

The Right Honourable David Mellor, PC, QC | The Threat to World Peace Posed by China, Russia, the US and Europe

- Good evening everybody, and welcome back. Tonight, David Mellor will be talking about the threat to world peace. The Berlin Wall fell just a few months over 30 years ago. The 9th of November, 1989, to be precise. And at that time David was a member of the British government. For most of it, he was deputy foreign Minister, responsible for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, as well as for the Middle East. David will be talking about how the positive expectation engendered by the collapse of communism has for the most part failed and why the world today is in a much more dangerous place than it ever was when there was still the Iron Curtain. David knew very well the key figures in the collapse of the Soviet Union, like Mikhail Gorbachev and in the Middle East, Saddam Hussein, with whom he once had a two and a 1/2, one to one meeting. He has also spent a lot of time in recent years doing business with China and he will explain why he now thinks China poses a really serious threat to global peace and security. Thank you for joining us, David and I'll now hand over to you.

- Is that on? Yeah. Are you hearing me? All right, Wendy. The University of Wendy is now in session. I hope someone out there is hearing me, okay. Just then, to pick up where you left off, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November of 1989 was the culmination of a long decline for the Soviet Union and the euphoria that greeted it was now seems to be overdone. I remember my dear friend David Frost in 1992 hosting a lunch for an American academic, maybe still around, who knows, called Francis Fukuyama, who was incredibly fashionable on the corporate dining circuit in America because he told them what they wanted to hear and what they wanted to hear was that capitalism had won.

Hence, his title of his book, "the End of History", history was over because one side had won well, we know that that isn't actually the case. Personally, I was never convinced by Fukuyama's thesis, and I actually of the opinion that the threat that was posed by the Soviets was nothing like as acute as a threat that is posed by Putin and increasingly by Xi Jinping. I tried the opportunity of travelling widely in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it was perfectly clear that this was a society suffering from the chronic malaise totally without any of the idealism that was once thought to a company.

The communist vision ruled over by failing geriatrics, Soviet Union, a range of elderly and sclerotic old men who were simply not barely capable of getting into the office, let alone pushing the wrong button when they were there. And the same was true for instance of East Germany where Eric Hanukkah, who didn't even survive, I mean he stood down before the Berlin Wall fell, but his East Germany was a wreck still bearing as one went around East Berlin or went to some of the major cities still bearing all of the signs of a war that was by then almost well over 40 years old, bullet holes in buildings and so on.

And what happened in East Germany, the economy was so chaotic, the Ostmark was trading at five to the Deutschemark, even though gallantly the West Germans, when they reunited

Germany actually agreed to give it parity. And this was true also in other parts of the so-called Soviet empire where any moral, any moral leadership had gone. And instead, crude repression was the order of the day. It was remarkable when I was asked to go and visit Czechoslovakia, for instance, and I had to say that I would only go if they guaranteed not to beat up Vaclav Havel, who later of course became Prime Minister on the doorstep of the British embassy, which is what had happened the last time my previous colleague had gone.

And even more extraordinarily, they actually agreed to that condition because they were so keen to have what they regarded as the legitimacy. They would even put out press statements saying, this is the 333rd visit by Western minister, as if a minister going to visit them gave them credibility as an independent state. The only funny moment in that was after I had, had a difficult up and a downer with one of the old monsters that they had a man called Palach. As we walked out of the room, he having not spoken English from only, he put his hand on my arm and said, "hasn't it been nice for you to meet a real dogmatic?"

Well, I don't know if it was nice, but certainly it was memorable so, into the mess that the Soviet Union was came, the one ray of hope that was all too soon extinguished, which was Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher had a big admiration for Gorbachev. They got on extremely well to the point that when Gorbachev went off, this was of course before the collapse of communism. And his sad lingering on after that, though his purpose in life had really gone, he came to Britain for a brief stopover when on his way for a what was regarded as a crucial meeting with Ronald Reagan.

And Margaret Thatcher was there to brief him. And it was fascinating to see him Eduard Shevardnadze, all the people that represented for a brief period hope of a different way of doing things within the Soviet Union. And we weren't put off by an incident when Justice Gorbachev was about to arrive. One of my officials said to me, "minister, "you've got to tell the prime Minister, "she has to have her own translator, her own interpreter." I said, but she's agreed that 'cause Gorbachev is so fond of his, she will use his. And my official said, "do you speak Russian minister?"

I said, no, of course I don't. He said, "well, I do "and the last time we had a meeting with Gorbachev, "it was rather like this," a Gorbachev office say, "what a lovely day." And his interpreter would say, shame, it's raining so hard. And he said, "it might be quite important "that they understand each other properly." Anyway, aside from that, it all worked out pretty well. And Gorbachev went to the United States where he had quite a successful visit.

I had the opportunity of going to Washington shortly after that and the usual rather fine group of people were gathered by the then ambassador for me to have dinner with. And one of them was Robert McNamara, of course, a fine man, although forever discredited by having been a major figure at the time of the Vietnam War and blamed for America's involvement in the Vietnam War. And I said to him, so what are Gorbachev's prospects? He said, not very good. He said, because the thing about Paris Stryker, it's about making a fundamental change whilst employing

a failed system to implement that change.

He said, "it's a bit like driving a car down a freeway "at 50 miles an hour whilst also "trying to change the entire engine." And that was a pretty fitting description of why Gorbachev succeeded in making the Soviet Union briefly and acceptable negotiating partner, but then failed and opened the way to the chaos of Yeltsin and the now awfulness of Putin. Margaret Thatcher was a big fan of Gorbachev, as I've already said, to the point that she thought the West should give Gorbachev a chance. She, for instance, did not believe in the reunification of Germany. Now, that may partly have been because the Germans, you know, she was of a generation that was frightened of a powerful Germany and have plenty of people who will be watching this programme.

However, every reason not to fancy an all powerful Germany either but it was never realistic that Germany would not be reunited. And of course, the collapse of the Berlin Wall was a sign that everything had finally gone. Good indication that he did was really going to go. It was not long before that making a visit to Hungary. Remember Hungary invaded by the Russians in 1956 and a revolution put down with the utmost ferocity. I spoke to the foreign minister, Gyula Horn, who of Hungary, who later became Prime Minister and I said, where are all these Russian troops? You've still got Russian troops here, haven't you? He said, "yes, we've still got Russian troops. "We don't let them out, "they stay in their camps. It's for their own safety. "You understand? We couldn't guarantee their safety "if they were allowed to wander around."

And so of course, and there was an interesting, so let's pretend way even before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, we didn't have to talk to the Hungarians about Eastern Europe. The Hungarians were part of central Europe, that's to say a different part of Europe from that which was run by the Soviet. And of course, at the end of the day, the reason why the Berlin Wall collapsed was not because of anything that was done by either part of Germany, but it was because the Hungarians opened their borders.

A whole lot of East Germans flocked across the open border between East Germany and Hungary and they were out. And that was the end of the whole ramshackle setup. Now, how can it be that such a hopeless, it's like one of those tables in the tropics, which looks like it's a proper table, but it's been eaten away, so eaten away by termites, you touch it and the whole thing collapses into dust.

That was the state of Eastern Europe at that time. How come we now have to worry about the threat from Putin, particularly since after the fall of Gorbachev, a grotesque drunk called Yeltsin took over and he was of course who created the oligarchs and began by allowing them to take over state owned enterprises, not for the benefit of the people, but for their own benefit. There may be people amongst the South African contingent here who can think of modern parallels to that process but anyway what happened was that Yeltsin was soon succeeded and ultimately by an ex-KGB man called Putin who created what the State department almost immediately called an organised kleptocracy. i.e. a large country actually run by criminals for the benefit of

criminals. But somehow out of that construct Putin has been able to create quite a threatening country. And he's been able to do that for two reasons.

First of all, because Russia does not lack for assets like for instance, gas that will always give it a certain potency. But secondly, of course people become powerful, first of all, because they aspire to be powerful. But secondly, because other people let them become powerful. And this is where we come to a crisis of leadership in the United States, which is not merely a factor of Donald Trump. In fact, it precedes Donald Trump by quite a long way. I'll come to the the Middle East momentarily where George W. Bush totally destroyed the stability of the Middle East thinking he was returning it to stability.

But interestingly, it's the saintly Obama, a man I would certainly have voted for, as I think I said last time, if I was an American voter, yes I'd vote for Obama, but Obama was not interested very much in foreign policy and not interested in taking a forceful attitude as is essential in my view, for an American president to take and so, he would draw lines in the sand and when someone crossed them, well, he'd just draw another line someplace else.

It's extraordinary that for instance, the Russians were allowed back into the Middle East. The Russians hadn't been in the Middle East for decades, and then they suddenly become and all powerful part of the post George W. Bush chaos that had descended on the Middle East. I also find it amazing actually that the Russians were able to get away with they or their clients amongst the Ukrainian forces shooting down innocent passenger aircraft that happened to be flying over their airspace.

And here we come across to the world of Donald Trump. There's obviously been something going on with Donald Trump and the Russians, it's interesting, he never says a personal word of criticism about Putin, but again, we just have to comment on how remarkable it is that the Russians are able to interfere with American presidential elections. That they're able to hack into this and hack into that and totally distort social media. I cannot imagine for a moment why any American president worth his sort would tolerate such a thing, but Obama did and so does Trump.

After all America hasn't surely gone so much to seed that if it came to interfering, for instance, with the workings of key industries, which totally depend on their IT, it wouldn't be possible for America to issue an even more profound threat to the Russians than the Russians could say to them. And in the good old days, as I some sometimes think of them, messages were sent, for instance, to the old communist leadership of the Soviet Union that certain things would not be tolerated. The ultimate message, the one that became public was what John F. Kennedy said to Khrushchev, that he would not tolerate ballistic missiles being put in Cuba, almost in America's backyard.

And in the end, Khrushchev backed down. Kennedy had his blemishes and his imperfections, but he knew a moment when the West had led by the Americans to stand firm and that's exactly

what he did. And despite all the bluster, that's exactly what Trump doesn't do and Obama didn't even pretend that he wanted to do that so the impact of Russia is a threatening one and they're always trying it all Russian military jets are always trying to enter British airspace and then count how long it is before an interceptor is sent up. And of course the Russians are re-arming at an extraordinary rate. Is Russia a profound threat to world peace? Probably not in truth for a profound threat to world peace, we've got to look to China.

But there is no doubt that Russia is an uncomfortable force on the world stage. A world force almost entirely created by the West, unnecessary peace of self harm perpetuated by George W. Bush. The thing about the Middle East is it's necessary always for there to be a balance. A balance that for instance, does not allow Iran itself a threat to peace, regional peace not world peace. But ever since Jimmy Carter was foolish enough to persuade the Shah of Iran, not to resist the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini, I mean despicable actually, because the Americans had persuaded the Shah to spend an absolute fortune on American defence technology. And then when the moment came that he could sensibly use it, they told him he absolutely couldn't. As a result of which the Shah already by then a second dying man was driven out of office.

And Jimmy Carter, a saintly man, but just a man who became president before he really had the understanding and I mean in my service to the British government and to the wonderful Mrs. Thatcher who spoke of me with even more contempt than my mother did, which was quite something. And the fact that I in the interests of this had to regularly have lunch with the Shah's brother who retired to London after the arrival of the Ayatollah Khomeini and listened to a couple of hours of attack on Jimmy Carter and you know what, I couldn't really summon either the energy or the capability to deny what he said because most of what he said was self-evident. And we are paying the price for letting the MAD Mueller's take over in Iran even today.

But the thing was, it was a cardinal principle of Western policy that Iran should be confined to Iran knowing that they would always have Hezbollah and organisations like that but essentially that Iran would be kept out of Iraq and kept from going further west. And that worked pretty well under Saddam Hussein. Who was I admit a pretty awful man. But I still enjoyed the fact I had two and a 1/2 hours with him mainly because the British ambassador said to me, "you'll get 1/2 an hour and 15 minutes of that will be devoted to saying how terrible it was that the British supported the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq which was ended when the young king was dragged, body was dragged through the streets or behind a gun carriage and then General Qasim and the Bartis took over in Iraq and then you'd have 15 minutes and try and say as much as you can and then that's it.

So I was quite pleased I managed to make it go on for two and a 1/2 hours and you know, although it was perfectly possible for Saddam Hussein to take me out of the room and shot me, which is what he made a habit of doing with a few of his cabinet ministers, nevertheless, even monsters can be quite civilised when they want to be. And the thing about Saddam, was although he was a monster, he was a monster who shared one ambition with us that George W. Bush stupidly threw away. What was that ambition? He had no time for Islam and for

Mohammed and all the rest of them, he was the man who ruled Iraq. And when you went to Iraq in those days, massive photos of Saddam Hussein often clutching little children and pretending to be the father of the nation or even the grandfather nation they were there and the foolishness was to depose Saddam Hussein without any viable alternative.

I don't know whether Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, he probably didn't. I certainly agree with George W. Bush and his pathetic partner in this escapade of invading Iraq. Tony Blair reminds me, I don't know how many of you read "Winnie-the-Poo", but very improving piece of literature, "Winnie-the-pooh" and there's one of the pictures Winnie-the-poo is Winnie-the-pooh going up the stairs of Chris Robin going upstairs and there is Winnie-the-pooh bumping on every step behind him.

That was Tony Blair's role in his relationship with George W. Bush. And at the end of it all, what was the consequences of George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq to destabilise Iraq, to prevent anyone who was going to be capable of holding down the religious fanatics and creating a vacuum and who moved into that vacuum? Why the Iranians? Of course, 'cause that's what they do. And it always astonished me that the Americans couldn't see that and they compounded the folly by actually not only getting rid of Saddam Hussein, but dismantling the Iraqi army.

And so a whole lot of well-trained military people went back into civilian life. And a lot of them, of course ended up running Da'ish and joining up with the religious fanatics and at one point, making them quite an effective armed force as a result of all, well actually I might just tell you, sorry, this what frightful name drop, what was the point of having me along if I don't tell you some of the people I met and some of the things they said to me, George Bush's father I had a lot of time for, and I knew him quite well in the Reagan period. And after he'd ceased to be president, he came by once again, my dear old friend David Frost, who I could always rely on to introduce me to people that I wasn't likely to get to see myself. And we had a little lunch down at David's country place and I sat next to George Bush who I liked and I knew, and he had a grace to remember that we had met before, which was kind of him.

And I said to him, Mr. President, I never quite understood why you decided having driven the the Iraqis out of Kuwait not to go up to Baghdad and finish the job. And he said something to me, he said, "well, I could have done," he said, "we could have done," but there were three reasons against it. One was there was no international mandate to do so. The international mandate was to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait. It was not to actually invade Iraq.

Secondly, the public were were getting fed up with seeing what turned out to be a Turkey shoot with, you know, such was the power of the Americans and the allies that the Iraqis were done for. And killing and destruction on that scale didn't go down well with the television audience. And thirdly said, yes, he said, "we could have gone up to Baghdad, "but how would we then have got out again?" And you know, I've often thought of that conversation.

I thought to myself, didn't George Bush talk to George W. Bush? 'Cause that's exactly the piece

of idiocy that George W. Bush actually carried through. He went to Baghdad and then he didn't know what he was going to do and he created a mess. And the people who benefit from the mess today are A, the Iranians B the Russians and the fact that Iran dominates the Middle East and the Russians are there at the right hand of the dictator of the dictator of Syria, Bashar al-Assad.

I've got the sad state in my life now where I knew people's fathers, we didn't know them, I never met him, but I knew his dad quite well, a vicious person. But at least somebody who once again ran a show that wasn't too much of a problem for anybody else. Hell of not a problem if you lived in Syria under Assad pair, but not a problem to anybody else. And that could have been, in my belief, the situation with Saddam Hussein.

But it wasn't because Saddam Hussein was not given the option to behave himself. So many wise things were said to me during my stint at the foreign office by experienced diplomats. And one of them said to me, "the thing is, minister, "this is not a fashionable thing to say, but believe you me, "Iraq can only be run by a man with a big moustache. "And the moment you get all this democracy stuff, "the place is finished." Well, Q.E.D, quod erat demonstrandum, that's exactly what happened.

Well, now what have we dealt with so far? We've looked at the Soviet Union, we've looked at era strewn policies in America, all of this, there's Europe, but you know, the feebleness of Europe is quite depressing. And one of the, you know, the EU aspires to many things and one of the things it aspires to is a foreign policy, but they've never managed to have a foreign policy because key members of the EU, aside from us and the French, is really to bend the knee to almost anything that's said or done led by the Germans.

I mean, okay, nobody wants an over mighty Germany, but one that had a little bit of strength of personality and character would be good. It's the Germans who've never stood up to the Russians because they are dependent for the Russians on gas. And it's the Germans, you know, who are not standing up to China. It's the Germans who for instance, I mean when the EU was about to publish a perfectly reasonable document about the creation of this Covid virus, the Chinese virus, and at least I agree with Trump on that one thing.

It's the Germans who allowed the Chinese to remove from that report an awful lot of the powerful truths that ought to have been retailed and which were not. I must say a little disappointed with what's happening in China because it's not, wasn't hard to foresee the problems that were going to be posed by the Russians. But very difficult to understand the problems that were going to be posed by China. It seemed to me, and I've done a lot of business, I do a lot of business with China and I'm even on that Chinese platform, WeChat, which, and one of my friends years ago said, "it's not really called WeChat, you know, "it's called You Chat we listen," i.e. the intelligence penetration by the Chinese government.

But for some time I never quite grasped how threatening the Chinese government is because a

lot of my friends talking on WeChat didn't seem to care that probably every word was being noted down by some part of the Chinese intelligence machine. And I guess what I assumed was going to happen was that as prosperity came to China, as capitalism came to China, as China developed alternative power bases to the Communist party and the Chinese government because billionaires were being created men of power and influence employing tens of thousands of people, then it would be very difficult for someone like Xi Jinping to actually still dominate China with what we might call an old fashioned approach to what is in China's best interest.

But unfortunately I was wrong about that. I assumed it would be a bit like what happened in Dubai where a friend of mine was one of the great creators of the wealth of Dubai. And I once said to him, so where does the ruling family fit in with all this? And he said, "well, as long as they don't interfere with us, "they can stay for as long as they like." And I suppose I felt that with China that was how it would be and that the spread of capitalism into China would make it impossible for the unreconstructed fanaticism of a Xi Jinping to be advanced. But I think I'm wrong about that.

And let's look at some examples of that. The first thing is, I mean, China is an uncomfortable member of the international community. That virus is undoubtedly a Chinese invention. The third attempt that has happened, I don't see it by the way they're doing this deliberately. I think it happens because of their disgusting eating habits and all the rest of it I mean, I'm not against bats, but I can't imagine putting one into a bit of soup and eating it personally but they do. And these movements across of viruses from animals to humans has happened three times now in less than 20 years. And this one is the worst yet. And I'm going to try and forget what a scientific friend of mine says. You know, it could be worse. The next one is going to be even worse. Will there be a next one? Almost certainly, you know, China blaggards, the World Health Organisation, I mean here again I don't understand like Donald Trump on a bad day, but you know, you can't be wrong about everything by the law of averages.

And Trump was actually right about the WHO which accepted Chinese lies, including that there could not be transmission of this thing from human to human complete rubbish. And the point about the Chinese is they are so bruising in the way in which their diplomats conduct themselves an attack force, what do they call them? Wolf pack or something. The way they describe this, that it requires great strength of character to stand up to them and there has been no strength shown by the west. Wait, once again we go back to Obama, such a charming man, such a shame he was so hopeless at large chunks of being president.

The South China Sea is an important international ocean where, I forget what percentage is somewhere around 10 or 12% of the world's trade, maybe even more and check that one out, passes through the South China Sea. Under Obama, the Chinese were allowed to effectively annex it, take atolls or create atolls, arm them and then claim that when vessels pass through the South China Sea, somehow they are trespassing on Chinese territory.



The Chinese going back to that Covid virus, there hasn't been a single admission that this came from China. And the devastation to the global economy is entirely something that lay within their control not to do. I don't believe they intended it should happen that way, but when it did, they were determined to take advantage of it. Which brings me to Taiwan and Hong Kong, only a country, so given over to a sort of ruthless approach to their own interests would really, even now 70 years after Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan, they would really still want to treat Taiwan as part of China and they will block Taiwan from having any international representation in a whole lot of bodies. And of course supine Lee the west degrees.

But now it's got worse under Xi Jinping, there's even a suggestion they might contemplate invading Taiwan. I probably think they won't. But the fact that it's deemed by Sinologists the people that sort of claim to know all about what's going on in China, that it's actually on the agendas, shows what an uncomfortable neighbour China is. And as it grows more powerful, what a threat to world peace becomes.

Hong Kong is another good example. When you re-read what Chinese spokesman say about Hong Kong, it's how dare we interfere with an internal Chinese matter but it's not an internal Chinese matter. When the British left in 1997, they left having signed a treaty which guaranteed a whole lot of things, but just we haven't got time for all of them but 50 years there would be separation of powers between Hong Kong and China, separate development and that the people of Hong Kong would be allowed freedom of expression and all the other freedoms that civilised western communities take for granted.

Now the Chinese say, "how dare you complain what's going on in Hong Kong? "It's a purely internal Chinese matter," even though that treaty was lodged at the UN and their little helpers, the Russians are now blocking the UN, the UN is up to much, but that's a subject for another evening blocking any UN debate upon that matter. And when the Chinese were unable to enforce their will through the awful Carrie Lam, it's hard to imagine a more well Lam and in I mean a more Lam like insignificant, insubstantial, flimsy creature to be running one of the world's most exciting city states. But of course she doesn't really run them, she just is told what to do. And in a rather inexperienced way does it. Xi Jinping is now fed up with her and so effectively the Chinese government has taken over Hong Kong and they are now asserting the right to bring in laws, repressive laws that will end up in the destruction of democratic expression in Hong Kong.

Now once again, Trump has got this one right, whether he'll throw it through, we don't know. China, Hong Kong exists and has lots and lots of trading benefits because it's not deemed to be part of China. And if you go to Hong Kong as I've often done and then you travel across into China, it's like you are travelling to a foreign country in terms of what you have to do, the permissions you have to get. But that's obviously all been thrown away now. And where the Chinese are is that they will assert the right to run Hong Kong and they will defy the world to stand up for them because they have such contempt. They don't think we ever would stand up to them. But you know, we have to stand up to them and if we don't stand up to them, an

uncomfortable member of the world community will become an impossibly overbearing one. Even so, I think our old friend from the days of the Soviet Empire will come to the rescue, MAD, MAD, mutually assured destruction.

Even an incapable American president still has a button to push and maybe there would be enough people in Beijing to worry that he might push it. Trump is an awful person. But you know, I look at that sad old creature, Joe Biden completely clapped out one step away from the car home. And I think, is he going to be the man whose finger is going to be on the button from the beginning of next year? Will the Chinese have any fear? At least for Trump, although he's erratic and one minute he's sort of kissing and embracing Xi Jinping and the next minute he's threatening eternal vengeance because he's unstable as indeed are a lot of people with whom Xi Jinping has to deal like the dictator of North Korea.

I think Trump might get away with it a bit better than Joe Biden would, but Joe Biden in office, I think that bending the knee to the Chinese will become more than an occasional thing. It will become a habit, almost an addiction. Anyway, I hope not. And yes, probably the world will survive all of this because of mutually assured destruction. But you know, if we look back to the fall of the Berlin Wall and all the euphoria, no one thought we were going to end up in an infinitely more dangerous position than we were in before the Berlin Wall fell. But at least I'm hope I persuaded you that, that is absolutely the case. Thank you very much.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Thank you David. So now I get the chance to do a few questions with you. So to start where you left off on the topic of MAD, mutually assured destruction often worked because of two rational actors on either side of the table. And what people have said about Iran or others is, you know, you can't necessarily assume that that's the case. So, with the countries you've touched on, could you assess where you think MAD, you know, really will save us? And where in fact the power's been put in the hands of people who may not understand, you know, that they bring their own destruction with the other side?

A: I think the Chinese understand that actually and they just push their luck because cringing entities like the EU will always bend the knee to them and the Germans will always think there's some financial advantage to them in keeping up their buoyant trade with China so, I think that would be all right. I think the one that you can't guarantee is Iran. I think that Iran you see, 'cause you never know who's running Iran. Is Iran run by the Ayatollahs or is it run by their independent national guard that they're the ones who run those little boats out into the Gulf and attack ships or capture ships or whatever.

It's not clear to me and it's probably not clear to anyone in Iran who's actually running the show. Another reason why actually, although he doesn't seem to be doing much about it now, Trump isn't wrong to actually try and bring down this regime. It's deeply unpopular with the people of Iran. And if sanctions continue against Iran, the Mueller's will find it quite difficult to stay in power

and at least getting rid of the Mueller's will be a step in the right direction.

Q: So continuing with China, I wanted to turn to the China-India border where you will have seen there's been an increase in skirmishes through the Himalayas in recent weeks, the worst in the last few years. In terms of signs of trouble ahead, as China continues look to project power in seemingly every single direction, where do you see that relationship with India and the possible potential for threats there.

A: Deeply uncomfortable. And I don't think, you know, it's like the way the Chinese crushed Tibet. You see the Chinese would not be afraid of the Indians and the Indians they would not regard as posing any great threat to them. I don't see that as the thing that's bubbling on the stove as much as the ones I mentioned, like their protection of the South China Sea, their attack on freedom of expression in Hong Kong and their desire, reckless, pointless desire to bring back Taiwan into the fold. But no, I mean look, China is a very, very uncomfortable neighbour. It's a very uncomfortable country. But you know, I'm not sure I see much evidence of the Indians doing very much about it.

And at the end of the day, you know, I mean even Trump, there's this ludicrous thing where he is getting rid of the G7 meeting and putting it off for perhaps for time and he won't be in office. But it's interesting, he wants to invite others to the G7, including India and would you believed Russia, which was slung out before it was a G8 and then Russia was slung out. The willingness to have these unacceptable countries like China and like Russia, given all of the boons of being civilised members of the world community whilst not being is a sign I think that, you know, almost anything could happen but I don't see the India one as being a real flashpoint.

Q: So Mr. Stiffel is keen that I ask you, about whether or not the US that still currently has the upper hand militarily and should they close the straits of Malacca to demonstrate to China that they need to behave? Can you comment on that?

A: Well, I think these things are, I think that at some point someone is going to have to stand up to the Chinese and we'll then see what happens. And it's possible to stand up for the Chinese in relation to something like that without provoking some sort of nuclear holocaust of which we were always so afraid, but which actually is a great protector, more of a protector than a threat. But at the moment there isn't any particular sign that the so-called free world is willing to act together even on quite a small thing like that.

Q: So you touched on Iraq and the role of Saddam Hussein, but we didn't talk about Syria over the last seven or eight years. In terms of the world community and its lack of intervention and you know, the red lines that were moved and that kind of thing. You know, do you still feel that the rest of the world can act as a kind of policeman led by the US or actually to quote your remark on Iraq that you know, the men with moustaches should be left to it?

A: Well, I mean I think so far as Syria is concerned, you know, why should it only be the

Russians who dabble in Syria? At the end of the day, instability in Syria causes instability throughout the Middle East. And of course what it does is create pressures because a lot of Syrians have to flee their country, and I don't think anyone can argue that they don't. It's about two or three million Syrians in Turkey at the moment. And of course that causes problems in terms of where they then go after that and they become a bargaining chip as to whether the Turks will try to confine them or not.

And of course, once it's clear that Syrians can travel wherever they want to travel, then of course that means others come and you get a whole host of economic migrants who besiege the EU and the EU lacks the capability to deal with them and it's a further sign of the EU weakness, you know, and even somebody who's often credited, perhaps not always rightly with great statesmanship and wisdom, which is Merkel. You know, she suddenly says that she's quite happy to welcome a million immigrants into Germany, well I can tell you the Germans themselves weren't that keen and that from that moment on, she's been living on borrowed time and it's not clear at all that there will be a succession in Germany that will be remotely convincing. And I just think that if we don't deal with Syria in Syria, we have to deal with the Syrians out of Syria and that's a much more difficult proposition.

Q: Returning to Hong Kong, you talked about the need, you know, to stand up against the restriction on freedoms. What could the international community do? I know the UK has mentioned, you know, possible visas or you know, the change in special status. What actions would you see that could hold the change...

A: Well I think that change in special status is more than just a nothing but it does really drive a stake through the heart of Hong Kong's ability to exist as an independent economic and commercial power. And the Chinese, it's very useful to them to have Hong Kong in that role. And while it would be sad for the Hong Kongers if this happened, it's interesting quite a lot of the leaders of the democracy movement in Hong Kong want that to happen because they understand that only something that is going to call, make quite a difference will work and so far as the British are concerned, I mean, you know, once again it's a sign of the unacceptable way in which the Chinese behave is for them to say that, you know, we have no right to offer these people the right to and live and work in the UK.

You know, who the blank do the Chinese think they are, they get away with it because of weakened pusillanimous leadership, which has allowed them to believe that which was exactly what Saddam Hussein believed. Saddam Hussein believed he could go and invade Kuwait and invite the whole of the Gulf and no one in the West was strong enough to stop him. Not they didn't have the capacity to do it, but they wouldn't have the will to do it. And that's exactly what Xi Jinping thinks about Hong Kong. And at some point the Chinese will have to be taken on, hopefully taken on with a diplomatic rebuff rather than anything worse.

But what you cannot be is afraid of China. China has to be dealt with. It's not perhaps quite as frightening as some people think because it's incompetently run and incompetently managed.

But we need to remember Chinese have always had a history of being totally ruthless in what they do, you know, if you look at "Mao's great famine", 1958 to 1962, the latest estimate is that 45 million Chinese starved to death during that experimenting collective farming. The Chinese are ruthless with their own people, so why wouldn't they be ruthless with us? No reason at all.

Q: Looking at the international community as a whole, do you see the UN having any role in, you know, we talked about the World Health Organisation, but as they look to engage some of these challenging players, or is it really about, you know, one major country, be it the US stepping up against this?

A: Well the UN is, you know, it exists and it provides a forum for discussion. But as long as the right of veto exists and the Russians exercise it on almost every occasion that they can, we end up with a situation where the UN can do nothing effective at all. But even so, it's probably better we have one than we don't. But no one can pretend that the UN is really a very effective organisation nor indeed or an awful lot of its operating parts, including the World Health Organisation.

I don't share this feeling that somehow or other this is a great body when the history is written of its attitude to the Coronavirus, it was totally supine in the face of Chinese lies and it's bound to be when, you know, somehow out of nowhere, they contrived to put the ex-foreign minister of Ethiopia. Ethiopia and little better than a client's state of China. They put the ex-foreign minister of Ethiopia in charge of it. No reason to have done that and no reason to be surprised that it's not an effective organisation when that's what they did.

Q: Looking at Africa then for a second, and your comments on the role of the Chinese as they look to make their way across the continent, you know, with one or two exceptions where Taiwan is the sponsor, do you believe that that the next kind of battle for power will be in Africa?

A: I don't know if it's a battle for power, but there's no doubt the Chinese think of Africa as being very useful to them. It's a source of a great deal of mineral wealth and so on, and it's a way to spread their influence around and yes, I think, you know, the Chinese will be there bearing gifts that might turn out to have rather more strings attached than any sensible African leader would want. But yes, I think they are interested in Africa and they do think it helps achieve their objectives to have a sort of client-state relationship with a number of African countries.

Q: Is it the time of Churchill versus Halifax, but this time against the Chinese?

A: What do you mean? So an appeasement party and a non appeasement party.

- Yeah I think this is the question from John...

- Well, I mean, you know, I just don't think, you know, Donald Trump is probably going to lose the presidential election and I'm not sad about that. But it's not going to matter to the public that

the person who replaces him will be absolutely hopeless on all this stuff. I don't think it's a feature on the landscape really. Whereas at the end of the day with Churchill, everything he said came true and therefore he had to be brought on board. But there's unlikely to be such a stark choice, we hope anyway in an American election you know, it's just that America will not be as influential as it ought to be and as it wants to be, but which it's rather inept about how it chooses to be influential.

I mean, when you actually look at it, Reagan's a very successful for a person in foreign policy. He defied the Russians and he really defied the Russians by going into what was regarded as very provocative arms race with them. But what he knew was that a third world economy could not sustain a first world investment in defence. And that's what brought the Russians down. But everyone after him hasn't been very effective. and the last three in their different ways, disastrous.

Q: And for the final question, Trump has done his best to take on China, particularly around the trade imbalance. Where do you think he went wrong, given everything you've touched on about the Chinese aggression?

A: I don't think he did so badly over China. He just can't make up his mind you know, he still can't resist having conversations with Xi Jinping where he comes out with all kinds of oily, greasy rubbish that is then quoted against him. But I think Trump's done quite well with the Chinese. But you know, he started from a bad situation because Obama did nothing about Chinese grandisement and, you know, allowed them to militarise the South China Sea. And it would've been much easier to have dealt with the problems of the South China Sea before they had got these armed atolls. And before they effectively started to claim that the South China Sea was an inland sea of China and it ain't nothing to do with the rest of the world at all so, you know, I mean, Trump is, I can't, still can't believe he's president, you know, I think it's a nightmare, we'll wake up from it. And his limitations are being shown this week, aren't they?

Because he's incapable of making a speech to bind up the wounds of the nation. He's impossible for him to be anything other than an appallingly divisive figure. And the fact he had to go skulking in his bunker under the White House because they seriously thought that this mob was going to break in is a sign at the end of the day that he is impotent as an American leader. But I would be happier if I thought the next American leader would at least adopt one or two of his policies and his scepticism towards China and his desire to see the Chinese off is worthy of being emulated by his successor, though it won't be.

Q: And when we have one more sneak in under the wire, so given the size of China and their pace of growth, do you think it's inevitable that sooner or later they will supplant the west?

A: Well, the answer to that is probably, but not certainly. See, don't forget, the Chinese of course do their best through industrial espionage on an epic scale to be able to create things that appear, that give them, they become more than just a cheap reduction factory for a lot of

Western stuff. But I don't think it's necessarily the case that the Chinese will be able to continue to get away with that. And if it is indeed a serious policy by the West to start ensuring that their supply chains for all kinds of things are no longer dependent on China. I mean, for instance, the British government finds the guts from somewhere to deal with the Chinese involvement in 5G, Huawei in 5G or Chinese involvement in nuclear power stations.

I mean, if the West really does repudiate the Chinese, I think that would have a great impact on their ability to be as large a power economically as they want to be. But then, you know, it's a big if and you will always find people like Germany who have a burgeoning trade with China, and all they want to do is to say whatever they have to say in order to retain that. And when it comes to principles, well any, even our audience now who don't think Germany have many principles in the past and certainly not good ones if they had any, and I don't think they have improved in that there's something about German foreign policy, which is totally dominated by a short term view of their own self-interest so, there'll be plenty of appeasers to China, but I think that the chances of China becoming as powerful as they want to be, paradoxically are dented by Xi Jinping's aggression that makes it almost impossible for anyone who wishes to retain their self-respect from Kowtowing to him and them.

- Thank you very much.

- Well, well, David, thank you for that riveting talk. You've given us a lot of food for thought as you've made your way across the world. Your expertise is second to none, and we'll do our best not to have nightmares tonight.

- We are indeed, as a Chinese proverb goes living in interesting times and as we've seen black swans arrive when we least expect them. And unfortunately the death of leadership in the world today is worrying, worrisome. But I have every hope that the next generation will be resourceful and turn these challenges into opportunities. So I want to thank you very, very much for what was fantastic lecture. Thank you and goodnight.

- Great pleasure. Thanks.

- Thank you, thank you everybody. Thanks for joining us. Goodnight.