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Jeffrey Sachs: What did Trump do differently than Franklin Roosevelt, like Theodore Roosevelt?

From [Editorial staff](#)

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December 23, 2025 – Professor Jeffrey Sachs (right) as a guest of Judge Andrew Napolitano (right) | Source: Screenshot YouTube Judging Freedom

The renowned professor, former UN Special Envoy, author and political analyst, Jeffrey Sachs, recapitulates on the podcast, Judging Freedom by Judge Andrew Napolitano, the challenges and weaknesses of US foreign policy at the end of the year.

Jeffrey Sachs: "From a technical and operational point of view, the USA is now at war with Venezuela!" – Part 1

Judge Napolitano: Hello everyone, this is Judge Andrew Napolitano with "Judging Freedom." Today is Tuesday, December 23, 2025, and Professor Jeffrey Sachs is our guest today to discuss "The Underestimated Russia!" Professor Sachs, a very warm welcome, my dear friend. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us. I also wish you and your family happy holidays!

I would like to discuss the European mentality and its notorious underestimation of Russia. But first, I want to address a few other things, not least those concerning China.

But first, some breaking news: About an hour ago, Greta Thunberg, the climate and peace activist, was arrested in London for holding up a sign that read, *"I support prisoners of the Palestinian action and reject genocide!"* Because she expressed this sentiment on a piece of paper in London, England, she was taken to jail. Can this really be true?

Jeffrey Sachs: This is happening all over the Western world. It's in line with Western values. In the United States, my students were summarily arrested, dragged from their dorms in front of their wives, and imprisoned for months. In Europe, people are arrested for simply expressing their opinions. In continental Europe—in the European Union—people are arrested based on scientific reports...

...which contradict the statements of the European Commission, have been placed on sanctions lists!

What we are currently experiencing amounts to a general restriction of freedom. Judge, your program is about freedom, yet we are witnessing how freedom in the so-called Western world, which claims to defend Western values of freedom, is being drastically restricted after people spoke out against the prevailing opinion.

I would say that we are witnessing a kind of paranoia, coupled with acts of desperation, among those in power in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. This is happening in slightly different ways in different places, but restrictions on freedom of expression and very basic political speech are being implemented in an absolutely dramatic manner!

Judge Napolitano: In the last two weeks, there have been three events relating to China:

- The Trump administration published its *National Security Strategy*, according to which China is no longer an enemy, but an economic competitor – a good insight.
- But then, a week later, Congress passed the *National Defense Authorisation Act*, which President Trump signed into law. This law provides the Department of Defense, now called the Department of War, with one trillion dollars next year and allocates 11 billion dollars worth of offensive weapons to Taiwan. According to Scott Ritter, these weapons could reach as far as Beijing!

Jeffrey Sachs: Yes, that became public!

Judge Napolitano: Correct! But then the president dispatched the US Navy to seize an oil tanker arriving from Venezuela, the contents of which had been bought and paid for by a Chinese company. And Trump said: *"We're going to keep the oil and the ship!"*...

Jeffrey Sachs: ...and new sanctions against Chinese trade, also imposed just a few hours ago, target semiconductors destined for China. So, this is a US administration acting in a very chaotic and ambiguous manner. It's showing a very violent side. Sometimes there's rhetoric that isn't violent. But there's no consistent line! Washington is full of warmongers, whatever one may think of that. These warmongers are quick to take anti-China measures, and so such actions against China will inevitably continue.

The seizure of the Panamanian-flagged tanker, which was not sanctioned, constitutes an act of war!

Because the United States—President Trump, who lacks the constitutional authority to do so—has imposed a blockade on Venezuela. A blockade is an act of war. That, too, is unconstitutional. But you and I know that we essentially no longer have a Congress. You hear nothing from it, and it no longer plays any role. The members of Congress no longer exercise their prerogatives. Attempts to limit the president's power over Venezuela by making it clear that he was unilaterally declaring war had failed in the US Congress. Most members of Congress, and of course members of his own party, have sided with the president.

From a technical point of view, and indeed also from an operational point of view, we are now at war with Venezuela!

This occurred due to the blockade and the seizure of ships. The underlying objectives are:

- Overthrow the Venezuelan government!
- To seize or steal Venezuela's oil reserves!
- To hinder trade with China!

These are multiple motives, targeting different things, but all are reckless and irresponsible, making the world a more dangerous place on this eve of Christmas – which are supposed to be days of peace. The world has become a very dangerous place, and the USA bears some responsibility for it!

Judge Napolitano: I will play two clips: In one, President Trump states quite openly what he intends to do with the oil and the ship. And in the other, one of his predecessors [presidents] speaks brilliantly after American ships were hit:

Recording 1:



Donald Trump makes it abundantly clear that the US is above international law / Source: Screenshot YouTube Judging Freedom

Question for Trump: What will happen to the oil we now have?

Donald Trump: What do you mean?

Question: The seized oil: The United States seized 1.9 million barrels of oil on December 10th!

Donald Trump: We'll keep it – we'll keep it!

Question: Where is it? Will we either sell it or store it as strategic reserves?

Donald Trump: Maybe we'll sell it – maybe we'll keep it. Maybe we'll use it for strategic reserves. We'll keep it – along with the ships!

Recording 2:



Franklin Roosevelt during Fireside Chat 18 regarding the "Greer Incident" / Source: Screenshot YouTube Judging Freedom

Franklin Roosevelt: *We did not seek an armed conflict with Hitler. We do not seek it now. But we do not need peace so much that we are prepared to accept or allow our warships and merchant ships, which are carrying out their legitimate missions, to be attacked...*

Editor's note: *In his Fireside Chat 18 on September 11, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt discussed the sinking of several US cargo ships by German submarines, and Franklin Roosevelt sharply criticized this.*

End of note

[...]

Franklin Roosevelt: *... When you see a rattlesnake about to strike, you don't wait until it strikes before you crush it. These Nazi U-boats and plunderers are the rattlesnakes of the Atlantic. They are a threat to free shipping lanes on the high seas. They pose a challenge to our sovereignty. They attack our noblest rights, just as they attack ships flying the American flag, symbols of our independence, our liberty, and our lives.*

[...]

Judge Napolitano: Did Donald Trump send rattlesnakes to the Caribbean?



Jeffrey Sachs voices criticism on topics that many of his colleagues usually remain silent about / Source: Screenshot YouTube Judging Freedom

Jeffrey Sachs: The crux of American politics right now is to let everyone know that they can do whatever they want: as if there were no rules and no international law or anyone who could stop the USA.

President Trump revels in this, trying to appear as outrageous as possible and attempting to communicate that...

...brute force would be used and anyone who dared to resist would be destroyed by the USA!

This is the antithesis of the rule of law. It is the opposite of what brought security to the world. Rather, it exacerbates the already heated atmosphere of hostility in Europe and the United States. This is extraordinarily reckless and dangerous. Many countries are too intimidated to speak out against Trump right now because they fear him. But that is precisely what Trump wanted to achieve. It amounts to a dramatic show of force!

It's fortunate that you included Franklin Roosevelt. In my opinion, he was undoubtedly the greatest president of the 20th century and remains so to this day. He pursued two great ideas that Americans should remember:

- Firstly, he conceived the United Nations in the midst of World War II because he believed that international law was needed, based on global cooperation and not on brute force. The USA was fighting against the brute force of National Socialism. Franklin Roosevelt wanted the world to operate according to international law and global cooperation.
- Franklin Roosevelt's other outstanding idea, which is still absolutely relevant today, was his declaration at the beginning of his first term in office:

The "US policy of good neighborliness" towards the countries of America!

His distant sixth cousin, Teddy Roosevelt, as we have already discussed, had, at the beginning of the 20th century, as a true imperialist, proclaimed the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe

Doctrine. This Roosevelt Corollary, proclaimed by Theodore Roosevelt as president in the early years of the 20th century, stated:

The USA will be America's policeman and will intervene at its own discretion!

Thus, the Marines landed countless times in the Caribbean and Central America under the so-called Roosevelt Amendment.

Well, this [other] Roosevelt we just saw, [namely] Franklin Roosevelt, said: “*This is not right! It does not work! It leads to unrest! It increases insecurity throughout the Western Hemisphere!*” He promised the “*policy of good neighborliness*,” according to which the United States would not intervene, by force or military force, in the affairs of other countries of America!

He kept his word and in 1948 the countries of the Western Hemisphere signed a charter to establish the *Organization of American States* :

This charter enshrines the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries!

Donald Trump is not just returning to the *Roosevelt Corollary* . He is going much further. He has announced a kind of brutal corollary: “*We will do what we want, wherever we want – against all principles, all rules, …*”

... all international law, all regional agreements, all charters – we keep the oil – we don't care and it simply belongs to us!

That's precisely what he proclaims with great fervor: He's trying to instill fear and terror in the rest of the world. If you thought this would bring security to you, me, and the American people, I would have to disagree. On the contrary, it has increased our insecurity at a time when we could be the safest people in the world if we would only stop raising the temperature on the planet with all these threats—with this unilateralism and doing whatever we want just because we're the toughest, shadiest, and worst guys in the “*territory* .”

What are we doing? We're selling weapons to Taiwan. Would we like it if China wanted to sell weapons to the state of Pennsylvania? I don't think we would—not at all! And yet we interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and in the most intense and dangerous flashpoints.

Whether it was the attempt to push NATO into Ukraine, the seizure of tankers and violation of international law, or the sale of weapons to Taiwan against China's vehement opposition and its clearest red lines.

But we think that's clever and good, and that it's the American way. In reality, it only puts us at greater risk. And that's exactly what's happening right now. It's unbelievable! It's as if there simply aren't any adults who understand the basic idea that you have to act according to principles if you want to be safe, and that if you act like a tyrant, you'll bring about disaster.

Part 2 to follow