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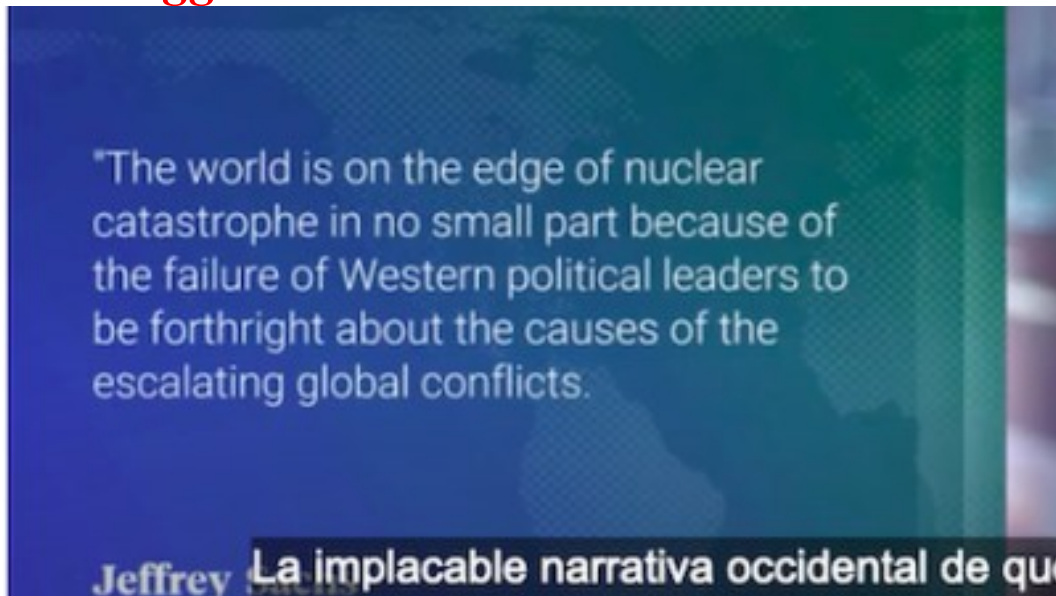
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By Amy Goodman, Juan González

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Interview with Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University

## "Dangerous" US Policy and "False Narrative of the West" Aggravate Tensions with Russia and China



Sources: Democracy Now!

Sachs says the bipartisan approach to U.S. foreign policy is "inconceivably dangerous and misguided" and warns that the conditions the U.S. is fostering are "a recipe for another war" in East Asia.

AMY GOODMAN: Politico reports [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/08/29/biden-taiwan-arms-sales-congress-00054126>] that the Biden administration will ask the U.S. Congress to approve a \$1.1 billion arms sale to Taiwan. According to the outlet, the sale includes 60 anti-ship missiles and 100 air-to-air missiles. This comes after two U.S. warships sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Aug. 28 for the first time since House

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Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan earlier this month. China condemned the visit and launched large-scale military exercises near Taiwan.

Meanwhile, President Biden last week announced additional military aid to Ukraine worth \$3 billion, including money for missiles, artillery shells and drones to help Ukrainian forces fight Russia.

To talk about U.S. foreign policy regarding Russia and China we are joined by economist Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Center for Sustainable Development and chair of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Sachs served as an advisor to three UN secretaries-general. His most recent article is titled "The West's False Narrative on Russia and China."

At the beginning of the article, Sachs writes: "The world is on the verge of nuclear catastrophe, largely because the political leaders of the West have not been transparent about the causes of the escalation of world conflicts. The relentless Western narrative that the West is noble while Russia and China are evil is a simplistic and extraordinarily dangerous stance," Sachs said.

Jeffrey Sachs, welcome to Democracy Now! Could you start by talking about this?

**JEFFREY SACHS:** Thank you. I am pleased to be with you.

**AMY GOODMAN:** What should people in the West and in the rest of the world understand about what's happening now with these conflicts, with Russia, between Russia and Ukraine, and with China?

**JEFFREY SACHS:** The most important point is that we are not using diplomacy, but weapons. This arms sale to Taiwan that has been announced, and about which they have spoken this morning on the programme, is just another concrete case. This does not make Taiwan safer. This doesn't make the world a safer place and clearly doesn't make America a safer place.

This goes much further back. I think we can start 30 years ago. When the Soviet Union disappeared, some American leaders got into their heads the idea that there was now what they called the "unipolar world," and that the United States was the only superpower and could take control of everything. The results have been disastrous. We've had three decades of militarization of U.S. foreign policy. A new tufts University database shows that there have been more than 100 military interventions by the U.S. since 1991. It's really incredible.

I myself have seen, in my extensive work over the past 30 years in Russia, Central Europe, China, and other parts of the world, how america's approach is first and foremost and often

only military. We arm those we love. We call for nato expansion no matter what other countries say about the possible harm to their security interests. We dismiss the security interests of any other country. And when they complain, we send more weaponry to our allies in that region. We go to war when we want and where we want, whether it's in Afghanistan or Iraq or the covert war against Assad in Syria, a war that even today the American people don't understand correctly, or the war in Libya. And then we say, "We love peace. What about Russia and China? They are very bellicose. They are trying to destabilize the world." And so we end up in terrible clashes.

The war in Ukraine — to conclude this introduction — could have been avoided and should have been avoided through diplomacy. What President Putin of Russia had been saying for years was: "Don't expand NATO in the Black Sea region, don't do it in Ukraine, let alone Georgia," a country that, if you look at the map, is right on the east shore of the Black Sea. Russia said: "This will surround us. This will jeopardize our security. Let's look for a diplomatic solution." The U.S. rejected all diplomacy. I tried to contact the White House at the end of 2021. In fact, I contacted the White House and told them that there was going to be a war unless the United States engaged in diplomatic talks with President Putin on the issue of NATO expansion. I was told that the United States was never going to do that, that that was not an option. And indeed it wasn't. Now we have an extremely dangerous war.

And, in East Asia, we are using exactly the same tactics that led to the war in Ukraine. We are creating alliances, accumulating weapons, speaking ill of China, allowing Nancy Pelosi to fly to Taiwan when the Chinese government had said, "Please lower the temperature, defuse tensions," we said no, that we "do what we want," and now we send more weapons. This is a recipe for yet another war and, in my opinion, it is a frightening thing.

We are on the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which I have studied all my life and written about, including a book about the aftermath. We head towards the precipice and fill ourselves with enthusiasm as we do so. You can't explain how dangerous and wrong American foreign policy is. And besides, it's bipartisan.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Jeffrey Sachs, I wanted to ask you about one of the things you mentioned in a recent article published in the Consortium News, about the insistence of the United States, and in turn of Europe, on maintaining its hegemony around the world at a time when the West sees its economic power diminish. You mention, for example, that the BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — represent more

than 40% of the world's population and have a GDP greater than that of all the G7 nations, but their interests and concerns are practically dismissed or, in the case, obviously, of Russia and China, they are described to the American people as aggressor countries. authoritarian and causing turmoil in the world.

**JEFFREY SACHS:** That's a theme...

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Could you expand on that point?

**JEFFREY SACHS:** Yes, absolutely, and it is extremely important that you have touched on that topic. The disproportionate power of the Western world, and especially the Anglo-Saxon world, began with the British Empire, and right now the U.S. is about 250 years old, so it's a short period in the history of the world. For many very interesting reasons, it happened that the Industrial Revolution came first in England. There the steam engine was invented, which is probably the most important invention in modern history. Britain had military dominance in the nineteenth century, as did the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. Britain held the reins. Britain had the empire where the sun never set. And the West, that is, the United States and Western Europe, and currently the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan — in other words, the G7 and the European Union combined — are a small part of the world's population, about 10%, maybe a little bit more, let's say 12.5% if we count Japan along with Western Europe and the United States. But the mentality is "We run the world." And so it has been during the 200 years of this Industrial Age.

But times have changed. And really, since the 1950s, the rest of the world, when it became independent from European imperialism, began to educate its populations, began to adopt new technologies, to adapt to them and innovate them. And, who would say, a small portion of the world didn't run the planet or didn't have a monopoly on wisdom, knowledge, science, or technology. And this is wonderful. Knowledge and the possibility of a dignified life is spreading throughout the world.

But in America, there is a resentment about this, a deep resentment. I think there's also tremendous historical ignorance, because I think a lot of American leaders have no idea about modern history. But they resent the rise of China. That is an affront to America. How dare China grow! This is our world! This is our century! And from about 2014 I saw, step by step, and in great detail since it is my daily work, how the United States attributed to China the role, not of a country that was recovering from a century and a half of great difficulties, but rather that of an enemy. And consciously, we, as a matter of American foreign policy, begin to say, "We have to contain China. China's rise is no longer in our

interest," as if the United States were the one determining whether China is prosperous or not. The Chinese are not naïve; in fact, they are extraordinarily sophisticated. They saw all of this in exactly the same way that I did. I know the authors of the American texts. They are my colleagues at Harvard or elsewhere. I was surprised when this kind of idea of containment began to take hold.

But the main point is that the West has led the world for a brief period of 250 years, and yet says, "That's our right. This is a Western world. We are the G7. We can determine who writes the rules of the game." In fact, Obama, a good guy on the spectrum of what we have for foreign policy, said, "Let's set the trade rules for Asia, but let China not write any of those rules. The United States will establish them." This is an incredibly naïve, dangerous, and old-fashioned way of understanding the world. The United States accounts for 4.2% of the world's population. We don't run the world. We are not world leaders. We are a country with 4.2% of the population in a large and diverse world, and we should learn to get along, to play in the sandbox peacefully and not demand that all the toys in the sandbox belong to us. We haven't gotten over that way of thinking yet. And unfortunately this applies to both political parties. It's what motivated Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, to go to Taiwan in the midst of all this, as if she really had the need to go stir up tensions. But that's the mentality that America is in charge.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** I'd like to look back a little bit at the 1990s. I'm sure you remember the huge financial collapse that occurred in Mexico in that decade, when the Clinton administration authorized \$50 billion in a bailout of Mexico, which was actually for Wall Street investors. At that time you were advising the post-Soviet Russian government, which was also in serious financial trouble at the time, but was unable to get any major help from the West, not even from the International Monetary Fund. You criticized what happened back then. I wonder if you could talk about the differences between the U.S. response to the Mexico crisis and the response to the Russian financial crisis, as well as whether somehow the current situation in Russia can have roots in that period.

**JEFFREY SACHS:** Yes, absolutely. And what I did was a controlled experiment, as I was an economic adviser to both Poland and the Soviet Union during the last year of Gorbachev's presidency and advised President Yeltsin in the first two years of Russian independence, 1992 and 1993. I was working in the financial area, in helping Russia find a way to address, a serious financial crisis, as you described it. My basic recommendation in Poland, and then in the Soviet Union and in Russia, was: to avoid a social crisis and a

geopolitical crisis, the rich world of the West should help mitigate that extraordinary financial crisis that was occurring with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union.

Well, interestingly, in the case of Poland, I made a number of very specific recommendations and they were all accepted by the US Government: to create a stabilization fund, to cancel part of Poland's debt, to allow a lot of financial maneuvers to get Poland out of the difficult situation. So I congratulated myself, "Oh, look!" I made a recommendation and one of them, the billion dollars for a stabilization fund, was accepted in a matter of eight hours by the White House. Then I thought, "This has gone pretty well."

Then came the same recommendation, this time on behalf of, first, Gorbachev in the last days of his term, and then President Yeltsin. Everything I recommended, which was based on the very fundamentals of economic dynamics, was flatly rejected by the White House. Let me tell you that at the time I didn't understand it. I told them that had worked in Poland, but they just looked at me with puzzlement. In fact, a sitting secretary of state in 1992 told me, "Professor Sachs, it doesn't even matter if I agree with you or not. This is not going to happen."

It took me quite some time to understand the underlying geopolitics. That was exactly during the days of Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Rumsfeld, and what became the Project for the New American Century, that is, for the continuation of American hegemony. And I didn't realize it at the time because I was thinking, as an economist, about how to help overcome a financial crisis. But unipolar politics was taking shape and it was devastating. Of course, that plunged Russia into a deep financial crisis that produced a lot of instability, which had its own implications for years to come.

But even more than that, what these people planned from the beginning, despite explicit promises to Gorbachev and Yeltsin, was the expansion of NATO. Clinton began NATO's expansion with the three Central European countries — Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic — and then George W. Bush jr. added seven countries — Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the three Baltic states — all directly against Russia. And then, in 2008, the final thrust, which was the insistence of the US, despite the private opposition of European leaders, many of whom spoke confidentially with me at the time, when Bush: "NATO will expand into Ukraine and Georgia." And again, if you take out a map and look at the Black Sea, the explicit goal was to surround Russia in the Black Sea. By the way, they are old tactics. They are the same tactics that Palmerston used from 1853 to 1856 in the First Crimean War: encircling Russia in the Black Sea, and cutting off its ability to

have a military presence and project any kind of influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Brzezinski himself said in 1997 that Ukraine would be the geographical pivot of Eurasia. What these neocons were doing in the early '90s was building America's unipolar world. And they were already contemplating a lot of wars in order to eliminate the allied countries of the former Soviet Union: wars to overthrow Saddam, wars to overthrow Assad, wars to overthrow Gaddafi. All were put in place over the next 20 years. Those wars have been a complete disaster, a debacle for those countries, and a horrible thing for the United States, with trillions of dollars wasted. But it was his plan. That neoconservative plan is at its peak right now in two contexts: the context of Ukraine and the context of the Taiwan Strait. And it's extraordinarily dangerous what these people are doing with U.S. foreign policy, which is not entirely democratic politics. It is a policy of a small group of people who have the idea that a unipolar world based on American hegemony is the way forward.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Jeffrey Sachs, we don't have much more time, but, since this was such an important topic, Naomi Klein strongly criticized it in her book "The Shock Doctrine," when she said that you were recommending shock therapy. Can you make a connection between what happened as the Russian economy stabilized, to the conditions that gave rise to the invasion of Ukraine? I mean, how did the economic catastrophe that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union lead to the rise of the oligarchic class and, of course, the presidency of Vladimir Putin?

**JEFFREY SACHS:** Yes, for years I have tried to explain to Naomi, whom I admire very much, that what I was recommending was financial aid, whether it was for Poland or the Soviet Union or Russia. He was absolutely horrified by the deceptions and the corruption and the gifts. I said that very explicitly back then and quit because of it, both because I failed to get help from the West and because I didn't like what was going on at all.

And I would argue that the failure of an orderly approach, which was possible in Poland but not achieved in the former Soviet Union because there was no constructive engagement on the part of the West, definitely played a role in the instability of the 1990s and played a definite role in the rise of the oligarchic class. In fact, I was explaining to the U.S. and the IMF and the World Bank in 1994 and 1995 what was going on. But they didn't care, because they thought, "Well, that's okay. That's a matter for Yeltsin, perhaps," about the corrupt dealings of his stock loan scheme. Having said all that, it was something...

**AMY GOODMAN:** We have less than a minute.

**JEFFREY SACHS:** Not bad. Having said all that, I think it's important to say is that there is no linear determinism, even between such events, which were destabilizing and very unfortunate and unnecessary, and what is happening now, because when President Putin came to power he was not anti-European nor was he anti-American. What Putin saw, however, was the incredible arrogance of the United States, the expansion of NATO, the wars in Iraq, the covert war in Syria, the war in Libya, which went against the UN resolution. So we create a lot of what we face right now thanks to our own ineptitude and arrogance. There was no linear determinism. It was, step by step, America's arrogance that allowed us to get to the point where we are today.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Jeffrey Sachs, economist and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and president of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Sachs served as an adviser to three UN secretaries-general. I want to thank you for joining us from Austria, where you are attending a conference.

Upon returning, we will speak with a reporter who has documented how, over the past year, the United States has approved only 123 applications for "humanitarian permission" for Afghan refugees. By comparison, 68,000 applications from Ukrainians have been approved in recent months. Stay with us.

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