

Gaza & the World Episode 5 featuring Prof. John Mearsheimer: The UN Resolution That Betrayed Gaza

Transcript of the conversation held November 18, 2025, as part of Just World Educational's series on "Gaza & the World." The video is [here](#).

[Helena Cobban]

Hello and welcome everyone. I'm Helena Cobban, the President of Just World Educational, and I want to welcome you back to our video podcast, Gaza and the World. Today, I'm delighted that our guest is the brilliant scholar of international relations, Professor John Mearsheimer, speaking with us today from, I believe, Chicago.

It is an honor to have you here with us, and I'm happy that we're speaking on November 18th, 2025, just one day after the adoption by the UN Security Council of its momentous resolution 2803 on Gaza. Such a lot to talk about. Great to have you with us, John.

[John Mearsheimer]

I'm glad to be here, Helena. Thank you for inviting me.

[Helena Cobban]

So, with our Gaza and the World project, we're exploring the interactions between the still ongoing genocidal crisis in Gaza and the deep current shifts in the global balance of power. Professor John Mearsheimer, as I'm sure many of you know, is a very distinguished American analyst of international affairs. Indeed, he is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, where he has taught since 1982. He's authored or co-authored seven groundbreaking books in the field. The most famous, or if you're a lifelong Zionist the most infamous, of those was the 2007 study, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, that he co-authored with Stephen Walt, which appeared in 2007 and has been making waves ever since.

If you go to John's website, Mearsheimer.com, you can see a wonderful portrait of him dressed up as Machiavelli, or Mearschiavelli, as it says there, and learn a lot more about him.

I'm particularly happy that we can wrap up this first portion of our "Gaza and the World" project with this conversation, as the breadth of your work, John, really captures the scope and intent of our project, which is to probe the ways in which the Gaza crisis has been impacting the global balance, and of course, vice versa. For listeners here, if you visit our website, www.justworldeducational.org, you can learn all about this project and our other projects, including our weekly Palcast audio podcast, hosted by Yusuf El-Jamal, and

featuring his guests from on the ground in Gaza. Do sign up on the website for our regular updates.

So, Professor Mearsheimer, John, we have such a lot to discuss. Let's start with the impact of the latest news about the Security Council, about Security Council Resolution 2803, which seemed to adopt the whole of Trump's earlier so-called peace plan for Gaza.

The decision that many Security Council members, including China, Russia, and Algeria, took to allow that resolution to pass took many observers, including, I confess myself, by surprise. Maybe later we could speculate on the kinds of backroom deals that may have led both Russia and China not to cast their votes, their vetoes to block the resolution. But first, what can we say about the impact we can expect that Security Council vote to have?

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, I would say, just to get started, that the resolution is disgraceful. I find it hard to believe that this is where we have ended up since we've been in the midst of a genocide in Gaza since October 7th, 2023. And all sorts of people understand that the Palestinians should have a state of their own, or have some sense of self-determination.

When you sort of look at this resolution, it's just so counter to everything that would be sensible from my point of view. Let me make two general points about it. First of all, let's just talk about the Palestinians, and then we can talk about who's in charge in Gaza in terms of formulating and implementing this resolution.

First of all, with regard to the Palestinians, the key issue here is what is the political horizon, as they say? Are the Palestinians going to get a state of their own? Is there going to be self-determination?

And the answer is no. The Palestinians are treated as if they were colonial victims in the 19th century, which is really kind of hard to believe. They have virtually no input into formulating this resolution.

And furthermore, they're not going to run Gaza once the resolution is implemented. I'll talk more about this in a second, but the Israelis and the Americans are going to run Gaza. The Palestinians are not.

There's some vague talk about maybe in the future there'll be a Palestinian state, but anybody who believes that is remarkably foolish. In fact, Benjamin Netanyahu basically said before the resolution was passed, there will be no Palestinian state. And of course, the Israelis have held this position since the beginning of Zionism.

So the Palestinians are completely screwed. Oh, and by the way, what are they going to do? They're going to disarm Hamas, right?

So the Palestinians have no sense of running Gaza. It's not going to be run by them. There's no hope of self-determination, but they are going to be disarmed.

Then we get to the question of who formulated this resolution and who's going to implement it. And it's the old tag team, the United States and Israel. As we all know, those two countries are joined at the hip.

The United States is complicit in the genocide that has been taking place since October 7th [2023]. The United States has been supporting this apartheid state for as long as it's been created. So what's going on here?

You're going to put in charge, I mean, who's in charge of the Peace Board or the Board of Peace that's going to run Gaza? It's the overarching institution that's going to run Gaza. It's Donald Trump.

It's the United States, which again, is complicit in the genocide. And of course, the Israelis are going to have a say in virtually every dimension of the decision-making process involving Gaza moving forward. So you have the two states that have been executing a genocide since 2003 in charge, and the victims of that genocide, who are hoping for some form of self-determination, are going to get none.

They're going to be treated like they're sort of colonial victims. They're people who need guardianship. They need a trusteeship to run them.

It's hard to believe that in the year 2025, this is where we're at. But this is, I think, what we have gotten with this UN resolution.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, I'll come back to a lot of what you've been saying. On the custodianship issue, it should escape nobody's notice that actually, in the 1950s and 1960s, the state apparatuses in all of what were then known as the Trucial States, which are today the GCC, the Gulf Cooperation Council states: those were all created and built by Palestinians, virtually. I mean, the Palestinians do not need any tutelage in how to form a state.

That's quite clear at this point in 2025. And they're not going to be allowed to. Now, it's important to note that Hamas has come out openly, forthrightly against this resolution, which I think should make the implementation extremely complicated.

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, you say extremely complicated. I mean, how does the implementation work, the stabilization force? We have this Board of Peace that is in charge of running Gaza.

And then underneath that Board of Peace is an international stabilization force that comes in and maintains the peace and deals with the disarmament of Hamas. But Hamas would be nuts to disarm. And they've made it unequivocally clear they're not going to disarm.

And if they're not going to disarm, do you really think the international stabilization force is going to be put in there? As best I can tell, the leaders of the possible countries that might send forces have made it clear that they don't want to go in there to disarm Hamas and create peace. They want to go in there to maintain peace.

But this agreement doesn't provide for a peaceful settlement that then can be monitored by an international stabilization force. So I find it hard to believe they're going to get an international stabilization force in there. And then with regard to this Board of Peace, it's awful vague how this thing works.

I mean, maybe they're still hoping to bring Tony Blair in and let him run the thing. I don't know. But Donald Trump is going to run the Board of Peace, and this is going to work out?

I find that hard to imagine. And who's going to be working with him to make this work? And all at the same time, the Palestinians in Gaza are going to resist, and especially Hamas.

And by the way, as you know better than I do, Helena, the Palestinians, and this includes Hamas, have a right, according to international law, to resist. The occupation of Gaza is illegal. The International Court of Justice has just ruled on that.

Not that we needed another ruling. It was obvious to anybody who studied this conflict. It's an illegal occupation.

Hamas is within its rights to resist. And of course, they will continue to resist. So we're back to square one.

And I just point out to you just one other very important dimension to this. The Israelis' ultimate goal here is to ethnically cleanse Gaza. That's the goal here.

They have no interest in facilitating the creation of a Palestinian state. They have no interest in self-determination for the Palestinians. They want to cleanse.

And the way they're cleansing is they're murdering huge numbers of Palestinians. This is an ongoing genocide. And they will look for opportunities.

We do not want to underestimate this. They, the Israelis, will look for opportunities to continue the genocide and continue the ethnic cleansing. And they won't be content until every last Palestinian is driven out of Gaza or murdered.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah. I mean, we've seen obviously since October 13th, which was the date of the implementation of this so-called ceasefire, that it has been repeatedly violated by the Israelis. And meantime, the U.S. CENTCOM military command has, I think, 200 or 300 officers currently in a base in southern Israel, allegedly monitoring the ceasefire. But all those Israeli violations seem to have completely passed it by. Violations not only at the military level, but also in the absolutely promised delivery of humanitarian aid. So, you know, it's hard to see how this U.S.-Israeli duo, the devilish duo, can be trusted by anybody. And so this brings me to a question, why did Russia and China not use their vetoes?

[John Mearsheimer]

I'm not sure. I find it very hard to explain. I thought that they would go to great lengths to prevent this.

It may have been that they could not find any allies and they understood that it would not look good if they vetoed this resolution. I think that it would have looked very good. I think that there are lots of people all over the planet who understand what the Israelis are up to and could easily come to understand if they don't already, what's in this resolution and why it should have been vetoed.

But the fact is that the Chinese and the Russians didn't stand up to the Americans. I would just say to you, it's quite amazing the extent to which Trump is able to whiplash people inside the United States and around the world into dancing to his tune. I mean, he's had some setbacks and the whole Jeffrey Epstein business is something of a setback for him.

But otherwise, it's really quite amazing how he is able to get his way both internationally and nationally. And I think this is just another example of it. He was able to either convince or coerce, or some combination of the two, the Chinese and the Russians to at least abstain from the vote and not kill the resolution.

[Helena Cobban]

I think the one power that he has not until recently been able to convince has been China, which forced him to step back on the tariffs issue, when we saw them both stepping back after China had wielded the rare earths and other economic levers. So why has China stepped back now on this issue? I was hoping, since you seem to know a lot of people in decision making positions in China, that you could tell me.

But if you can't, that's fine.

[John Mearsheimer]

It's just happened yesterday. So I don't have a good sense of what's going on here. But I am greatly disappointed in the Chinese, as I'm disappointed in the Russians.

Although you can imagine that the Russians don't want to do anything to provoke Trump because they want to keep things as calm as possible vis-a-vis the Ukraine war.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, that's true. And I think you and I both agree that in international affairs, China is quite a lot stronger than Russia, anyway, for a number of reasons, including what's happening in Ukraine. But the Russians had put together this alternative draft resolution, which I thought was brilliantly drafted, because it presented itself as an amendment to Trump's comprehensive plan, and then proceeded with an international stabilization force that would have been very different, because it would have reported to the Security Council, and no mention of the Board of Peace.

And I thought, well, that looks like a really smart and well-conceived diplomatic initiative. And then they just tabled it. They just like, I don't know, trashed it, threw it into the shredder, and abstained on the American one.

So there's a lot of things that I hope we will find out more about some of this decision making. Algeria is another one. I mean, shameful that they actually voted for the resolution.

But I want to move to the question...

[John Mearsheimer]

And Pakistan, too.

[Helena Cobban]

Oh, that's true. Yeah, yeah.

[John Mearsheimer]

I was shocked at Algeria and Pakistan. And by the way, when they were discussing the Russian draft, there was hardly any support from the Arab and Islamic world for the Russian draft. And there was a lot of support inside the Arab and Islamic world for the American draft.

I can't believe that these countries didn't understand that this was a terrible deal for the Palestinians. And this was not the road we wanted to go down. But again, I think Trump has a lot of course of leverage over these countries, and he uses it freely.

And he's able to get his way. And I think it's Trump's behavior that accounts in good part for why the Russian resolution never really went anywhere.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, very complicated to try to figure it out. I mean, I'm not an expert in UN canon law, but I'm guessing that the Security Council, after six months or maybe earlier than that, could actually say, oops, that was all a terrible mistake. Let's pass another resolution.

But meantime, we are going to have a period in which this is international law, and people are going to have to adjust to that. But I don't see, you know, the Israelis have had what now 110 weeks of trying to obliterate the resistance in Gaza, and they haven't succeeded with all their military capabilities. So, you know, you think a few, like, Indonesian or Pakistani troops are going to be able to do it?

I don't think so.

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, the question is, do they want to do it? And the answer is no. Right.

I think everybody understands, except maybe the Israelis and a huge slice of the American national security establishment, that the only way you can settle this conflict is a political settlement, that unless you kill everybody, there's no military solution to this conflict. This is a political problem. It involves Palestinian self-determination.

And, you know, the idea that you can use what Yabotinsky called the iron wall to beat the Palestinians into submission has never worked, and there's no evidence it's going to work now. So we need a political solution. And you can send the Indonesians, the Pakistanis, wherever you want in there, and they're not going to be able to fix the problem unless there's a political solution.

[Helena Cobban]

So this brings me to the question of what impact do you think the vote on Resolution 2803 is going to have on the role of the United Nations itself? You know, for all of my lifetime, it's been the one nearly universally agreed supreme arbiter on international issues. What happens now to the UN?

[John Mearsheimer]

The UN is not an important player in terms of the Gaza conflict and more generally in terms of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The United States runs the show and the United States is joined at the hip with Israel. And the two of those countries determine what happens in Gaza and what happens in the West Bank.

And again, more generally, what happens to the Palestinians. The UN just doesn't matter.

[Helena Cobban]

So that actually has huge impact on the international situation far beyond West Asia. If the UN doesn't matter, then neither do all the organizations affiliated with it.

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, I think lots of people have come to the conclusion, and this didn't start with Trump, it started with Biden, after October 7th, 2023, that the United States doesn't take international law seriously at all. You know, we talk about the rules-based order. There is a rules-based order.

And there's no question that great powers sometimes disobey those rules because they think the rules are operating in a way that threatens their vital interests. This does happen. But most of the time, those great powers who built the order, who built the institutions, who created the rules, obeyed them because they created them.

So we've always paid homage to the rules-based order for that reason. But I think that given our support of the genocide, given our support of Israel and all it's been doing, if anything, we've just thumbed our nose at the rules-based order. And this goes beyond the United Nations, as you're pointing out.

And the question you have to ask yourself is, where does this all lead? And the answer is, it's going to lead to just more trouble.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah. I guess one description I heard when Biden kept talking about the rules-based order was, you know, we make the rules and you follow our orders. And that's what it is, the rules-based order.

But you're quite right, it went back before Trump, and now it's here in spades, if you like. I want to come back to the issue of the Israel lobby here in the United States, which you so smartly described in your book, which was published now some 18 years ago. And as I said earlier, has been making waves ever since.

One of the major impacts that Israel's genocide in Gaza, or the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, has been a notable decline in the influence of the lobby. How do you describe the dimensions of this decline with the recent election of Zohran Mamdani in New York, and so on? And can we see that, when can we see that anti-Zionist, or anyway, non-Zionist forces in US public life starting to have an actual impact on policy?

Because, you know, in the US Congress, there's still a tiny minority who are free of the lobby.

[John Mearsheimer]

Hmm. I think that to evaluate the influence of the lobby, you have to look at two levels. One is the policy level, and the other is the public level.

And I think that since Steve and I wrote the book in 2007, and by the way, we wrote the article, the original article in the *London Review of Books* the year before.

[Helena Cobban]

The one that the *Atlantic* magazine would not publish... Was Jeffrey Goldberg the editor at that point? I don't think he was.

[John Mearsheimer]

No, no, he wasn't. It was someone else. And Jeffrey Goldberg would have never even considered it. So he wouldn't have been in a position to reject it. But that was in March 2006. The article was in 2007, which as you point out, in fact, this March will be the 20th anniversary of the article came out.

But I think, Helena, what's changed since then is the discourse, the public thinking, the public's thinking about Israel, about the lobby and about the special relationship that we have with Israel. And it has actually changed in profound ways. This was obvious up until recently only on the left, but it's now obvious on the right as well.

And you see it with people like Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and assorted other people. I mean, it's quite clear that Charlie Kirk, before he was killed, was moving in that direction. And all sorts of people I know who teach courses will tell you that when you listen to the students talk about Israel and what's going on in Gaza, and you talk about the special relationship with students, this is mainly undergraduates-- It's truly remarkable how willing

students are to criticize Israel. You have conversations now that you did not have back in 2007 when our book came out. And of course, I think the genocide really matters here.

And the fact that the Israelis flaunted their barbaric behavior on TikTok and in assorted other places and allowed people in the United States to sort of see what they were up to has had a devastating impact on how many people think about Israel and how they think about America's relationship with Israel. So there's been a sea change down below. The problem is that at the policy level, there's been hardly any change at all.

I mean, if you look at both Biden and Trump, and you look at their principal lieutenants, you know, Anthony Blinken, Jake Sullivan, and, you know, now Marco Rubio, and assorted other people who work for Trump, they have not changed one iota in terms of how they think we should deal with Israel. I mean, as Steve and I pointed out in the book, what you have to understand is we have a special relationship with Israel that has no parallel in recorded history. There's nothing that even comes close to our relationship with Israel.

And basically what we do is we support Israel unconditionally. In other words, no matter what Israel does, of any major consequence, we support Israel. And that has been the case for a long time now.

And it remains the case today. You know, Trump likes to portray himself as a tough guy, Benjamin Netanyahu's not going to push him around. And his minions occasionally put out some rhetoric that says, we want you to understand that President Trump is fed up with Prime Minister Netanyahu and he's decided to get tough with him.

This is poppycock. This is not to be taken seriously. The Israelis own President Trump, right?

He's in a straitjacket. The idea that he can get tough with Israel is not a serious argument. The idea that Joe Biden could get tough with Israel is not a serious argument.

If Kamala Harris had been elected, she couldn't have been, wouldn't have been able to get tough with Israel. This is just the way it works at the policy level. So the \$64,000 question is whether or not this disjuncture between public thinking about Israel and the lobby and the special relationship and so forth and so on will cause a change at the policy level.

And of course, the lobby is working overtime these days to make sure that doesn't happen. What I just described to you is a situation that the lobby is fully aware of. They understand that public opinion is deeply anti-Israel at this point in time.

I've seen polls in Europe and in the United States where around 60% of the population thinks that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. It's very important to understand that 60% of the population, countries like Italy, countries like Germany, countries like the United States, and here in the United States, it's 40 plus percent of the American Jewish community, 40 plus percent of the American Jewish community thinks Israel is committing genocide. Genocide is the crime of all crimes.

And the idea that a Jewish state is committing genocide is not an argument to be taken lightly. But people understand that that is what the Israelis are doing. And this is a huge problem for the lobby, right?

What are they going to do, shut down TikTok, shut down social media?

[Helena Cobban]

Well, they've been trying and they will continue trying. Yeah. I want to come back a little bit on what you said that, when you said that Trump could not have pressured Israel.

I think Trump and Biden could have if they wanted at any moment, especially, you know, after three or four months into the genocide, they could have built a national constituency to support pushing back on Israel. And then when Trump-- before Trump came in, in January, he sent Witkoff and just put the arm on Israel and got Israel to agree to a deal that had been on the table since May of 2024. And Biden had never pushed Netanyahu on it. Trump did.

And we had that six-week ceasefire, but it was supposed to be followed by, you know, two more tranches of ceasefire. And the Israelis, I guess, at that point, noticed that they had more leeway than they thought. And after the six weeks, they just resumed the full siege and the military attack. And we've seen something a little bit similar in October, when Trump did put the arm on Israel to agree to the so-called comprehensive peace plan, the one that he had formulated in late September. And he got that ceasefire.

But again, no follow through. So the Israelis have been eroding it ever since. I just think that Trump and before him, Biden could have pressured Israel a lot more, a lot more effectively and won public support for it.

But that's not going to happen now, sadly.

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, there's no question that they could have won public support. Again, or some public support. If you sort of look at what's happening in the public, and you look at public opinion in particular, there's evidence to back up what you say.

But you do not want to underestimate the extent to which the lobby can move in and cause enormous problems for any president. The lobby is just so powerful. And Trump can get a ceasefire.

He comes into office on January 20th, and he sends Witkoff to the Middle East and tells Netanyahu, Witkoff tells Netanyahu that he has to shut down the genocide before the inauguration, because Trump doesn't want the genocide hanging over the inauguration. So on January 19th, the genocide is shut down, as you described. But the Israelis, who actually needed a break at that time, used that opportunity to reconstitute their forces, reload the shotgun.

And then in March, they started up the genocide again. And what did Trump do? Nothing.

[Helena Cobban]

Nothing. Nothing. Yeah.

[John Mearsheimer]

And look at who Trump's advisors are. Steve Witkoff, super Zionist. Jared Kushner, super Zionist.

It's really quite remarkable. He should have advisors involved in the Middle East who have no allegiance to Israel, no loyalty to Israel. Instead, exactly the opposite is the case.

People like Witkoff and Kushner, I mean, these are both people who are passionately attached to Israel. They're supposed to be American policymakers. But to use Aaron David Miller's old phrase, these are Israel's lawyers.

And so you want to ask yourself, why does Trump have Israel's lawyers handling Middle East policy for him? Because that's just the way it works.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, that's the way it has worked for a very long time, John, as you know, ever since Aaron David Miller and Dan Kurtzer and Martin Indyk came in in 1993. So I mean, those have all been Israel's lawyers. Anyway, I'd love it if you could just quickly define the lobby for me.

I mean, we know there's like AIPAC, which is a sort of publicly constituted, quasi foreign influence organization here that donates money or directs the donation of money from various rich sources to congressional candidates. In a sense, that's the well-known face of the lobby. But it's also, I think, it's burrowed very deep into the military industrial surveillance complex in this country.

I think that's where they're joined at the hip. You know, if you look at the big tech oligarchs, so many of them are dual nationals. And, you know, they got there, they started their careers in tech in this Unit 8,200 of the Israeli military doing surveillance there.

And then they founded little startups in Tel Aviv. And then they brought their startups to Silicon Valley. And I mean, have I got that wrong?

That is really crucial. The other part of it, of course, is Epstein. We have to talk about Jeffrey Epstein.

And maybe, you know, it's bigger than just Jeffrey Epstein. What other portions of the lobby are there?

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, Steve and I define the lobby as a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that are deeply committed to working to make sure that the United States continues to have this special relationship with Israel that I described to you before. These are people and institutions. And of course, the institutions are comprised of people who have a passionate attachment to Israel.

And they want to work very hard to make sure that the United States supports Israel no matter what. Now, it's very important to emphasize that this does not include all Jews. And many Jews are hostile toward the lobby and hostile towards Israel's behavior, as you and I both know very well.

And furthermore, you have a whole slew of Christian Zionists who are deeply involved in the lobby. People like Reverend John Hagee, who goes to great lengths to support Israel at every turn. So that's why we call it the Israel lobby.

I could spend probably three hours listing all the organizations that are part of the lobby. I mean, it goes well beyond AIPAC and the Anti-Defamation League. So, excuse me, there are lots of institutions or organizations, and then there are lots of individuals.

And some of these are the high tech people that you were describing. If you just look at the columnists for the New York Times, people like Tom Friedman, people like Bret Stephens, and then you can go to other newspapers as well. Where, I mean, if you read the Wall Street Journal, the Wall Street Journal is basically like a mouthpiece for the Netanyahu government.

It's truly stunning. They never have any articles or op-eds or editorials that represent the other side in this debate. It's all pro-Israel down the line.

So the media matters here. And a lot of these corporations, as you described, matter. You have people like Larry Ellison and his son now, David Ellison, who are buying up big chunks of the media in good part for the purpose of making the media more Israel friendly.

So that's really what you're dealing with here. And then if you go up on Capitol Hill, whether you're in the Senate or the House, there are a number of people who go well beyond just voting for Israel. They're deeply dedicated to protecting Israel at every turn.

Chuck Schumer defines himself as a protector of Israel. This guy, I think his name is Randy Fine, who is a congressman from Florida, is in a similar position. So you have lots of people there who are deeply committed to Israel.

And by the way, I think Tony Blinken fits this description as well. Marco Rubio. I mean, these are people who are Zionists on steroids.

[Helena Cobban]

So at the legislative level, obviously, they've been trying to do a lot to suppress the open discourse, both with their moves against TikTok, which seem to be in abeyance now a little bit, but also with the moves to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Association definition of antisemitism, which conflates antisemitism with criticism of Israel, which is, as you've just kind of mentioned, is completely wrong, given that the two are completely different animals. But on TikTok, it's not just TikTok, it's Instagram, it's a lot of things.

But I'm kind of noticing that, as you mentioned, the Israelis are super happy to advertise their grotesque brutality. I mean, when I say the Israelis, I mean, many actual Israeli serving members of the military are just, you know, cock a hoop. They're sharing all this stuff about

how they demolish buildings, how they kill people, how they wreck the humanitarian aid deliveries, and they share it all on TikTok, for, I guess, a couple of different reasons.

They share it to brag to their friends back home. And they share it also, I think, to try to intimidate the Palestinians, you know, like, we can do this to you. But I think what they don't notice is that all the rest of us who are not, you know, Israelis or Palestinians see this stuff as well.

And it horrifies us. And so that's why we've had these moves against TikTok. I don't know how far that's going to go.

You know, the discourse suppression may come back very much tighter here in the United States, if we get some of these measures like the IHRA definition of antisemitism. You know, there are these broad, broad moves to affect the universities. I mean, I don't know what you've seen at the University of Chicago, but I've seen universities in the Ivy League just caving and caving and caving to this Zionist pressure.

How is it over there anyway in Chicago?

[John Mearsheimer]

I just want to point out on that, that the lobby got three presidents fired, three presidents at the most prestigious universities in the United States. One is Harvard, two is Penn, and three is Columbia. Just you just want to think about that.

Three university presidents were pushed overboard. And I think there are a number of other cases where the lobby was involved, although it's not as obvious, Cornell being one. But-UVA, I was going to say UVA being the other.

But just to show you how powerful the lobby is, you remember in the spring of 2024, we had huge protests on almost every college campus in the United States, including the University of Chicago. And for the most part, these were peaceful protests. They were protests against the genocide.

They included many Jewish students as well as non-Jewish students. We have now reached the point this year, 2025, where there are basically zero protests on college and university campuses, nothing. You just walk around the University of Chicago, nothing.

It's quite amazing. And what has happened here is that the lobby went to work and it's a two-pronged effort. It's basically very rich Jewish donors who give money to universities.

And these rich Jewish donors, of course, are passionately pro-Zionist. They tell the university or the college that if they don't shut down the protests, they will stop giving money. And universities are at a point in their history where they desperately need the money.

And the threat of that money being cut off by the donors is just unacceptable. That's one prong. The other prong is that those same rich Jewish donors go to the executive branch and they tell Donald Trump or Joe Biden that if he doesn't turn the Justice Department loose or he doesn't turn the state loose to go in and shut down these protests, the politicians will pay a significant price.

Because as you know very well, Helena, the American political system depends on money and politicians need money. And therefore, when Donald Trump is told that he has to shut down these protests on campuses, he reads the Riot Act to university presidents and he tells them if they don't shut down the protests, the government will cut off funding. This is like, oh my God.

Now, the government's going to cut off funding. That's the second prong. The first prong is that the rich donors are going to cut off their donations.

This would be the end of the university. And Trump talked like he wanted to run Harvard into the ground. He talked like he had his gun sights on Harvard and he was going to destroy it.

Well, the University of Chicago clearly saw what was happening. The University of Pittsburgh saw what was happening. Every university in the country, every university president for sure saw what was happening.

And in that world, the last thing you want to do is alienate those rich Jewish donors. And the end result is we have no protests. We really don't have freedom of speech if you get right down to it on campuses anymore.

The damage that's been done to campuses or to universities is enormous. But nobody wants to talk about this. And if you do talk about it and you do talk about the influence of rich Jewish donors, they'll say you're an anti-Semite.

This is a blood libel. This is ridiculous. Everybody knows exactly what's going on here.

It's, you know, common sense coupled with brute facts. But again, you can't talk about that because that's the way things work in a country where you have a powerful institution like the lobby.

[Helena Cobban]

Have you personally actually experienced attempts to suppress your speech or to surveil your classes that you're teaching or other kind of forms of pushback?

[John Mearsheimer]

No, but I've not done much on campus here and I don't get invited to other campuses to talk about this for all the obvious reasons. So I've mainly restricted myself to talking on platforms involving podcasts like yours. I mean, I give lots of talks of this sort because you reach many more people and furthermore, you reach the students as well.

And the problem that you run into if you really think about it, Helena, is do I want to cause the University of Chicago a lot of problems? I used to teach a course on Zionism and I was thinking about maybe teaching a course on Zionism. I saw where Omer Bartov, the distinguished historian of the Holocaust at Brown University, was going to teach or has taught, I'm not sure which one, a course that compared the Holocaust with the genocide in Gaza.

And I thought that would be a great course to teach. I actually know a great deal about the Holocaust, about the causes of the Holocaust, and the conduct of the Holocaust. I had thought at one point about writing a book on the German killing machine.

So I taught myself all sorts of things. And of course, I've been following the Gaza genocide very carefully. And I thought, after I heard that Bartov was teaching this particular course, that it would be an amazing course to teach.

But then I said to myself, do I really want to teach that at the University of Chicago? Because given who I am, one of the co-authors of the Israel Lobby and someone who has spoken out about the genocide quite forcefully and quite loudly, I would cause the University of Chicago a great deal of trouble. And do I want to do that?

And the answer is, I don't. Now, one could argue that I shouldn't worry about those sort of things. But my reasoning was that given that I have platforms like your show, Judge Napolitano's show, and all sorts of other platforms, I could get the message out loudly and clearly without causing Chicago problems at this point in time.

But it's a sad commentary that I'm telling you this story. It's a sad commentary on where we are today. But it just shows you the damage.

And I'm choosing my words very carefully here. It shows you the damage that Israel, its supporters in the United States, and the lobby more generally, have done to freedom of speech here in the United States. This is not a good situation.

This is a threat to basic liberal values. And I believe that Israel's supporters in this country should think long and hard about what they're doing on our campuses and in the society at large, by labeling people anti-Semites and labeling them as talking in terms of blood libels and getting university presidents fired and so forth and so on. This is not a healthy situation at all.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, very unhealthy. So I want to end up by going back to the broad level of international politics. Because you have said that we've actually been living in a multipolar world since, I believe you said around 2017, and that there are three major poles in this world, the United States, China and Russia, with the first two of those being the strongest peer competitors is how you've described them.

And you've outlined the emergence of a sort of global spheres of influence situation in which Washington exerts a near hegemony over the affairs of the Western Hemisphere, while China does the same or aspires to do so over the affairs of East Asia. Maybe I've wrongly summarized your views, but I think that's more or less what I've picked up from them. So if this is indeed your view of the global balance of power, then I want to know what role you see West Asia, and indeed, also Europe playing in this situation.

Are both these areas, in essence, reduced to being borderlands in the global contest for power? What can we learn about this configuration? Well, no, let's just stick with the borderlands issue for now.

I actually read a really interesting piece by Gideon Rachman today in the Financial Times. I don't usually agree with what he says. Well, frequently, I disagree.

But he said that just as in the late 19th century, the European powers were engaged in a scramble for Africa, to try to divide up Africa, that perhaps what we're seeing now is a scramble for Europe, in which the big powers in the world are kind of, you know, trying to divide up power in Europe. And I would say also West Asia, is that what it is to be a borderland? Or is there a way for the emerging or ever ever changing multipolar system to actually be more supportive and respectful of the peoples of West Asia?

[John Mearsheimer]

Well, I would not call West Asia or Europe a borderland, either one of them. Let me tell you how I think about the world, which I think directly ties into what you were saying. I think from the American point of view, there are three areas of the world that are vital strategic interests.

One is Europe, two is East Asia, and three is the Persian Gulf. Notice, I'm not saying the Middle East or West Asia, I'm saying the Persian Gulf. And the reason that we have historically cared so much about East Asia, and especially Europe, is because that's where the other great powers are.

And the United States cares about power and where other great powers are. So those two regions are explained by the fact that great powers resided in East Asia and Europe. With regard to the Gulf, the reason we care so much about the Gulf is because oil is there.

And oil is an exceptionally important resource. And the United States does not want any one country in the region or outside the region dominating the oil that sits below the ground in the Middle East. So those are the three areas.

Now, historically, going back to 1783, when this country was created, or got its independence, 1783, up until about 1917, Europe was by far the most important area of the world for the United States. As you know, even though the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor, we had a Europe first policy during World War Two. During the Cold War, our principal focus was the Central Front, the NATO Warsaw Pact conventional balance.

It was not East Asia. And of course, it was not the Gulf either. Those two areas mattered.

I'm going to make that very clear. But Europe was of tremendous importance. What happens in 2017, with the coming of multipolarity, is the United States, of course, remains the number one power.

But the number two power is China. And it's not that far behind the United States. And given its impressive economic growth and its huge population, it's clearly a peer competitor.

And our great fear is that it will end up dominating East Asia. Okay. And it will be a regional hegemon in East Asia, the way we are a regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere.

To use your rhetoric, they will then have a sphere of influence in East Asia, like our sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. Now, very importantly, Europe is no longer that important. It's just important to understand for the first time in our history, Europe is not terribly important to us.

It is a vital strategic area, but it's not that important. East Asia is numero uno. So when Hillary Clinton in 2011 talks about the pivot to Asia, she's basically saying the pivot away from Europe to East Asia.

Say a bit more about Europe today. There's all this talk in the West that the Russians are 20 feet tall. They want to conquer all of Ukraine.

They want to conquer countries in Eastern Europe. Pretty soon they're going to be on the beaches at Dunkirk and so forth and so on. This is nonsense.

Russia is the weakest of the three great powers. It is nowhere near being in a situation where it can turn Europe into its sphere of influence. This is not the Soviet Union on May 8th, 1945, sitting in the middle of Berlin with hundreds of divisions.

That world is gone. Russia is the weakest of the three great powers. So there's really no reason for us to be in Europe with military forces.

We don't have to contain Russia. If we hadn't been so foolish as to expand NATO eastward and try and bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO after April, 2008, we wouldn't even have a war. Ukraine would be intact.

Russia is not a major problem. In terms of a threat to the United States, there's only one country that fits that description, and it is in East Asia, and it is China, and that's why we're pivoting to East Asia. Now, with regard to the Gulf, there's no real threat in the Gulf at this point in time either.

Why are we in the Gulf? Why are we in the Middle East or in West Africa, as you call it? One very simple reason, one word, Israel.

That's why we're there. If Israel didn't exist, we would have fundamentally different relations with the country in that region. I believe we would have good relations with Iran.

We have no reason to have bad relations with Iran. If you look at what happened in the 1990s, the Iranians tried to establish some sort of rapprochement with the United States. Bill Clinton at first thought this was a good idea, but guess who intervened to make sure that that didn't happen?

We won't even answer the question because we know. But anyway, we are involved in the Middle East or the Persian Gulf or West Africa because of the Israelis, but otherwise we wouldn't be there.

[Helena Cobban]

West Asia, not West Africa.

[John Mearsheimer]

Oh, we say West Asia. Sorry, sorry. I don't use that term very often.

[Helena Cobban]

I do because it's no longer a Eurocentric term. Middle East is a Eurocentric term.

I've been hoping that China's relations with a lot of states in the Gulf and in West Asia would be strong enough that they would have said we should support the resistance in Gaza.

I've been really disappointed that they are saying, oh, we don't care enough about the people of Gaza to actually cast a veto there. What do you think?

[John Mearsheimer]

Yeah, I think, Helena, that over time, China's influence in the Gulf will increase greatly. It's very important to understand that China is building a blue water navy for the purposes of projecting power into the Gulf, just like us. The Chinese are basically imitating us.

They want to dominate East Asia the way we dominate the Western Hemisphere. They say, look, we have a Belt and Road. That means we have a Belt and Road program.

That means we have political and economic interests all over the planet. To support those interests, we need a military. Of course, the one area that really matters to us is the Gulf because all that oil comes out of the Gulf to us.

We're going to build a blue water navy. As you know, the Iranians and the Chinese actually have quite good relations these days. The Saudis and the Chinese have quite good relations these days.

You could see the Chinese politically moving into the region, and you can see them with that blue water navy thinking about moving into the region militarily. But we're far from the point where China is a major player in West Asia. It's just too soon.

China is rising. It's mainly concerned with its own backyard at this point in time, Taiwan, East China Sea, South China Sea, worried about its border with India up in the Himalayan mountains. But with the passage of time, I think China will become a heavyweight in that region, in the Persian Gulf region.

And then you may see more sympathy and more action on the part of the Chinese in support of the Palestinians. But I don't think that's going to happen today or anytime soon.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah. Meantime, the people in Gaza are, I mean, it's getting worse and worse and the rains are coming and the humanitarian aid is not coming. And now we have Trump's peace plan.

It all sounds actually far too depressing to carry on talking about. Maybe we should wrap it up at this point. I want to really thank you, John Mearsheimer.

It's always a pleasure to listen to you. And it always challenges my thinking. And I hope that we can carry on discussing some of these big picture and smallish picture issues as we go forward.

So thank you very much indeed.

[John Mearsheimer]

You're more than welcome, Helena. I enjoyed it thoroughly. Although the subjects, subjects that we talked about are categorically depressing.

[Helena Cobban]

That's true. You stay well anyway.

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