react. They're rich. They're going to build a navy so that they can get their oil on which their economy runs. Can we be a little bit sensible with them and decide how we're not going to have choke points and then we don't have to have a nuclear war, which is really going to ruin our day. That's the point. We can think a little bit. We can understand it from their perspective. We can understand it from our perspective. Deconfliction. By the way, I don't believe India is an ally. India is a superpower. India is going to have its own very distinctive interests. Thank you. It's not going to be an ally of the United States. I happen to like India enormously, and...

**JC:** We're making our iPhones there.

**JS:** ...admire their policies. But the idea that India is going to align with the United States against China, in somebody's dream – in Washington. Because it's another delusion in Washington, because they should get a passport and go see the world and understand something. These are my own students in Washington right now, because they didn't listen to their professor, Jeffrey.

**JC:** But we're making our iPhones in India now, is that not significantly important.

**JS:** Sorry, say it again.

**JC:** We're moving iPhone production. You're into economics here and that impact. We got Apple moving out of China. You've got Japan funding people leaving China to Vietnam and

to India. Is that not the solution here? As we decouple from China, it seems like they come back to the table. We had Xi Jinping kick all the venture capitalists, all investment out of China. He got rid of all the education start-ups and then whatever, two or three years later he's in San Francisco asking all of us to invest more money and said, Where'd you go?

**JS:** Okay, first of all, invite me back ten years and we'll see how smart all these decisions are because...

**JC:** Xi Jinping?

**JS:** No, I'm talking about yes, we moved to India, that's our great ally, and then we're going to have other other issues.

**JC:** And Vietnam.

**JS:** Okay. I think you said that Xi Jinping's trade policy is self imploding or something.

**JC:** It seems like there's a lot of self-inflicted wounds.

**JS:** No it is not. Let me explain what the wounds are.

**JC:** Okay.

**JS:** The wounds are the United States deliberate policy to stop you from selling things to China and to stop China buying things from you. That's not self-inflicted wounds.

**JC:** Oh, no, you're wrong here.

**JS:** This is a clear...

**JC:** You are wrong here.

**JS:** Wait a minute. Wait. Just to say, let me say please, because it's very important for the economy of the people in this room. This is a decision that was taken around 2014 to contain China. And it's been systematically applied since then. And it's not a surprise that Biden kept all the things that Trump did and added more. And now Trump says, I'm going to do all the things that Biden has kept in place and I'm going to do more. This is not a self-inflicted wound. The United States has closed the market to China. Okay. Is that smart? No, it's not smart. Is it, by the way, recuperating American manufacturing jobs? Zero. It may shift them a bit. It may make things less efficient. It may make all of you lose a bit more money or not make as much money. But is it going to solve any single economic problem in the United States? No way.

**Speakers:** Crosstalking

**JM:** I just want to ask Jeff a question on this. My argument is that this is the way the world works.

**JS:** Yes, I know. And it is.

**JM:** And it is. But if I'm describing how the world really works, how do you beat me?

**JS:** The reason is you've described a world, you've described, I think, better than any person I ever read or know how American foreign policy works. I think it's likely to get us all blown up. And [inaudible] not because of John, but because he made an accurate description of a profoundly misguided approach, which is power seeking. Even if you're safe as a regional hegemon, you're never safe if another regional hegemon does what you do. No, you can't allow that to happen, so you have to meddle in every single place in the world. All I'm saying...

**Speakers:** But ...

**JS:** Wait, let me just finish. Because this is important. That it is important to say try this in the nuclear age. You don't get a second chance. So this to me is the most definitive fact of our lives, which is we are now in a war, direct war, direct war, not proxy war, direct war with Russia, which has 6000 nuclear warheads. I can't think of anything more imbecilic than that. Aside from the fact that I know step by step, because I saw it with my own eyes how we got into that mess because we thought we had to meddle up to including putting NATO into Georgia in the caucuses of all places, and Ukraine. So we made that because we have to meddle because we couldn't let good enough stand. If we do the same with China, there will be a war. But it's not like reading about the Crimean War or World War One or World War Two. That's my difference. This is a fine theory that explains a lot of things. But, damn if you can make ChatGPD, or you can make Optimus or you can make all the rest, we can avoid nuclear war. So just do a little bit better than saying it's inevitable.

**DS:** All right. So we only have a minute left, so I want to give it to John.

**JM:** He had a question.

**DF:** I know, but we only have a minute left and it's...

**JC:** We got to add five minutes. This is the best panel I have ever been on in my life. Can we just add five minutes?

**JC:** We got to have five or ten minutes. It is the best panel – is this the best panel ever?

**DS:** Okay, we got five minutes. But before we leave this topic, John, your book is called The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. You clearly understand the tragic aspect of how great power, rivalry, great power competition can lead to disaster. What Jeff is saying is we're now in the nuclear age and it's going to lead to nuclear war. So do we have to be on this path or is there a way off of it?

**JM:** Two points. In my heart, I'm with Jeff in my head, I'm not with Jeff. I wish he were right, but I don't believe he's right. To answer your question head on, I believe that there is no

way out. We are in an iron cage. This is just the way international politics works. It is because you're in an anarchic system where you can never be sure that a really powerful state in the system won't come after you and inflict a century of national humiliation on you. So you go to great lengths to avoid that by trying to gain power at the expense of another power. And that leads to all sorts of trouble. Can war be avoided? I like to distinguish between security competition, which I think is inevitable, and war, which is where security competition devolves into war. I think war can be avoided and we were thankfully successful in that regard during the Cold War. And hopefully that will be the case in the US-China competition moving forward. Can I guarantee that? No. Does this disturb me greatly? Yes. But again, this is just the tragic aspect of the world.

**DF:** Let me just ask one, because a little bit.. I know we were going to try and talk about the Middle East for a good chunk of this. So I just wanted to scenario, propose or kind of give you guys a scenario, and get your reaction. Because it is kind of what feels to be the most imminent theatre of conflict, the West Bank, that the Israelis are buttressing the settlements. There's a lot of checkpoints. Things are getting very tense. They're running raids. And it's becoming a very difficult place to live for Palestinians, and there's a real concern that the West Bank...

**JM:** ... and Israelis.

**DF:** And Israelis. But there's a real risk that the West Bank collapses and turns into a real conflict zone. If that happens, the Jordanians are sitting right there and they're not going to let Palestinians get slaughtered. They're going to have to do something. And they're such a strong ally of the United States. Does that trigger a theatre of response? Where, what is Saudi going to do? Are others going to be drawn to the region? Does the collapse of the West Bank or the conflict that seems to be brewing in the West Bank become this kind of tinderbox for everyone showing up and getting involved and create some sort of regional issue that we get drawn into in a bigger way?

**JS:** Can I start and have John have the last word? I work each day at the UN and discuss this issue with ambassadors from all over the world. There is, over the last 50 years an agreement on what would make for peace. And the agreement is two states, maybe with the big wall between them on the 4th of June 1967 borders with a state of Palestine being the 194th UN member State and its capital in East Jerusalem and control over the Islamic holy sites. And that is international law. The International Court of Justice just reaffirmed that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal. The ICJ is likely to find that Israel is in violation of the 1948 genocide convention, which I very much believed to be in violation. So my own solution to this is implement international law, two states, build the wall as high as you need to build, but you give Palestinian rights. You establish a state of Palestine. You stop the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians. You stop the Israeli apartheid state. And you have two states living side by side. Israel is dead set against that. The entire Israeli political governance now is dead set against that. Hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers in the West Bank are dead set against that; Smotrich, Ben-Gvir, Gallant, Netanyahu are dead set against that. So my view is it has nothing to do with what Israel wants. It has to do with enforcement of international law.

So I want to see this imposed, not because Israel agrees to it, but because it is imposed. And there is one country that stands in the way of imposing this. Not Iran, not the Saudis, not Egypt, not Russia, not China, not any country in the European Union, one country and one country alone, and that is because of the United States of America and the Israel lobby. Somebody wrote a very good book about that, too, that I know. The best book ever written about it by John. And that's what stops the solution that could bring peace. And I believe we should bring peace, because not only would that bring peace to the Palestinians and peace to the Israelis, but it would avoid potentially another flashpoint that could easily end up in World War Three.

**JM:** Let me answer your question about escalation, potentially the Jordanians coming in. Israel faces three big problems aside from problems with centrifugal forces inside the society. One is the Palestinian problem, which is both in Gaza and in the West Bank. That's one. Two is Hezbollah. And three is Iran. I think there is virtually no chance of what you described happening, which is if the Israelis were to go on a rampage in the West Bank, similar to what they've done in Gaza, that the Jordanians would come in or the Egyptians or the Saudis. They simply don't have the military capability. This is a scenario where the Israelis completely dominate. So in terms of escalation with regard to the Israel-Palestine problem, I don't think there's much potential. Hezbollah is a different issue, but mainly because it's linked with Iran, right? And Iran is the really dangerous flashpoint because, as you know, the Russians are now closely allied with the Iranians. The Chinese are moving in that direction as well. And if Israel gets involved in a war with Iran, we're going to come in, in all likelihood. Remember, when the Israelis attacked the Iranian embassy in Damascus on April 1st, on April 14th, the Iranians retaliated.

**DF:** The reciprocal response.

**JM:** But we were involved.

**DF:** We were forewarned, weren't we?

**JM:** Yes, we were forewarned. But the point is that we were involved in the fighting, right? We were involved with the Israelis, with the French, the British, the Jordanians and the Saudis. We were all involved in the fighting. So this gets at the escalation problem. Now, to counter the Iranian escalation scenario, the fact is Iran does not want a war with the United States, and the United States does not want a war with Iran. And it's the Israelis, especially Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been trying to sort of suck us into a war because he wants us, the United States, to really whack Iran, weaken it militarily, and especially to go after its nuclear capabilities. Because as you well know, they are close to the point where they can develop nuclear weapons. So the Israelis are the ones who want us to get involved in a big war with Iran. That's the escalation flashpoint. And the \$64,000 question is whether you think the United States and Iran kind of colluding can work together to prevent the Israelis from getting us sucked in.

**DF:** That question will be answered based on who leads the next administration?



**JM:** Well, if you believe that, it matters who leads the next administration, that is true.

**DF:** I take it. Thank you.

**JC:** Let me just say, Jeffrey and John, now I know why Sacks will not stop talking about you two. This was the most amazing panel of the event so far. Give it up for Jeffrey Sachs and John Mearsheimer.

**END**

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