

**Dwarkesh Podcast #59 - Sarah C. M. Paine - Why Dictators Keep Making the Same Fatal  
Mistake**

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**Dwarkesh Patel**

Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Sarah Paine. She is a professor of strategy and policy at the Naval War College and she has written some of the best military history I've ever read. We're going to get into history, strategy, and all kinds of interesting topics today.

My first question, does grand strategy as a concept make sense? While you have these countries, the people making these decisions are individuals and they have so many individual ambitions and desires and constraints from internal politics to factions they have to appease. Does it make sense to talk about countries having strategies?

**Sarah Paine**

Before I get going, I have to make an obligatory disclaimer. My views do not necessarily represent those of the US government, let alone the US Navy department and much less the place where I work, the US Naval War College. Okay, now that that's over, on to grand strategy.

Yeah, it is useful. I'm going to define grand strategy as the integration of all relevant instruments of national power in the pursuit of national objectives. If you think about modern governments in the West, they have cabinets and they sit before the president. Those cabinet portfolios represent the different instruments of national power. Can you imagine trying to run foreign policy without having those people at your table and coordinating?

If you look at countries that have not coordinated all instruments, for instance, Japan in World War Two versus Japan during the prior period of the Meiji Restoration, by the time the Japanese got into World War Two, they were really prioritizing the Army and the Navy too, but the military was their main instrument of national power. They were not coordinating with civilians. They assassinated those people and got into deep, dark trouble. They didn't listen to their finance minister who told them it was unaffordable. So yes, grand strategy is absolutely necessary.

If you have national objectives like you want to improve your own security or you want to improve trade then you need to think about all of these different instruments of national power and how you're going to coordinate. Those who don't coordinate get into deep, dark trouble.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Right. So maybe having a coherent grand strategy is the ideal but if we want to understand history maybe it's more useful to talk about factions and individuals? A previous guest, Richard Rhodes, who wrote the Making of the Atomic Bomb, talked about how after the war, the different branches of the military were competing with each other to see who would get more funding and who had access to nuclear weapons was a big part of that and how many.

If throughout history we see lots of competition between the different parts of the government in ways that explain their choices, for example, in the case of Japan, why they invaded China instead of pursuing a maritime strategy, then isn't it more useful to just talk about the factions and the individuals rather than the strategy of the country?

**Sarah Paine**

I think it's the individuals making their arguments for what they think the strategy should be. I'll give you an excellent example of how the sausage was made.

I was perusing the Eisenhower archives a number of years ago. So here's the Allied Commander from World War II, then President of the United States, and what he would do is bring in all the relevant parties to whatever the decision is. He would have them recommend various courses of action and they would offer arguments and counter arguments, and then they would hash it out and come up with some kind of combination of all or choosing one of them.

Yeah, there's going to be a big debate. People are going to have all kinds of different ideas. In fact this is one of the great strengths of democracy. You have to listen to the counter argument or the counter argument is called "you lose the election" and the other party is in. But the notion that you're going to streamline it and not have disagreements, that's what dictators do and they have problems. They double down on bad decisions.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah, that's actually one of the questions I eventually wanted to ask you. In World War II, we see that many of the countries had really well coordinated and apportioned budgets spread between their different branches. And in the case of Japan, they didn't.

Is democracy the answer for why the U.S. and Britain were better coordinated?

**Sarah Paine**

Part of it. And I think part of it is a different issue. If you think about who the strategic leaders of World War II were, they were the conscripts of World War I. Think about people slightly younger than you, maybe your age as well, if they survive to come off that front, then they come back and they want to start families. It's the Great Depression. It's terribly difficult. And when they get to the age where they're going to be strategic leaders, they have the harm of sending their own children in. So they thought deeply about what had gone wrong in World War I. This is in the West, particularly Britain and the United States. And their answer was institution building on a massive scale and integrating all elements of national power. This is when you've had the National Security Act passed in the United States, setting up all kinds of organizations like the National Security Council, United Nations, NATO and all manner of things. A lot of it is coming off of the horrific war that was World War I and then doing a better job in World War II.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

You would think that the victors of a war would be the ones whose perception of reality is the most inflated, whereas the losers are the ones who have to come to terms with why they lost, whereas we see the opposite. The U.S. had such good leadership like Patton and Curtis LeMay and there are so many great generals that came out of that time. Whereas in Germany, Hitler himself fought in World War I so it's hard to explain why he made so many mistakes.

**Sarah Paine**

Initially, Hitler did incredibly well. His Blitzkrieg was incredible. If he had stopped with the Anschluss, where he gets Austria and is going to take Czechoslovakia, and said, "Oh, I'm uniting the German people." he would have gotten away with it and probably be considered a brilliant leader by Germans. But then, hubris, right? The Blitzkrieg worked so well, his generals told him he couldn't do it, but of course it worked, and then he goes further and overextends.

When you look at what you think are great generals on the Western side, they are great generals but their success has to do with a whole lot of other people. If we hadn't broken the codes, which the British and the Poles helped us do with the various Enigma machines, would it have turned out the same? If you don't have Henry Ford, who's turning his cars into tanks, and the people who built the Liberty ships, would it have been the same? If you do not have scientists doing the Manhattan Project, would it have been the same? Think about the enormous mobilization within the United States, where Americans are all on board and in Britain and all over. So when you go, "Ah, Patton." he actually has a whole civilian architecture behind him. We tend to personify it as the general. It ain't so. It's everybody.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

You mention that if Hitler had stopped, I guess in 1939, after he had expanded the borders of Germany beyond where they had ever been in history, I want your opinions on what is the latest at which he could have stopped, and maybe not avoided war, but at least solidified and consolidated the biggest possible empire?

Various options could be - one is just after 1939. What if he invades Poland with the Soviet Union, but he doesn't invade Russia after or declare war on the United States, and maybe at some point negotiates a peace with Britain. Would that have been possible? Or what about after the fall of France? Then he could have just controlled all of Europe.

**Sarah Paine**

(a) I don't know. But (b) I think he could make the ploy - I'm just a continuation of Bismarck. I'm fighting these limited wars. I'm uniting the German people. That one he might have been able to sell and quit after Anschluss. The moment he's going into genocide against the Poles we are off to a different race because Poland is why Britain gets into the war.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Right but is that a race he could have won or at least settled? In that, maybe if it wasn't for Churchill and Britain is just like, "You know what, we'll just let Hitler have Europe." And then he doesn't go to war with America. Is it possible that there's a world in which Hitler just controls Europe?

**Sarah Paine**

I think the problem with your question is that it's just not who Hitler was. He wrote in Mein Kampf exactly what he wanted to do and that what you're describing is not what he's about. If he were about combining with the West and taking parts of the Soviet Union, maybe? But that's not what he's about. He has this whole genocidal program that goes with him.

There's another issue is that if you take too much, like if you're going to go kill off the Poles, the Poles never give up. The Poles went through three partitions over their history but the Polish identity never disappeared. If you do that, it never goes away. You will never have stable borders and then it's easy for others to fund insurgencies because you have this dominated population that hates being dominated. It's not stable.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Then suppose that before Stalingrad, he had stopped. At that point didn't he control like 30% of the Soviet Union?

**Sarah Paine**

He'll never hold it. He'll choke on his acquisitions.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Ah. Did Germany have the power under another leader to just hold that whole section of Eurasia?

**Sarah Paine**

All right. I'm going to flip this whole argument. You're talking about people doing territorial conquest and taking things and butchering enormous numbers of people to get it. You can watch this in real time in Ukraine. This is how it goes — You're butchering a lot of people. You're destroying wealth at an incredibly rapid clip. You can do that but since the Industrial Revolution in the West, there has been a growing consensus that that's probably not the way to do things. We are far better at crafting international institutions, international laws, treaties that we sign on to, the parts that we want to and then we adhere to them. And then that allows us to go all over the world running our little credit card transactions. No one kills us and you can make a lot of wealth doing that.

Since the Industrial Revolution, who's making all the money? People who buy into that system. Territorial expansion isn't the way. It's a real throwback to a pre-Industrial

Revolution way of managing your national security. This is how traditional continental empires always did it. The Industrial Revolution with compounding economic growth, offers a completely different alternative, which says we're going to compound our wealth by having rules that we can all adhere to. And then we'll run our commercial transactions that way.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Why was Russia eventually so robust in pushing back against the Germans? Despite losing tens of millions of soldiers, the government doesn't collapse like the Tsars did in World War I. And not only that, but a communist country is able to produce really advanced tanks in large and reliable numbers. There are so many mysteries there like why did central planning work? Why didn't the government collapse? Despite the fact that Stalin killed off so many of his people. He would have been hated, right?

### **Sarah Paine**

Ah, but Hitler killed more and was more hated. What you're thinking about is what did the Russians do? I'm going to flip it. What did the Germans do?

A useful concept comes from the Samuel Griffith' translation of Sun Tzu, which talks about death ground. What's death ground? It's when your enemy puts you on death ground, which means they're going to kill you, and therefore, you have no choice but to fight, because if you don't fight, you're dead. And even if you fight, your odds are poor, but at least that's the only way you're going to get out.

The Ukrainians initially welcomed the Germans. Why? Because Stalin and friends had imposed the terrible famine of the early 1930s on them. And they couldn't imagine that anything would be worse than that until they met Nazis, who then had them dig their own mass graves. The Ukrainians rethought that whole thing. And if you do this to people, you will conjure a formidable enemy. So that's what happened to Russia. You can see it happening to Ukraine now before your eyes. Go back before the invasion of Crimea in 2014. You've got Ukraine, which has a very corrupt government and people were at sixes and sevens about whether they want to do Ukrainian things or Russian things. Fast forward to now, where you have Russians blowing away the people who were most loyal to them in the eastern part of the country. Their apartment buildings are being leveled by Russians. Ukrainians think, "Aha. This idea that we can coexist with these people is over."

The irony is Putin's forging Ukrainian national identity and wars often do this. In the United States, we started out with our 13 colonies and they're all very different but the Revolutionary War starts forging a national identity. And by the time you get to the end of the Civil War, where you have northern armies, at least those people have been all over the country. They have a real sense of nation by the end of that one.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

It's interesting because the strategy we pursued with Germany and Japan was unconditional surrender. Obviously we didn't commit genocide or anything, but do you think of that as different than the sort of total unlimited policy objectives that Germany had in Ukraine or Japan had in China? We also pursued unconditional surrender against the South in the Civil War. How do you think about that? Because that's also something where your back is up against the wall. Why did that not result in the same kind of morale?

**Sarah Paine**

Because the United States did not put the people of these countries on death ground. The leadership had put themselves on death ground. Basically the problem for Tojo Hideki is that if he backs down on anything, he's out of office and then he doesn't know what happens after that. So he personally is on career death ground and he thinks, and we were planning to, that he would get executed at the end of the war. But the Japanese people eventually figured out that they weren't on death ground. In fact, the Japanese people were so exhausted by the whole thing that the society shattered.

The United States was never going to start massacring the German people in the way that the Russians massacred the Poles when they moved in or the way the Germans massacred the Poles. How do you wind up with eight or nine million Polish deaths in World War II? Think about that. That's a large number. It's because they're being massacred.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But there was a firebombing of Tokyo, Dresde, and Berlin. I think it was in your book that 84,000 people died in that one night of firebombing in Tokyo.

**Sarah Paine**

Yes. It's terrible.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why did that not make them put them in the mind frame of a sort of total death ground?

**Sarah Paine**

(a) I don't know. But (b) Japan had been at war since 1931 in China. They had been sending large armies. This isn't like recent U.S. wars, the counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here they are sending hundreds of thousands of troops to occupy Manchuria. The Chinese don't give up. It goes on and on and on. So by the time you're getting to 1945, it's a long time. Also, they had committed atrocities in China and they knew all about it. And the atrocities got even worse. When there were wounded Japanese soldiers, their commanders ordered their fellow soldiers to execute them because they didn't want cripples going home. They couldn't deal with them there. And so rather than have the allies pick them up, they executed them in place. Can you imagine how Japanese soldiers felt about this?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

How then do we explain the famously high morale of the Japanese military, where they would refuse to surrender even after given orders by their superiors? Despite knowing about these things that you're talking about.

**Sarah Paine**

Oh, it's true. It's because it's a different culture. In Japanese culture, you belong to in-groups or out-groups. So the biggest in-group that Japanese belonged to was Japanese people and everybody else. But within Japan, you come from a province, a locality, etc. You go to school and get your education at various places. You belong to a job wherever you are and there are various units within your job. And you owe loyalty. It's obligation. In the West, it's all about liberties and my rights. In the East, it's about obligations to other people. So you owe obligations to all of these organizations.

When soldiers are thinking about war, they're not thinking about grand strategy. They're thinking about operational success. In the west, the moment you as a soldier start losing a battle, you can retreat and surrender and it's not dishonorable because you're going to live to fight another day. In Japan, you're a failure. And therefore, if you come home back as a failed soldier, you bring dishonor to yourself, your family, your locality, anyone you are associated with. So that's why it is so difficult for them to surrender.

However, by the time you get to the end of the war, they are so exhausted. Their economy is something like a tenth of our economy. They have something like a 13th of our coal or steel production. And they don't have any local oil production. They're importers of food and they're not getting that food. So by the time you get to '45, they're exhausted. And a shattering occurs.

Finally, at the very end, you have Emperor Hirohito, who knew full well earlier that he would be assassinated or proclaimed deranged if he disagreed. And he had a perfectly good underage son to be used as a figurehead. He knew that he couldn't do much about it. At the very end, when he decided he was about to get nuked, that's when he intervened to break the deadlock at the cabinet meetings and there were a variety of people at the very top who realized it's over.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Could Hirohito have intervened earlier?

**Sarah Paine**

I doubt it.



**Dwarkesh Patel**

Let's go back more than five years. If he intervenes when Japan is overextending in China, is there any chance that he could have succeeded?

**Sarah Paine**

I doubt he thought of Japan overextending in China. What expertise does he have? He likes guppies. He likes studying fish in his backyard. He has no expertise. And then, of course, there's the hubris of it all, that we're going to dominate this place. They look at the Chinese as an absolutely feckless backward place. It's had all these warlord things going on and it doesn't dawn on them that by their extreme brutality in China, the Chinese finally get it going. "We're not the problem, the Japanese are the problem." And it is what the Japanese do that superglues China and is the great impetus to nation building. You can see parallels with Hitler doing the same thing in Russia. And also right now, Putin's busy canonizing Zelensky and creating a real nation out of Ukraine that's never going to forget these ongoing events.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Something I learned from your book that I thought was really interesting, and also tragic because of the counterfactual, was one of the strategies you suggested. If Japan thought like a continental power, they could have allied with the Nationalists to beat the Communists in Russia, maybe waged a three-front war with Germany and the Nationalists. And then Japan beat the Communists and prevented the Communists from taking hold in China. Given the consequences of communism in Russia and China and how many lives could have been saved if Hitler was beaten and then the Communists are beaten. That Japanese choice just seems so tragic.

**Sarah Paine**

Let's say they do it. That means Hitler forever. And that means if you're anything but a nice Aryan, your days are numbered. It certainly would have been the most massive ethnic cleanse ever in Europe.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Suppose the Third Directive survived. Maybe it had stopped at the point you were talking about where the German lands were reconstituted. Suppose that it happened. If you look at the Soviet Union, Stalin kills more of his people than Hitler had by that point. I wonder if we have sort of burnished Stalin's reputation a little bit because we had to ally with him in World War II. But then the cycle we see in the Soviet Union is the inherent corruption and inefficiency of the totalitarian system. And then it breaks down and there's reform because people realize how crazy things have been.

If the Third Reich had survived, would we see that same cycle there where the system breaks down? Would we also remember them the same way as the Soviet Union where it was evil but you just can't sustain that level of craziness forever?

**Sarah Paine**

I suspect it to be worse. Why? Because the Germans are far more efficient than the Russians were in those days. Nadezhda Mandelstam, who was married to the poet Osip Mandelstam, talking from the prison camps said, "At least it's Russians doing this because if it were Germans, there'd be no hope. With Russians, there's always a hope because they're inefficient too." And she's a Russian talking about it.

Hitler is talking about annihilating entire people...

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But so was Stalin with killing off entire classes of Ukrainians.

**Sarah Paine**

His idea is that Ukrainians need to pretend they're Russians and it's fine if they do that. What you're describing is not a happy ending. It's a horrendous ending.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What's the scenario in which both Hitler and Stalin could have been defeated in World War II? Is there some system of alliances or counterfactual where that happens?

**Sarah Paine**

No. I think the problem is World War I.

World War I has enormous consequences. All sides allowed their generals to make strategy. No one is doing grand strategy in World War I. It's all about operational success, this is what we're all going to do. And then the generals keep sending up waves and waves of young men up over the trenches. What do you think is going to happen to them if you send them over the trenches? This is how you get these horrific death rates. Hundreds of thousands in a battle. In our own day it's inconceivable.

You have a massive power vacuum because of that war. Not only does it upend Europe by getting rid of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire, but it puts two really pernicious ideologies on steroids. Fascists and communists. And that's how you get all that evil. It's out of a gross mismanagement of World War I. Once they're off and running, you've got problems on your hands. And you've got a long solution.

Back to your initial question, does grand strategy matter? It does. Look at World War I when they didn't practice it and the civilians allowed the officers to make all decisions. Britain is a

country that is maritime by geography but then they built a continental sized army. That is not Britain's great strength in World War I. The victory in World War I was at the horrific cost of the beginning of the end of the British Empire.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Britain is the only country that fights Hitler all the way from 1939 to 1945. Whereas Stalin only fights Hitler after he himself is invaded and in fact collaborates with him to dissect Poland. After the war, Russia expands beyond any ambition that a czar might have had. Whereas the British Empire is about to collapse and loses all its territories.

What explains the differing outcomes of these two countries post World War II? And why did the post war objectives of Stalin succeed much more?

### **Sarah Paine**

You mean like retaining an empire versus losing an empire? They're fundamentally different kinds of empires. Russia is a classic continental empire. What it owns is contiguous. Britain's empire was all about trade and having enough coaling stations around the world. That was initially what it was all about. You have coaling stations everywhere and then you want to get the trade through. And then what the British did is they trained barristers all over the world, barristers are lawyers. That lays the basis, not on purpose, of having international law where people who are eventually going to be running these independent countries have a legal training to use international law to their own kind of benefit.

But anyway, Britain has this non-contiguous empire and after the war, it does not have the ability to hang on to them because of nationalism. Nationalism starts in the Napoleonic Wars. That's what Napoleon leverages to create the mass of his armies because French people feel nationalism and it's incredibly powerful. And nationalism has been spreading its way around the world ever since. Once you have nationalism, have fun hanging on to a non-contiguous empire because the locals are going to fight and resist. There won't be commercial advantages because it'll be too expensive to hang on.

Britain, in most cases, did not fight to hang on to its empire. It left and negotiated its way out. Whereas France did the fight in Vietnam, which it lost, and the fight in Algeria, which it lost. The British didn't do that.

Russia is a different event. It's all contiguous and wherever that red army is, it can hang on to it. And so yeah, it hangs on to Eastern Europe forever at a great cost. But if you look over time, initially Stalin rebuilt and does quite well. But then in the 60s, 70s, all of a sudden their growth rates are not like Western growth rates.

Yeah, they're still growing, but the difference is growing and the compounding effects of this are enormous. If you fast forward to now I think Russia's entire economy now is less

than Mexico. There's nothing wrong with Mexico, but the Russians have this idea that they have this huge, they don't.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

The compounding is a very important point because Tyler Cowen has an example of this in one of his books: that if U.S. economic growth rates had been 1% lower every year from 1890 to the 20th century, the U.S. per capita GDP would be lower than that of Mexico's.

**Sarah Paine**

Bingo. And this is to give a tangential comment. This is how sanctions work. People look at sanctions and go, "Oh, they don't work because you don't make whoever's annoying you change whatever they're doing." What they do is they suppress growth so that whoever's annoying you over time, you're stronger and they're weaker. And the example of the impact of sanctions is compare North and South Korea. It's powerful over several generations.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But the question about why Russia did so well? In terms of, after World War II they ended up with so much.

**Sarah Paine**

But before you say they did so well, look at the tens of millions of people who died.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

That's my point.

**Sarah Paine**

The cost is horrendous.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I should say why Stalin did so well.

**Sarah Paine**

Well, yeah, because other people died and he lived and he kept his dacha.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

The reason I ask it in this way is I'm trying to understand the counterfactual in which it doesn't happen because it was so bad. Did the failure of FDR to be sufficiently anti-communist, especially towards the end of the war, contribute to how much land that the Soviet Union was able to accumulate?

**Sarah Paine**

There's a choice at the end of the war. There was some talk about whether to invade up through the Balkans and try to put Western armies there. Let's put you back in time as a serviceman. Do you want to lose your life by going up through the Balkans? Or are we just going to call it a day? And also Stalin has a land power with a huge army in place. He is fighting me at an advantage. Do you really want to lose your life doing that? And you have US leaders looking at it and going, this is going to be good enough because the costs are too high.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But there's this narrative that FDR was also a communist sympathizer. You're saying that it wasn't that and it was just that it strategically didn't make sense?

**Sarah Paine**

Well, (a) he died so we don't know fully. But he was mobilizing the United States to prepare for war while America firsters were saying, "No, no. Isolationism is the way to go." So he was preparing all of that. And yeah, if you're going to defeat Hitler as an offshore power like Britain and the United States are, as in the Napoleonic Wars, you need a local continental power with a huge army if you're going to deal with that continental problem. Russia has that army.

So you're going to cooperate with Russia in the near term to get rid of the really big problem, which is Hitler, who's far more efficient than the Russians are. He's also located near the high value, industrialized parts of Europe whereas Russia is further away. You're going to deal with Hitler first.

And then if you're going to have Stalin as an ally, of course, you're going to say nice things about him. That doesn't make you a communist. That is just managing an alliance. What are you gonna do? Spit in his face while you're fighting the war?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But why believe him when he says that there will be elections in Eastern Europe once the Soviet Union?

**Sarah Paine**

Well, we tried. We tried very hard. Britain tried very hard, particularly in Poland, because think about why Britain got into the war? It's over Poland. And it was just not feasible. When you get to the end of the war and the Red Army is fully in control of Poland, there's nothing we're going to be able to do about it. Americans have had enough of the fight.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

There's cases in history where it seems like there is a hinge point. Let's say after the Bolsheviks take over Russia or after Mao was consolidating Communist control of China, where it's always hard to plan some takeover. But in those cases, it seems like the way in which they got in was so tenuous and contingent that... would it have been possible and desirable for us to extend greater efforts to prevent these regimes from getting in the first place? Where we've had to deal with the consequences of them getting into power for decades or sometimes centuries afterwards.

**Sarah Paine**

If you're a Russian of any persuasion, I suspect you'd be really angry that some American from across the seas is going to determine what kind of government you live under. That's a problem there. You asked me earlier about over extension. So we're going to go around the entire world telling others how to live?

And then there's another issue, which is that people like Stalin are a reflection of the country at the time. The notion that one guy, Stalin, waves a magic wand and everyone does what he wants and that he is responsible for these millions of deaths? There are millions of people pulling millions of triggers for all these deaths. There are a lot of people who think it's a good idea. They are a reflection of the place.

We personify this with Stalin to understand this. It's the earlier issue about generals. We personify how wars turn out often by generals because it gives us a grasp on it. But it's a much more complicated thing.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

How contingent was the global rise of communism? You've done so much research on Russian and Chinese history, in what percentage of worlds do the Bolsheviks take over in Russia? And if that doesn't happen, does communism spread to China and beyond? Because there's not the Bolshevik example and support of these global communist parties.

**Sarah Paine**

The Russian revolution is essential to the spread of communism.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What are the chances that the White Army could have won? Does that make sense?

**Sarah Paine**

Unlikely. If you look at Russian rail networks, they had the two centers, Moscow and St. Petersburg, which the Bolsheviks controlled. So if you're anybody else, it means you're on the end of these different railway lines and there isn't the ability to link up with everyone.

Whereas the Bolsheviks at the center can fan out. They also occupy the industrial centers. So it gives them the ability to pick off their enemies in detail and win that thing.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

How about in China? What are the odds that after the war, the nationalist could have consolidated control of China?

**Sarah Paine**

It's difficult. The nationalists don't get the credit for all the fighting of Japan. There was no way to get Lend Lease aid to them during the war. If you want to get Lend Lease aid, and you've got to have ports and railway systems. And if you look at China, the Japanese did a very effective blockade of China's coast. So we're trying to fly stuff over the hump, which is the Himalayas, and you're flying jet fuel over the hump so that the planes can then use them. It means that there's no way to supply the nationalist armies.

Yeah, they do some things in Burma, which arguably is a terrible mistake. I suspect it would have been far better leaving Chiang kai shek with all that stuff and then it would have been useful for him in the final stages of the war to get a few wins against the Japanese to make him look good. But basically the Japanese had eviscerated his armies. And then think about it as the communists. You constantly blame the incumbent government. "Oh, all of our problems. It's all about the nationalist corruption." And they are corrupt. Don't get me wrong. But the reason they're having troubles is because of the Japanese. So the Japanese did end the nationalists.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

One interesting point you made in your book was that not only were so many nationalists killed in the conflict with Japan, but there was a selection effect that the most competent and brave were the first soldiers to die. And that left not the best of the crop left to fight the communists.

**Sarah Paine**

That would be speculation. That's also a comment that's been made about World War I, that Britain, for instance, lost so many of its best and so they don't go on to have children. They don't go on to become strategic leaders and are unavailable in World War II.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Can you talk more about these consequences of what are the kinds of people who are most likely to die in a war and what are the broader consequences for it?

**Sarah Paine**

I have no idea. How would I know if the statistical evidence isn't there?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I mean, obviously the able-bodied people are the most likely, right? And then the more able-bodied though...

**Sarah Paine**

It depends. A lot of the people who died in World War II are civilians and they starve to death. Huge numbers. I can't remember the statistics, but tens of thousands of Japanese are dying in '41 and you finally get up to hundreds of thousands in '44, but it's going into the millions in '45. And it's because of starvation.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Is this the intentional starvation of the Hunger Plan?

**Sarah Paine**

It's war time. It's just facts. In a war where you've destroyed all transportation and the ability to get goods anywhere and you've killed the farming population all over the world, you get famine. And by the way, this is an argument for when people say, "Can you have avoided the atomic bombs?" That ended the war really fast and probably saved millions of lives because they didn't starve. The war was over and all of a sudden you're starting to ship food around.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why did Germany and Japan continue the war after it was obvious that they would lose? And speaking of the deaths, didn't a huge chunk of the deaths happen after '43 when it was quite obvious that they were going to lose?

**Sarah Paine**

I know. Well, it's because the leadership was all on death ground and the population's been fed this story that if the other side wins, they're all going to be murdered too. Wars are easy to start and they are very tricky to end. And this has been your life too, right? You have watched the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Easy to start, very hard to get out of. And now we're into Ukraine and we'll see how long this goes on.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Speaking of which, a broader question is, how well do you think the insights of scholars like you have been integrated into the thinking of military leaders? Where people like you have written these extensive books about how empires overextend and how invasions can be more complicated than you think. To what extent does that actually percolate to the military and civilian leadership that they would decide to do an Iraq war and Afghanistan war?



**Sarah Paine**

You're asking the wrong person. You need to interview those people and ask them what influenced them. At my low level in the weeds, I work at the U.S. Naval War College, we have officers from the United States and all over the world who come on in. We assign them readings from the kind of scholars you're talking about, what we do in strategy and policy or case studies about wars, and have them think about a lot of the kind of questions you're asking is what we ask students of. So we assign all these things. How much it influences them later in their career, you'd have to ask them.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But surely you must be optimistic about it. There's a reason why you do this work, right? Presumably you think that better understanding these previous situations helps leaders now make better decisions. I'm curious to what extent you think that pipeline is functioning?

**Sarah Paine**

I have no idea about the pipeline, but I can answer about me. I grew up during the height of the Cold War and started graduate school as it was ending but I didn't know it was ending. So I had a full up Cold War education where I did study the Soviet Union when it was and they had all these huge programs which no longer exist.

If you want to make good decisions, you have to be knowledgeable. You have to be able to make an accurate assessment about yourself and the other side and so I've devoted my career to understanding the other side. One of the things that I think Americans are particularly prone to is what I call half-court tennis. They study the world from their point of view. So they're always focused on Team America. It's like half-court tennis, they look only at their side of the court. Balls come from mysterious places. Some people get new rackets. Who knows where they come from? And then somehow I'm going to play this game. Think about people who love football in the States. They know about all the opposing teams and who's strong and blah, blah, blah. Well, foreign policy, you need to understand the other side. It's not just about me and it's all about the interaction.

Growing up in the Cold War I'd heard that the Russians were really evil so I thought I'd learn more about it. I first started learning about Russia and then I decided I was going to learn about China. And I realized, "Oh, Japan's in there." So I got to learn about Japan and wind up studying their relations and tried to be open minded and understand the world from their point of view. Not that it's right or wrong, but just trying to understand it.

So for your point of view, when you're picking up a book and you want to avoid half-court tennis, give the book a 30 second read. What's that? Go flip to the bibliography, flip through it for 30 seconds, and see if at least some of the citations are in the languages of the

countries being discussed. Because how much respect would you have for a book about the United States that has not a single source in English? I suspect the answer would be zero.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

How do you consume these? Do you read the translations?

**Sarah Paine**

Oh, no. I can make bad spelling errors in numerous languages. I read these things slowly with lots of large dictionaries. You say you've got my book, *Wars for Asia*, go take a look at the footnotes in the back. You'll see they're in Russian, Japanese, and Chinese.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah. It is perhaps the best military history I've ever read. And also, I've really enjoyed your book on Japan, *The Japanese Empire*. And you also have these other textbooks and collections of essays, which I highly recommend because of the thorough nature and the diversity of sources.

Let's actually talk about your research. Maybe tell me more about where you've done research around the world and throughout your different projects. Because I think people might not know the extent to which you've dug into the trenches on these over the years.

**Sarah Paine**

I have co-edited a series of books on naval operations with my husband Bruce A. Elleman. United States is a maritime power. If you want to understand the maritime underpinnings of US security, go to those. Particularly a book on peripheral operations called *Expeditionary Warfare*, which is what we do. The expedition will be crossing the ocean to get there. And commerce rating and blockades which is a key to US foreign policy. And the problem is if you exercise a continental foreign policy, you're prone to get into all sorts of wars you don't need to get into. But because we have huge oceans that separate us from our problems, it's a major point of strategy of whether to intervene or not intervene. So it's important to understand the maritime position in the United States. So there are these maritime books that if you're interested in learning about that. They're not fun reads. But they exist.

You were asking me about research. Back in the day, I spent a year in the Soviet Union, when it was, and then a year in PRC right after Tianmen was delayed for a year. That was quite exciting. There were armored trucks all around Beijing University, not to protect the students, but to neutralize them and then it happened. And then three years in Japan over the years and three years in Taiwan over the years of just reading deeply in the archives. Donald Rumsfeld has been much vilified as the former secretary of defense. But one of his quotations that I love is, he said he wasn't worried about the known unknowns because he'd go after those, but he's worried about the unknown unknowns. And that's why you do archival research. What is it that I know nothing about that is actually terribly important? So

I did a bunch of archival research in Japan. That dries up after World War II, you can get into military archives and their foreign ministry archives, but then it's much less afterwards. Well, China and Russia, they've both closed down. There's no way I wouldn't go into either country at this stage.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Oh, you think even more so than after Tiananmen or during the Soviet Union? It's more hostile now than then?

**Sarah Paine**

We were in the Soviet Union while Gorbachev was in power. And I actually got into the foreign ministry archives there, but only for the Tsarist period. And in China, you could still get into various archives. I was using the Qing archives and then the nationalist archives were much more closed. Now the archives are just plain closed. Go to Russia now, you will get yourself arrested. And China likewise, they've shut down all of these archives.

So to compensate for that, for the last 10 years I've spent two months every summer going to the U.S. presidential archives. Starting with, we didn't do it quite in the same order but, Truman, Eisenhower, and then this last spring, we just did the George Bush Sr. archives. And now I'm in Britain using their wonderful national archives, looking particularly from the 1917 to 1945 period researching the Cold War. You might go, "Well, but the Cold War didn't begin in 1947." I would argue the Cold War began in 1917 because we have this notion that, "Oh, I decide when wars begin." Not quite if the other side declares war on you. And the Bolsheviks made it very clear that they had declared war on the capitalist order. Britain was much more attuned to this and worried about communist ideas filtrating to labor movements and all this other stuff. So I'm reading their archives, whereas the United States was much more asleep at the switch.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

To what extent did the educated classes being naïve about communism play into the delay of the United States into recognizing the Cold War? You talk about this in your books about the Red Star Over China by Edgar Snow.

**Sarah Paine**

And also Jack Reed's Ten Days. George Bernard Shaw made a comment that if you haven't been a socialist before the age of 30, you have no heart and if you remain one after the age of 30, you have no brains.

It's the idealism of it all. World War I seemed to vindicate so much of what Karl Marx said about how capitalist countries are just imperialist. They don't care about the young. They just throw them over the trenches and destroy them.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Which is so ironic given how communist countries have dealt with their populations and how callously they have wasted their young...

**Sarah Paine**

That's called the Big Lie. And it is amazing how these big lies live and are very powerful but then when they crumble, they're gone for good. Even when I was in graduate school, there were a bunch of people saying, "Oh, Russia has no drug problem." because they're believing the Kool-Aid and lies that's being dished out from Moscow.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What explains the credulity of these people in the US and Britain on the Soviet Union's claims about everything from its economic growth to the way it dealt with its own populations? Why were some people so asleep to this?

**Sarah Paine**

I don't know, but I suspect that the sins of the West are really obvious because we have an open press. And for anyone who'd been through World War I and had any male member in the family who'd been at the trenches and came back and talked about it, it was pretty horrific. And you can't believe that anything's going to be worse than that. Or if you go to China under Chiang Kai-shek, he had a semi-free press and that's how we know about things. You look at the incredible corruption going on there, you go, "Well, how can anything be worse than this?"

Well, actually, it could be a lot worse than this.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

You talk in your book *The Wars on Asia* and elsewhere about the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and how they industrialized the region and at the end, it had 50% higher GDP per capita than the rest of China. And it was the most industrialized part of Asia outside of Japan. Japan also colonized Taiwan. We see those are some of the wealthiest parts of Asia now. And then we also see the impact of the communist counterfactual in other parts of Asia.

In retrospect, what should we make of the impact of the Japanese occupation given the wealth of Korea, Taiwan, these other areas now? And how much the industrialization under Japan mattered?

**Sarah Paine**

Let's go back in time. If you get before World War II, which is one of the really huge atrocities that the Imperial Japanese Army commits without any doubt, going into someone else's country and committing atrocities is not a winning game plan. If you go before that, if you

think of the Meiji Restoration, they colonized Taiwan and they colonized Korea. It was brutal in Korea because the Koreans resisted and then the Japanese got nasty. Taiwan was much less resistant. To this day, the Taiwanese do not have this bitterness about Japan that the Koreans do.

I'm not going to deny that there wasn't any brutality. There was brutality. But what the Japanese did when they moved into Korea and Taiwan is they set about creating infrastructure. They put in train lines. They set about educating people. Do they put them in the top positions? No, the top positions are for Japanese. But they do things like publish all kinds of magazines. Incredible numbers of technical journals about agronomy and things so that you have this incredible improvement of output because you're spreading knowledge to the Taiwanese and to the Koreans.

And because they do it from the bottom up, unlike the United States, they control the police force and the locality and from there all the way up so they really have local control. When the United States goes into places like the Philippines, which happens at more or less the same time, the Philippine war is like early 1900s. The United States wants to deal with English-speaking elites, sound familiar, who are located in the capital. And so we try to negotiate that way. But it never modernizes what goes on. These very traditional and actually not conducive to growth relationships of massive land control by not particularly efficient landowning classes remains.

The Japanese do it by literally building local organizations from the bottom up. Do not get me wrong, it's not remotely democratic. People who disagree at the time are treated brutally. But it turns out it's a very effective means for economic development because when they're booted, in 1945, the Koreans and the Taiwanese actually have something to work with. And then they're often running.

Chiang Kai-shek, who'd been horribly corrupt in the mainland, he could not do land reform in the mainland. Why? Because that's his officer corps. They will kill him. In Taiwan, he can definitely redistribute Taiwanese land. No problem there. He comes in with all the weaponry and redistributes the land. It gets bloody doing it. He offers the Taiwanese bonds. They think it's going to be like the lousy bonds that he distributed on the mainland. Turns out those bonds were worth money. I don't know how many years on that it was that people actually collected on their bonds for all of this. So the Japanese actually had many of the pieces for a really effective plan for economic development.

And if you look at China under Deng Xiaoping, who's he imitating? The Japanese. Deng Xiaoping is rather like a parallel, his generation to the Meiji generation. And think about what came after the Meiji generation. Bad news. Well, we're into Xi Jinping. Bad news. We're into bad news. But do not deny the achievements of the Meiji generation. They're enormous.

And then because Japan does all the atrocities, they can no longer brag about these previous things.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

There's so many interesting things there. There's a book, How Asia Works, by this economist Joseph Studwell, where he is trying to analyze why Korea, Taiwan and Japan did so well after World War II.

In the case of Korea, he tells a story where they have this factory where they're starting to export goods and they're working six, seven hour days. And the floor manager tells one of his underlings that the reparations on which we're supporting this economic growth from Japan came at the cost of your family being raped by Japan. So this is basically blood money that we're using to grow the economy. You better work hard to make sure it was worth it.

Sorry, the broader question I wanted to ask was, the economic development that Japan is doing in Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, if they hadn't made this mistake of fighting a war with America.. Let's say something like the Japanese Empire survives and isn't crazy militaristic. I don't even know if this is a question, but I'm just thinking about the counterfactual where you could have a really wealthy and prosperous area of Asia.

### **Sarah Paine**

Let's go back to our wonderful America of the 30s, the Great Depression hits and it's a mess. And so what we decide is we're going to have tariffs. This is the Hawley-Smoot tariff in 1930. We're just going to wall it off because we got to keep jobs for Americans.

This is half-court tennis. You're not thinking about what everybody else is going to do? Retaliate exactly in kind. So for the Japanese who had been good citizens within the international order, who had maintained really high positions in the League of Nations, which we'd been irresponsible and never joined, this pulls the rug on all of them. This pulls the rug on Japanese who said we needed to cooperate with the international order. Japan is trade dependent. What are they going to do? No one will trade with them. Their closest people won't. They look at the world and go, well, we need an empire because we have got to have it big enough so that we get food and the basics for us. '30 is Holly Smoot and '31 is the invasion of Manchuria.

Let's go back to grand strategy. This is Americans having no grand strategy of not thinking deeply. Life is an interaction. I can tell you whatever I want to but then you're going to make your own decisions. If I don't consider what your decisions might be, I'm going to be in deep dark trouble.

And I think about Hawley and Smoot. They didn't live to see what they wrought. A lot of young men across the world died because of the failure of people like them to think more broadly. Think about the lesson of the Great Depression. The moment the international economy starts getting cold, there are meetings of bankers and foreign ministers, the world over to prevent it from going crazy ever again because they realize what the consequences are.

You take people who are poor already and then you have a Great Depression, you get desperate decisions. And then once you start a war, it's very difficult to stop. So it's a great lesson.

Japan then is making an ugly decision because it's stuck. So they go into Manchuria, which is where all their investments are to protect them. China's got this crazy civil war going on. Japan, if it had just sat in Manchuria, they probably would have been just fine because they do stabilize Manchuria. They are bringing some income back in. But the moment that they escalate big time in '37, they ruin their economy. And it takes a number of years to play out fully. It's a disaster for themselves, most of all.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Just a broader picture of what I'm learning from these military histories and especially your books is that there's these bigger forces of like, which country has more production and so on, but then you can have these individual mistakes, a single decision point by a single person, that cascades and then you over extend in China and you need more oil and you feel like the need to invade America. And the importance of leadership in preventing these sorts of catastrophic mistakes.

### **Sarah Paine**

It's what I would call a pivotal error. Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor is a pivotal error. They are already grossly overextended in China. They want to cut out foreign aid. Remember that Hawaii is not a US state, and it doesn't become a state until '59 or something. And they probably take this racist view of Hawaiians of whoever they think Hawaiians are. So their idea is that they are going to take a newspaper and slap the dog on the snout and the dog will quit.

Instead you create great power allies all across the Pacific for the Chinese. So yeah, there are pivotal errors that you can make at which point there is no return for the status quo. You've seen Putin make a pivotal error. He was getting away with hanging on to the Donbass and the Crimea. Now he made the pivotal error to try to take the whole enchilada. There is no going back on that error.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Actually, I want to ask you about that. Japan invades Manchuria in 1931. Hitler invades Poland in 1939. In retrospect, we think of them as part of the same great global conflict, whereas they were separated by eight years. I wonder if you think of Ukraine today as eight years down the line or the things that could come, maybe not as a consequence but at the same time as this, which could lead to another global situation. Do you think that it could cascade into something like that?

**Sarah Paine**

Of course, yeah. This is the problem with all of this. Of course, it could and there are many people working to prevent this from happening. You see all of these meetings where our leaders are meeting with each other. If you get into some global war with people with nuclear weapons, when the losers decide that rather than losing, they're going to go for one more roll of the die, which is a nuclear weapon. Then the question is whether the people below them will actually implement the order, etc. Think about low probability but high consequence events. I don't know what the probability is, but I know the consequences are huge.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

And the probability is iterated over many years and decades.

**Sarah Paine**

Right, yeah. You've got to always not use nuclear weapons, right? That Pandora's box has already been opened, the nukes are there.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Especially if there's no retirement plan for Putin.

One of the things that's interesting from Wars in Asia, is that there are things that are seen by one side as a deterrence are often seen by the other side as a provocation.

The embargoes from the U.S. are seen by Japan as a deadline to attack. I think you had some other examples like this. People who are less empathetic to the Ukraine cause have said, "Extending NATO, which we thought would be a deterrent, was that actually a provocation for Putin?" What should we just generally make of that lesson?

**Sarah Paine**

First of all, I think you should look at the people living in the countries in question. Before we decide that Americans are the important people in the world, or since we're in Britain now, British, and therefore anyone in between doesn't count, I believe that's wrong.



All of the countries that joined NATO desperately wanted to join NATO. They've had a whole history of Russians doing terrible things to them. I'm not making it up. This is what Russia's been up to. They have been correct that Russia is going to do more terrible things. They were correct in doing everything they could to get into NATO and also be in the EU.

It's incredible to remember what the standards of living of people in Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union had dominated were and what it is now. Since they have been freed of Soviet domination, it's been a massive compounding of standards of living. It's allowed people your age to travel the world and have a lot of aspirations in their lives.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

They can do podcasting.

**Sarah Paine**

But when you talk about, "Oh, should we deny these things because we got some egos in Russia that want to maintain a continental empire?" You or I cannot change how Russians think about things. How they think about the things is their decision. But if you look at Europe as a peninsula, you're better off with more insulation from Russia than not.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But isn't this another case of not thinking in terms of both halves of the court in tennis where compared to the possibility of nuclear war, just nudging that number up and down matters far more than whether another country in Eastern Europe gets to be part of NATO or not?

**Sarah Paine**

Hope has been said to not be a strategy but the hope was in trying to get Russia to join the party. Trying to integrate their energy supplies into Europe and paying them good money for it. Having them make lots of money on that and hoping that they would invest this into their road system, which is lamentable, and hoping that they would invest this into cleaning out their business laws. It is horrendous trying to run a business there. As you can see right now as different things get nationalized and taken over. Different successful business leaders wind up unaccountably dropping out of six floor windows and old people who always seem to fall downstairs. I think that's a special way of offing people.

That was the hope. Join the party because you will become wealthy too. Russian standards of living have been stagnating for quite a while. Putin's model of basically taking over your neighbor's stuff and bringing home whatever you haven't bombed flat is not an efficient way to make wealth and you're killing so many people. So I don't believe that denying people of Eastern Europe saying, "Well, actually because the Russians have such an attitude, you get to be their serfs forever."

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But there are broader considerations for the same reason that you mentioned and we were talking about earlier, that it would not have made sense for Americans to have kept fighting further to prevent Eastern Europe at the time from succumbing to the Red Army.

**Sarah Paine**

The Ukrainians are doing the fighting right now.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But supplied by tremendous amounts of Western aid.

**Sarah Paine**

Yeah, they are, but that's pennies on the dollar. They're willing to fight for their country.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

It's not about the cost to the United States. It's not like it's 40 billion or whatever. How does this nudge the nuclear war numbers or the nuclear war probabilities?

**Sarah Paine**

What's the nuclear war going to do to Putin? The Ukrainian forces are dispersed. What's the target? It's going to be Kiev, I suppose?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Or, I don't know, he thinks that he's out of options. So let's go bomb NATO headquarters or something.

**Sarah Paine**

I think the Chinese have whispered in his ear, and this is pure speculation, "Buddy, if you do this, everybody on the planet is going to get nuclear weapons and all of a sudden we are going to have this little small club of people with nuclear weapons and the consequences are going to be rather horrendous."

And also look at China. It has more nuclear armed neighbors than anyone on the planet and some of them are totally nuts.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Putin himself, right?

**Sarah Paine**

Let's try North Korea for the country that's got starvation in the 21st century.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Although on this point, another thing your books have emphasized is how often leaders make mistakes that make very little strategic sense and are very stupid. You could imagine, even though it would be very stupid for Putin to escalate, especially if there's no retirement plan, I could imagine him doing very stupid things.

**Sarah Paine**

Let's put stupid out of it because saying someone is stupid is not explanatory. Saying they are stupid means you write off understanding their reasoning. A lot of Westerners, when they think of governments, think about governments operating in the interest of their population. So when their decisions don't improve standards of living security and things, then we say those aren't good decisions. But that's not the game. In China, for instance, it's all about maintaining the monopoly of the Chinese Communist Party to rule. If that conflicts with having higher living standards, you better believe they're choosing Communist Party. So you go watching those kinds of decisions going on right now where their most talented entrepreneurs are being relieved of their enterprises. Or Putin, as you said, he's made a pivotal error. He has no back down plan. He only has a double down plan. Expect him to double down forever. And then the question is whether all the oligarchs want to keep doubling down with him and his generals or whether they give him something extra in his cheerios some morning. Who knows?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I feel like this is one of the lessons you were actually talking about earlier, where you don't want somebody to feel like they're up against the wall, on death's ground, where even if it would be an unjust sort of resolution, some sort of ceasefire where Putin can save face can be good. I wonder if your historical lessons would bring you to that conclusion.

**Sarah Paine**

Putin will be back for more and understand that that's just the case.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But then what is the solution? We can't have unconditional surrender unless we're...

**Sarah Paine**

No, no one's marching into Moscow. The United States has done this for many years. You don't recognize the territories that he's taken, which means the Russians are stuck with a sanction regime of some type forever. And you go, "Oh, well. that'll weaken. Certain people won't adhere to it." It will depress Russian growth forever, which goes back to an earlier part of this conversation of sanctions being really powerful.

And it was some Russians who themselves said, at the very beginning, "Oh, no. We are going to be like North Korea." Yeah, you will be. That's exactly where he's heading them. We don't

control when the Russians reassess. We can't even predict when or whether they'll reassess. We can't predict whether there'll be some kind of incipient civil war in Russia which would be destabilizing by definition. Who knows how that goes? But the Ukrainians are fighting for their country.

One of the things you asked me in an email is whether superior finance wins wars or something. It's superior alliance systems that win wars. And it's interesting that the Europeans, particularly the Eastern Europeans, are the leaders of all this. Isn't it fascinating that the Finns and the Swedes, who forever were neutral, are now all over this? And they know. The enemy gets a vote. The Russians have a vote. As long as the Russians are playing this game, our best bet is to support Ukrainians. Because unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, where the locals do not do the bulk of the fighting, this is where the locals are fighting and that's key. You also were emailing me and asking me about successful versus unsuccessful interventions. When the locals do all the fighting, that's when your best odds are of helping them.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Actually speaking of Iraq and Afghanistan, after World War 2 our occupations of Japan and Germany were very successful in rooting out the toxic ideologies and completely transforming the society and culture. Whereas in Afghanistan and Iraq, we didn't have the same effect. What explains why those occupations are so much more successful?

### **Sarah Paine**

Easy. One is a case of rebuilding institutions and the other one is building them from scratch. You can rebuild things rapidly. Think of how after the war Western Europe rapidly repaired and rebuilt bombed buildings. Both Germany and Japan had an extensive list of functioning institutions from local police officers, offices, to educational systems, to local provincial governments and running the train systems and businesses and all of this have been absolutely functional. And so finding the expertise to recreate that is easy. And of course, Germans and Japanese living there are very interested in rebuilding.

I know more about Japan than Germany and then what the key thing the United States then did is — the Japanese are hemming and hawing over what their constitution was going to be like and so MacArthur finally got fed up and in one week he got his staff to write this constitution and they're running around Tokyo going to bombed out libraries trying to find examples of Western constitutions so they can put it all together. It was long before there's an internet where you can figure these things out and they're figuring out what the constitution is going to be.

They cook it up over the week. And what the Japanese are thinking is "Well, the Americans are going to leave. So we'll go along with this constitution but once the Americans are out, we're going to do whatever." And what the first post-war Prime Minister Yoshida said, "Well,

we thought we could change it back.” But he realized because of universal suffrage, allowing women to vote, and there had been a certain amount of land reform, he said there wasn't any going back. It permanently changed the balance of power in Japan. Another feature is that the Imperial Japanese Army had disgraced itself. Their strategy had led to the firebombing of the home islands, talk about a total failure.

It's the same sort of thing in Germany. You have universal elections. It took a while to get the Western Zones united because of all the fighting with the Russians over their zone. You eventually get two Germanies, etc. But then you have a very competent post-war generation, both in Japan and Germany, who understood full of the horrors of the war that they'd been put through as conscripts. And they are really intent on rebuilding their societies and they're the miracle generations in both countries.

There's no parallel for that in Afghanistan and Iraq, right? They've never been developed countries. Germany and Japan were developed countries. And then you think, well, how long does it take to become a developed country? Some people say centuries. And then there's a whole other piece, which is that the Germans and Japanese had a real sense of nationalism. So you don't have to worry about nation building because they have a sense of national identity. You do worry about state rebuilding. So we were helping with state rebuilding.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, there's no sense of a nation. I'm no expert on these parts of the world, but my understanding is you have these very different ethnic groups, many who want to kill each other. You've just got a civil war going on there. We're talking about a death ground kind of civil war where the ones in power just ruin the others. And when the others get in power, they ruin the other people. That's what's going on in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In addition, because they're internal locations in the middle of continents they're surrounded by a variety of neighbors. And if you look at those neighbors, you go, “Ooh. A bunch of those people are going to intervene.” And they're going to intervene in very destabilizing ways. Japan is an island. It's hard for people to intervene. Germany, we put a lot of money into it with having troops and getting the German army and other things up and running. This will be Ukraine's future where they will be... well, they already apparently do have the finest army in Europe and then they're going to make it very highly defensible before it's all over. And Europeans as a group understand that it is absolutely in their interest to have an impregnable border around Ukraine. It protects them all. Europe doesn't threaten Russia. They would love it if Russia would join the party. Join the rules based order. You'll make money. You'll do well. Except the oligarchs in question, this real minority of people who run Russia, they personally won't do as well. But now they're war criminals, so they're out of luck.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Speaking of miracle generations, the Meiji generation, as you have written about, learned so many reforms from the West, improved every aspect of Japanese governance and economics and education and law. And within the generation, you have people coming to power who make quagmire after quagmire, make mistake after mistake. There's some cases where countries manage to solve the succession problem after a really competent generation. For example, Singapore after Lee Kuan Yew. It seems like the government has kept up the system which promoted such efficient bureaucrats. Whereas in other cases, like after Bismarck in Germany, you have the mistakes that led to World War I.

What was the failure that the Meiji generation made that their level of grand strategy and insight was not carried over?

**Sarah Paine**

I wouldn't pick on them because they're brilliant. It's amazing what they achieved. It wasn't perfect but no one's perfect. I wouldn't pick on that particular generation. They're brilliant. As are Japan's post-war leaders.

The way I look at it goes back to your initial question about grand strategy. Are institutions really important? Institutions structure decision making. Now, it's very difficult to figure out what types of institutions to build. And when you see failings in them, you know I've got to do something next time. But this again is the brilliance of this evolving maritime order in which we live, where people sign onto the things in which it's in their interest to sign on to them. You sign on to treaties and then you have provisos of the parts you don't want. And you join these international organizations and then you influence how they develop, etc. So these organizations have been instrumental, the ones built right after World War II in holding the peace.

MacArthur's constitution and then Japan's subsequent leaders, have worked on improving the institutions that they have. But institutions take a long, long time to build. I think about it as sort of like a spider's web. So that you spin, spin, spin this thing that's like gossamer, but then you spin enough of it and then it really holds. But then there are people like Hitler who come through and they undo the work of others. Bismarck, when you ask about him, it's highly personalistic. That's not about an institution. That's about a guy leveraging the king. There's a reason for getting rid of royalty running the show. And then, yeah, there are emerging institutions in Germany, a general staff, and some other things that are very important.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I was about to mention that another generation that managed to create good institutions was the American founders. But then there was also the failure that led to the Civil War, right? So even there some institutions were weak.

**Sarah Paine**

Slavery, our original sin.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Let's talk about Taiwan. That's where the nationalists went after the Chinese Civil War. I think until recently the narrative has been that the CCP is incredibly competent and very good at engineering good policies and economic growth in China. And then we look at Taiwan and obviously it's so much richer than China on a per capita basis. Would that have been what China would have been like if the nationalists had remained in power?

**Sarah Paine**

Unknown. Because when the nationalists came to Taiwan, they were in really deep, dark trouble. And one of the ways that Taiwanese have maintained the moral high ground, which is necessary for them in order to guarantee foreign aid, is by being democratic. Their really exposed position put enormous pressure on them to democratize. Because the United States is sitting on them that they need to get democratic.

Also the nationalists engaged on a real comprehensive after action report on Taiwan asking why did we lose? Well, it was this incredible corruption and the need to do land reform. I don't think land reform was feasible for Chiang Kai-shek on the mainland. Why? Because that's his power base, all the landowners. And if you try to reform them, you'll get a headshot. Whereas in Taiwan, it got bloody doing land reform. The local Taiwanese did not appreciate getting expropriated and there were massacres over it.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Although in Korea, I think Park did land reform and that was native.

**Sarah Paine**

Syngman Rhee apparently did it even earlier. One point in the land reform they did there was that the Japanese had large expropriated areas so it was easier to do that. And so Syngman Rhee does land reform immediately. It's not been well studied and it'd be fascinating if someone actually did study it. It probably helps explain the tremendous loyalty to the South Korean government within the Korean Armed Forces within the Korean Armed Forces.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

In *How Asia Works*, Studwell makes the interesting point that because these countries are so overflowing with labor that it makes sense in these countries to have lots of peasants who can tend to the land instead of having a single landowners with a large tract of land. Mechanization is maybe not the best idea when you have so much labor that can actually do these things that are not scalable.

Anyways, going back to Taiwan. The growth rate of modern day China is slowing because of zero COVID, less foreign investments, data intervention in the economy. I think consumers aren't spending as much. And also obviously because of demographics. Does this increase or decrease the odds of Chinese action on Taiwan?

### **Sarah Paine**

I honestly don't know. But I think a better way of looking at it is to look at consequences. It's guaranteed that if they go into Taiwan, it is a high consequence event without a doubt. What the odds are, I don't know. However, if you listen to their speeches, they tell you they're going to do it. They're consistent.

The West learned that you read improbable speeches, right? People read Mein Kampf and said, "Oh, this is a nutcase. No one would ever do that." Well, it quite accurately represented people. Even in dictatorships, they have to transmit messages to the population and they quite often very accurately tell you what they're going to do.

Putin has been quite clear of what he's been up to. Stalin was very clear of what he was up to. So let's judge Xi Jinping at his word and he says he's going to go for it. Now, whether he's still in power, I don't know. But here's a problem for which we don't have a solution, that Chinese people have to figure out the solution. The Chinese Communist Party has clearly made the decision that it wants to maintain a monopoly of political power. And for a while there, during Deng Xiaoping, that worked because the reforms that they wanted to make for agriculture and things, they can maintain their monopoly of power but also do things that allow people to get much wealthier. So that went in tandem for a number of years.

Now we're at the inflection point where you have a lot of educated people and businesses who are really integrated into the world and they want to make autonomous decisions. Also, you have some very large, very successful companies and they have quite a bit of clout. The Communist Party worries about this because what do people want at that point? It's probably some influence over political decisions. And the Communist Party said that's off the table. Okay, if it's off the table, how do you keep it off the table? All the things that you're talking about. This 24/7 surveillance state.

Since you have a computer science background, you'd have a better understanding of this than I. Think about the cost if the United States had a 24/7 surveillance system where you're literally doing it down to who's jaywalking and who's not, in order to put it into their social security score. Whose kid in their classrooms rolling their eyes at their teachers, I kid you not, and putting it down as a ding on that kid's social score.

And also, who knows what's accurate and inaccurate on the facial recognition stuff. So they start chalking up the wrong scores for the wrong people. The cost would be incredible. All the people power you're going to have to devote to this. And then all the false positives,



which will be incendiary for the people who are falsely considered disloyal. This is where they're at. And now they're doing the National Disappearing Act. We don't know where their minister of defense is. He's a non-person. And oh, by the way, what happened to the foreign minister? Give me a break.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah, and the cost is also so gruesome in comparison to the alternatives. There are so many cheap interventions like giving people iron supplements and folic acid or giving them 20-dollar eyeglasses, that could raise the childhood nutrition that is lacking in rural parts of China by so much that it would actually be worth it for the government if you think of the additional tax revenue that healthy people can bring in the future.

**Sarah Paine**

They're not gonna do that. Xi Jinping is another guy making a series of pivotal errors. His handling of COVID was just stupid, right? COVID started in China. Go investigate it and figure out where it came from, and then it would be a non-starter. But instead, they do the massive cover-up, etc. And then all of a sudden, instead of just being unlucky that COVID started there, it's all of a sudden, "No, you're complicit." A lot of people died across the globe over this, and it came from you, and you clearly were letting people out of the country knowing full well that they were vectors for spreading this disease. This is a problem that the rest of the world's not going to forget. There are just too many millions of people who died.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

You were talking about the cost of the surveillance. It is an interesting question that what percentage of the Soviet Union's GDP was dedicated to the NKVD?

**Sarah Paine**

When the United States was trying to evaluate what the load of the military was on the economy, and the CIA was trying to figure it out to the best of their ability, it was really difficult because they don't have a convertible currency.

And then they're busy lying to each other. That's a whole other thing in communist states and dictatorships. You're incentivized to lie about everything. Think about the compounding effects of these lies. It means I can't make good decisions because everyone around me is lying, and then it gets worse at the top. You're going to watch as these cascading things happen to the Chinese and the Russians as a result. It turned out that at the end of the Cold War that if you did the calculations for the whole military-industrial complex, well over half their economy is being devoted to this.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Which is crazy because during the peak of World War II, the fraction of US GDP was like 45%.

**Sarah Paine**

That's right. I think they think Nazis were 55. But don't quote me on it, I may be remembering these incorrectly, but it was horrific in Russia. Let's say we're running little subunits in the Soviet Union but I'm afraid I'm not going to get enough parts in. So I lie about how few I have, even though I got lots more. And then you're busy lying. So then when we compile macroeconomic data, and we don't really know what the price of anything is, we don't know the value of labor, of capital, and we don't know what consumers really want. So Russia is massively misallocating capital, labor, and they don't understand preferences.

So when you asked me earlier, are people stupid? It's more that they've got all this incorrect data, and by the time they realize that something's wrong, they're already in a deep, dark crisis. This is late in Brezhnev, where the numbers are just a mess. And so when Gorbachev comes on in 1985, it's just a massive implosion. And then he tries to save the beast, and of course his cure kills the beast.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Speaking of which, after World War II, the companies in Germany and Japan that were making weapons, Mitsubishi and Volkswagen and BMW, became creators of world-class consumer products. For example, even GE in America. Whereas in Russia, they had... is it the T-34, the tank?

**Sarah Paine**

Apparently that thing was built on American chassis. Apparently it's based on our technology that we weren't interested in. Of course, they took the chassis, etc. But in World War II, do not forget about Lend Lease. This is another lesson of World War I.

Imperial Russia fell. Absolute disaster. Why did they fall? No one bothered to focus on supplying them with adequate weapons. They had huge armies, but they're sending their young men in with their rifles and saying, "When you get there, go pick one off of a dead body." I think that means they've done no training. And you're just wasting people. Can you imagine being that soldier and thinking this is how my government treats me?

So in World War II, the emphasis on supplying Russia is huge. So what do we supply? We supply all the things that make them move. So it's rolling stock and getting their train lines going. They produce planes, but they can't do jet fuel. It's high octane. You may know more about it than I do. We're providing all that. Russians will starve. We provide a tremendous amount of food. The word 'spam', like in email spam, comes from that canned pork. If you get one of those little spam cans, that'll keep you going. And we sent that all over the world

and that's the origin of spam on the computer. People by the end of World War II were so sick of spam. But anyway, we fed the Russians and we provided them all kinds of things that without it, they could not have fought. So fast forward now, we're providing those things for Ukraine. So that the Ukrainians can feed themselves. To keep them in the fight.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why didn't the impressive industrial war output of the Soviet Union transfer into the same way that it did in Germany and Japan and these consumer brands?

**Sarah Paine**

This is a big difference between their model for development and the Meiji model. The communist model is heavy industry and largely for the military. And the Meiji, even though they wound up with the big military, it's about getting these consumer products in light industry. And then they go on to do heavy industry. It turns out the Meiji model is a better one. It just works better for an economy.

And so the Russians aren't interested in doing consumer goods, right? It's all about the communists having monopolizing power and then playing God in whatever region they control and dictating whether other people live or die.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Let's go back to Taiwan. What are the odds you would give of a Taiwan conflict? Maybe you can give me your over under five years, ten years, twenty years.

**Sarah Paine**

I have no idea. I think you have to prepare for it. And it will best position you to deter it, even though you may fail at deterring it. And then if you fail at deterring it, it will best position you to deal if bad things happen.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Being at the Naval war college and seeing how people are talking about this. How likely is it that the U.S. would actually directly intervene on the behalf of Taiwan and directly fight the Chinese?

**Sarah Paine**

Taiwan is a country of 20 plus million people. If you look across the globe, how many countries have about 20 million plus people?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Lots.

**Sarah Paine**

Yeah, probably most countries in the world are above that size. So if you say it's okay to level a country because for the People's Republic to take Taiwan, I presume it's going to begin with an artillery barrage. I presume that's going to be leveling Taiwanese cities, right? We've watched how it goes in Ukraine. I can't imagine the Chinese being less brutal. You're going to say that's okay. Our whole thing about this maritime system of international law. What is the fundamental underlying principle of it all? It's sovereignty. It's the notion that just because you're big, you can't go and destroy someone who's small. This is the fundamental basics of the whole thing.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah, although in the case of Taiwan, it's hard to argue that one island that is right off the coast of China, and China, unlike any other area, has for decades said that they want to conquer. It's not like they've been saying that once we get Taiwan, we also really want to conquer India and Burma and Vietnam.

**Sarah Paine**

Actually, they've just been redoing their maps. They say what is Uttar Pradesh is ours. That would be a detail, right?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah, but it's hard to see. They conquer Taiwan and they get emboldened to then conquer Korea? What's the cascading effect to worry about?

**Sarah Paine**

Well, look at Chinese history. It is a continental empire. What is the paradigm? Territorial conquest. Take a look at it. This is it. And they're not off that paradigm. They're still on it.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

On the doctrine of strategic ambiguity, what is your opinion on this? Because in World War I wasn't the Kaiser surprised that Britain intervened on behalf of Belgium? And he was so upset about it.

**Sarah Paine**

I don't know the details, but someone said that man wasn't the sharpest quill in the porcupine?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But just generally, is it wise to have this, will they, won't they attitude? Does it do a good job of deterring them?

**Sarah Paine**

I think you want to be ambiguous in the United States because otherwise it would enable Taiwan to do crazy stuff. Like under Chiang Kai-shek, if we had been unambiguous, the man might have done crazy stuff and then all of a sudden we get pulled into a World War.

But if you think about a Taiwan conflict, just because there's a conflict there does not mean the United States has to send its military toe to toe. I would think it would give China a long lasting time out from the international world order. It'll be sanctioned.

This is what's so tragic about China. Think about how many people have been lifted out of poverty. So many since Deng Xiaoping. Hundreds of millions. It is a great achievement of our lifetime. This has happened since you were born. And why did that happen? It's China's reintegration into the rest of the world, of joining the maritime order, following the basic credit card rules of paying for transactions and then your transactions are also guaranteed.

That is the win for China, the true win. And taking Taiwan, who needs it? The Taiwanese are perfectly fine doing their own thing. And they've made it clear they don't want to be taken over by force. Who would be?

The problem in China is a Communist Party wants to maintain its monopoly on power. It used to claim the moral rectitude card. Well, they can't do that anymore. They're so corrupt. They used to claim the economic growth card. Well, that one's going away. They're left with one card. It's the nationalism card. And they're playing it hard because it's a unifying thing for Chinese, for the Han ethnic group in China, who constitute the overwhelming majority, that Taiwan should be theirs. It's a mistake. It will be a pivotal error if they make that mistake. But guess what? Other countries cannot control what the Chinese government decides to do. It's foolish to think you can control it. It's beyond your abilities.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Although we can control whether we get into a head war with another global superpower. What are the odds you would give to a war between China and the U.S. going nuclear?

**Sarah Paine**

It would be the most catastrophic error imaginable for the United States and China to have a military conflict. There will be no winners. There will be massive numbers of losers.

Let's talk about nuclear weapons for a minute. Think about how Americans are so mad at each other about wearing a mask or not wearing a mask. Talk about something that's stupid. Talk about something that's not a big deal, wearing a mask or not. If anybody nukes anybody else's city, do you think the world is going to be remotely the same way? Can you imagine?

We can't even be logical about masks or just letting other people do their thing about masks. We can't even do that in the United States. We have many diplomats who are doing their best to prevent this eventuality but understand that we do not control the decisions of others.

For instance, I'm going to make a guess that you don't have children. But if you ever have children and little ones that you could pick up and put down, they will wind up doing things that you cannot fathom. You're genetically related to these people. You love these people. And they will do stuff that you think is just wild. You will put enormous pressure on them not to do these things and they'll do it anyway. So the notion that we can take a country of one billion and change and make them do anything...

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But the reason I ask is, is an island of 20 million people worth getting into an altercation that could potentially lead to a nuclear war?

**Sarah Paine**

Ah. The global order, going back full circle, is based on sovereignty. If you allow this, it doesn't mean you have to go to a nuclear war. You just never recognize whatever it is and then you sanction China from then until kingdom come, so that they are not part of the maritime trading order. And you tell them they need to cough up Taiwan.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Understanding China and the way the government works, could the CCP survive a failure to take Taiwan? If they invade, they fail. And then because of that, they get kicked out of the global order. What do you think happens to the CCP?

**Sarah Paine**

I don't know. But look at North Korea. Talk about a failed place. It's amazing to me how long the Kim dynasty has maintained its power. It's just unbelievable. They're starving. Don't count on any short-term ending. Those countries that are willing to cooperate with each other, not invade, negotiate their disagreements, work through international organizations, improve international organizations, that world is what you want to protect. And you want to allow people to come and join. So if Russia changes its mind, new government, etc, you want to bring them back into just the way Japan and Germany were brought back in. You want to protect that order forever. Our prosperity is based on it. And it involves serious defense spending, etc.

The problem with the Communist Party, the paradigm of we're going to have a monopoly, it's a route to poverty. Think about it. When the communists took over, they didn't restore the grain harvest that had happened during the Civil War. The 1930s version until after Mao was dead, it's incredible. It's a really lousy system for promoting economic growth, and it matters

in a poor country. It's going to determine your per capita standard of living. And the poorer you are, the more that makes a huge difference to you to have somebody say. Communism doesn't produce wealth. It's an incredibly effective way for taking power within a failing state and putting a dictatorship in power. It's incredibly good at that. But it doesn't deliver prosperity afterwards.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Since World War II, is it fair to say that our Navy has not been tested to the same extent as our Air Force and Army have in the engagements we've had?

**Sarah Paine**

None of our forces have been as tested. Probably the Marines the most in the Army because they're doing land engagements. But if you think that Iraq or Afghanistan is a peer competitor, give me a break.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I think our GDP is like 325 times that of Afghanistan.

**Sarah Paine**

It is a different event, which is why the Ukrainians are going "Excuse me?" when they get advice from us.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Given that that's the case, how confident should we be in our \$15 billion carriers? The other person that I interviewed in the UK was Dominic Cummings, who was the chief advisor to the previous government, and he said that in the war games, for the British carriers to survive, they would have to exit the zone of contention, which would make them useless. So how worried should we be about our preparedness for a naval war?

**Sarah Paine**

You always need to be prepared. You have to be thinking about it constantly. One, our carriers are incredibly useful in going toe-to-toe with a peer competitor. The vulnerabilities you are describing are absolutely there, particularly if you want to get up close and personal. On the other hand, what a carrier provides you is that it gives you a base all over the world. So if you're not going after a peer competitor, then they're incredibly useful. And we own them.

So the question now is going forward, do you want to build more carriers? Or do you want to build something smaller that just takes drones? Or what are you doing? That's the big decision and I'm not qualified to answer it. But for the ones that you have, they're tremendously useful for doing these non-peer events. And again, I am not qualified to answer operational questions like these.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Yeah, I guess I am curious about it because in Ukraine we have these drones that are taking out extremely expensive tanks.

**Sarah Paine**

Bingo.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

The impact of asymmetric warfare. How do you see that shaping up?

**Sarah Paine**

Warfare has always been asymmetric. Isn't that the game? You figure out whatever they've got, and then you do something different, which is the asymmetry.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Right. Or the thing of just having cheap drone armies that can debilitate billion-dollar equipment.

**Sarah Paine**

Yeah, this is it. And you're very much part of the generation going back to your education in computer science and these technologies. Apparently the 3D printing that they're doing in Ukraine is absolutely going to change things. I don't know to what degree. I'm not an expert. The other issue with the United States is we build a lot of these very expensive platforms, these ships and airplanes, and then you wonder whether you can afford to lose them. Thinking creatively, this is where war games come into play, and planning is "Okay. What would be the value of these smaller things? Can they carry the water when the time comes, etc?" I think you're going to learn a lot from this Ukraine war about what works and what doesn't.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What is your opinion on how competent and effective the military is in general? Because given that there hasn't been a huge war for quite a while, have they been able to maintain the standards and the efficiency?

**Sarah Paine**

I am not qualified to answer that. I teach at the Naval War College but that does not make me an expert on how the Pentagon runs its business. I think the general feeling about the federal government is that there are incredible inefficiencies but it's very difficult to get rid of them. In the civilian part of it as well. Once people get a federal service job, it's very difficult to get rid of that particular job, etc.



**Dwarkesh Patel**

Are there plans around the Naval War College or elsewhere about how to make the system more modern and efficient?

**Sarah Paine**

I teach in the strategy department, so we do strategy, not all of this other stuff.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Is the era of great generals over? Maybe you answered this already when you said that we overemphasize looking back how much these generals mattered but for some reason or another, they've become historically famous. People like von Müller, Patton, or MacArthur. Whereas off the top of my head, I can't even name a famous general of Iraq.

**Sarah Paine**

I can name one. You have Valery Zaluzhny, who runs the Ukrainian army. Think about the people you're picking. You're picking people who were part of a global war, a really high stakes war. And then as I pointed out, we use these generals to personify a whole group of people.

I suspect the ones you're going to find are going to be the ones in Ukraine. And the fact that they've done as well as they have done so far is incredible. And then it's not just the generals there, right? You have Zelensky, who is the public face of diplomacy. It's incredible. From the night, his little sound bite — "I don't need a ride. I need more ammunition."

And then if you think of the people there who are running the rail system who have kept things supplied or the people who are repairing their electric power plants. There are so many Ukrainians of different professions who are holding that thing together. So, there are plenty of great people to be found there.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What is the process that leads to the loss of civilian control of the military? For example, in Japan. And why has the US been robust against this?

**Sarah Paine**

In Japan, it's interesting. If you go back to the Meiji leaders, who are they? They're the people who won the civil war against the last Tokugawa Shogun. If you look at their career paths, they had civil and military jobs as they swapped around, and they all knew each other. The head of the Army and the Navy and the prime ministers, they all interacted. But they didn't create an institutional mechanism. They did have a cabinet, but they didn't have a full up legal forcing together of all the civil and military parts of the government and have them operate on a rather level playing field. The Army dominates.

So when that generation dies, everyone gets much more stovepipe careers. They're much better educated than their parents and grandparents have been but their education would be strictly in the Army, as opposed to, "Oh, well. The founder of the Army also founded the police force. And he knew the finance minister and had great respect for the finance minister." And then you have people not respecting each other.

I'm making this up because I don't know the details of China but if you think about Deng Xiaoping, he's on the long march, he's one of the younger members. He must know everybody. And I know he's in and out of prison. So he knows the people who are in and he knows the people who are out. Then when you get to Xi Jinping, they're a much more stovepipe group of people. They don't have the institutions.

Actually, in China, they do have institutions for party control over the government. So that's how communist governments have maintained very good control over their militaries. In fact, if you look at Communists, they're really good at civilian control over militaries. In fact, that was Trotsky's contribution back in the Russian Revolution of how you take a bunch of white officers and veterans of World War One and keep track of them. It has to do with political and military commissars. The military commissar is the officer who's actually a professional. The political commissar is the one who's got a connection with the secret police, who if the military commissar doesn't do as told, they'll come in and kill him and maybe also his whole family for good luck. And it's very effective in the commissar system.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

In the U.S., though, in the Naval War College, you have these systems of the officers from West Point or whatever, I don't know what the actual progression looks like. Are they seeing the civilian from their education to their promotion? Are they in the military the entire time, or do they also have this wide spread of experience?

### **Sarah Paine**

Military officers have a very extensive education. It's often a succession of MA degrees. Some of them are very technical things. Like if you're in nuclear subs, you better know how to run the nuclear plant and engineering things. And then they come to places like the Naval War College to learn about strategy and other things.

In terms of civil control over the military, if you go back to the American Revolution, the Continental Army couldn't even get funding. And it grows very gradually over time. And then you have MacArthur, who is just ignoring Truman and is making all kinds of threats. Truman thinks he's got a way of settling out the Korean War, and MacArthur says things that overturn that. So eventually you have MacArthur getting fired, which is telling military officers you can't do that.

And then when you get some military officers shooting off their mouths under Barack Obama, they get fired instantly. We have full-up civilian control. With MacArthur, he was trying to run policy and got himself fired, but he was tremendously popular. And it was the joint chiefs of staffs who actually fired him. They agreed with Truman, they don't want MacArthur having his finger on the atomic button. It scared them to death because they thought he would press it.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Speaking of the political and military commissars and their system, why have the communists been so good at propaganda historically? You talk in Wars of Asia about how, despite the imperial things they did and the ways in which they sabotaged things, they had much better PR than the Americans ended up having.

### **Sarah Paine**

If you think about how communists started, if you take 1917, the Bolsheviks, they're really weak. And you think about people who are weak, what can you do? Words are key. So you're using words to cultivate loyalty so you can get cadres to come your way. And you're going to use words, since you don't have the ability to threaten people militarily, you're going to use words to try to undermine them. And we've seen this happen the world over, I think wasn't the story of Al Qaeda was pretty good at words and doing their recruiting, etc.

It takes the powers that are the target of this quite a while to realize the effects of this. You think the Bolsheviks are crazy people and ignore them but then gradually you see the cumulative effects and they are a threat and then you need to get going with your own information warfare.

And I'll give you an example, the United States had quite a robust information warfare by the later stages of the Cold War. It involved Voice of America and BBC and it was basically, just tell people the truth about the relative standards of living. The cumulative effects will be to destroy the allegiance of people in their own governments, which is what happened.

At the end of the Cold War in 1991, we ceased funding that because we thought it's over. And then I remember I was on sabbatical in California at the Hoover Institution, and one of the people there was a great expert on Ukraine, and this one time when the RTV was on, the Russian propaganda station, he said RTV is really dangerous. I said, "Oh, it's ludicrous. They're just telling nut stories." He was right. I was wrong. He was absolutely right that those crazy stories started getting a life of their own.

And then if you look at Biden, when this war was just about to begin in Ukraine, he made the decision to release a lot of the intelligence about, "Hey, they're about to invade. Here's where they're coming." And he completely buried Putin in the information war. So it took us a while to wake up. Now we're back.

The US ambassador in Japan has some really lively tweets about the Chinese, and they're hilarious, you need to Google them if you haven't read them. We're back. And actually the United States is really good at this department. Hollywood, the movies, we have so much talent in this department. A lot of it's just based on telling the truth. But lies, as we've noticed, take a long, long time. It's very easy to tell a lie. It takes a long time to get all the facts to prove it is a lie.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Why was the Axis so much worse at collaborating than the Allies? Especially given the fact that it seemed like the Axis should have been in much greater collaboration. They were all these nationalist militaristic movements, whereas the Allies, you have communists and democracies.

In your book, you talk about when Japan's fighting Russia, Germany has a non-aggression pact with Russia. When Germany does Operation Barbarossa on Russia, Japan has a non-aggression with Russia. So if they had a two-front war what could have happened? When Pearl Harbor happens, Germany isn't warned, but then gets dragged into a war against America. Why didn't the Axis better coordinate?

### **Sarah Paine**

I'm going to turn your question inside out. I'm thinking about the Alliance system. What did one side do versus the other side do? I'm thinking about the Alliance itself. Flip it around to the enemy which is that the Axis powers put their enemies on death ground. That is why the war began. That is an incredibly clarifying event. That got Britain, which really, really hated the communists to ally with them immediately. Forever, Britain thought that the dangerous thing were the communists, not the fascists in Germany. But then when the Germans worked their wonders, Britains got all "It's the communists who are the primary threat." If you look at it that way, that's one thing.

Another concept to think about are primary enemies versus secondary enemy. If I ask you the question for Germany to get what it wants in the world, who is its primary enemy? The answer would be Russia, because that's where it wants to do its Lebensraum and stuff. You go, well, Italy, who is its primary enemy to do its Roman Empire III or whatever number they're up to, and the primary enemy would be Britain who would get in the way of those plans. Then you go, who's the primary enemy of Japan? It's actually not us, it's China, because if they win, that's the prize to be taken.

So then you flip it around and go, okay, primary enemy of Britain, Germany. Primary enemy of the United States, Germany. It was never Japan. We deliberately understood that Japan would never threaten us directly in the way that Germany ultimately would if it took over all of Europe. Then you ask Russia, primary enemy? Germany. You know, kidding, we got three aligned on the primary enemy. It's a very effective alliance. Get rid of Germany and it falls

apart, which is actually predictable. When you lose the primary enemy, which is Hitler, he's gone. All of a sudden, we're back to Communist versus Capitalist. The Cold War is often running. People act like it's a surprise. No, it's not. Primary enemy gone.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Back to the question about the Meiji generation. We see these sorts of industrializations across Southeast Asia. What happened many decades later in Korea and Taiwan and China, did Japan just do that exact same thing earlier? And how come in Korea and Taiwan, you have a sort of dictatorship or an authoritarian government that leads this effort and then it transitions to democracy? Whereas in China and Japan, that didn't happen. What explains the difference there? Is it just the power of the US?

**Sarah Paine**

Well, (a) if Japan hadn't gotten into World War II, who knows what would have happened. If the West had not mismanaged the Great Depression, who knows what would have happened?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

If that didn't happen, do you think there's a chance Japan liberalizes in the 30s?

**Sarah Paine**

Perhaps. It's conceivable. But there's also another thing about human beings. We human beings require the absolutely scorching horrible lesson to suddenly realize, "You need to do these things. You're going to be better off." The searing lesson was World War I and that World War II generation set up institutions that have held the peace in the industrialized world. Not the third world where all the proxy wars were fought, but in the industrialized world till very recently.

On the authoritarian regimes, communist systems that insist upon a monopoly of power of the communist party are a separate problem. The places you're talking about in Asia, they invested extensively in education, extensively in infrastructure, extensively in industry of all types and allowed all kinds of private ownership.

You can have a lot of government planning and a lot of government ownership, and the economy works perfectly well. You can look at different European countries with different percentages. When you go to 100% government control, you kill your economy. Korea, Japan, etc. didn't do that. And so they get educated people who then for 20 years really put themselves on the line, putting the pressure on their own governments to democratize.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why was the strategy of the Soviet Union in World War II so much better in Asia than it was in Europe? In Asia they're playing off these different parties in China against each other, for

example China against Japan. In Europe, Stalin doesn't even see Barbarossa, or doesn't prepare for it adequately, why were they so much more effective in Asia?

**Sarah Paine**

I don't know. I would imagine cooperative adversaries. China had been a failed state for such a long time. They're trying to glue Humpty Dumpty back together again. So what works in Asia versus Europe where you have developed countries with a whole cadre of experts, which is not the case in China? There are a lot more people in the West who are re-assessing and they have robust institutions. It goes back to institutions. Whereas China is trying to just build these the first time around. Difficult in China.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why doesn't China think like a continental power? They have a vast coastline where a lot of their wealth is around that coastline. As far back as the 15th century, you have these huge Navy's. Wasn't it Zheng He that had a bigger navy and far bigger ships than Columbus.

**Sarah Paine**

Yeah, they had a big navy. Different times.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

So why didn't they think like a continental power?

**Sarah Paine**

Having a continental location is not a choice, it's a fact of geography. If you look at China, it has a huge land border. Sure, it's got a huge coastline as well but historically, where have China's national security threats come from? From the North, the Northwest. If you look where the passes are of people coming on in or down straight through Manchuria, etc.

China, in order to maintain its empire and just dominate China itself along with keeping these other people out, has had to have a large standing army. When it has built a large navy like Zheng He, is when it's got extra pocket change. If you have extra money then you can go do this. But if that changes and you have trouble with people on your borders, you've got to spend your money that way.

It's very difficult to have a world-class navy and a world-class army. If you think about Britain, it maintained the big navy and always had a tiny army until they ramped it up in World War One, which was the beginning of the end for them, as being the dominant power that they had been.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What level of competence should we assign our estimates of how well the PLA would function in a war, whereas at least the United States military has had these practice rounds

in Iraq and Afghanistan? We don't even know how the modern PLA would actually function in a war. And obviously, as you were mentioning earlier, in authoritarian systems, there's this lack of information and feedback that could lead to all kinds of catastrophes where people are not prepared. What should we think of the PLA's competence?

**Sarah Paine**

I don't know. But I think the people who are worried about that are the Vietnamese and the Indians, the people who are likely to meet them. Back in '79, when the Chinese tried to work their magic in Vietnam, they had massive casualties. The Vietnamese killed more Chinese in a matter of weeks than all US losses in Afghanistan and in fact, all US losses in Vietnam over however many years we were there.

Do you think the Chinese would be good at expeditionary warfare and sending these people anywhere? Think about where would you be fighting them? It's great that they have got a big army. So where are they going to deploy them?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Why have the wars in China been so deadly? You have millions of casualties sometimes.

**Sarah Paine**

It's continental warfare. That's how it goes.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

It's the same reason Russia has had so many Russians dying.

**Sarah Paine**

I believe if you measure the number of locals who died in Iraq and Afghanistan and then they've had the civil war on top of it, it's thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of people. We go, "Oh, it wasn't too bad for Americans." For those who live there, it was quite bad.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

The Taiping Rebellion, I guess another -

**Sarah Paine**

Tens of millions. No one knows how many people died in that thing.

I think one of the takeaways for you. if you look at Chinese history over the course of all these different rebellions that go back hundreds of years, all these different wars they fought and you look and go, "Wow, millions of Chinese killing each other." A mark of good strategy is not killing your own. So if the Chinese have been doing this for a long time, don't

expect them to be great strategists, which isn't a happy thing, actually. It might mean they do crazy, stupid things that are so detrimental to themselves.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

Some final questions about studying history in general.

So I studied computer science and I talk to a lot of people in these technical fields. Being around them, I think I have a sense of what it means to understand a technical field well. What does it mean to understand history or strategy well?

### **Sarah Paine**

In history, you have to do tremendous amounts of reading. And it's over a career. Also, publishing is really essential, not only do you give people the best ideas that you've encountered but it also forces you to really come to terms with what you do think and why. I feel after every book, whatever I was, I'm one-click better. You've probably got good eyesight, unlike me. If you go in for an eye appointment, the guy will go click, click, and go, is this one better or is this better? I feel like after a book, it's one better. Do I see 20-20 now?

And after a year abroad, like I'm in England for a year, where I just get to think, read extensively, try to be open-minded, try to look for the unknown unknowns. What is it I'm completely missing? What is it that I'm totally wrong about? Being open to reassessing, "Ooh. I got that wrong."

So it has to do with reading extensively. If you're going to be studying other societies, you better read the language. I'm not particularly good at any of these languages, but I do try hard. And it's taken years for me to bungle my way through them as I do. But that's really essential.

And too much of U.S. graduate education, particularly in political science, where they ask you very important questions for international relations and politics, they don't require them to have high-end linguistic skills. They should. And part of it is, if you learn a different language, you do kind of a mind-meld. If you learn Japanese, you have to learn all of these formality things and what's called Keigo. It's honorific Japanese. My Japanese is terrible, but learning as much as I've learned makes you realize part of how this hierarchical society works and you get a sense of how they think about things and they categorize stuff. So we're back at the opticians for this. If you do the language, you get a few more clicks.

### **Dwarkesh Patel**

And having to live there when doing this archival research.



**Sarah Paine**

Yeah. And then just asking people questions when I live there of why this? Why that? And then what's funny is you come back home and it gives you a new sense of what makes one's own country special. Because things that you just assume everyone does, you go, "Well, everyone doesn't quite do this."

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Have you come across something super shocking in your archival research? I don't know if there's a story of something super shocking. One of the things I'm remembering from your book, as you mentioned, that you had a speculation that both the nationalists and the communists help the Russians cover up the rape of Manchuria because they were both given hush payments.

**Sarah Paine**

Well, no, they cut a deal. It didn't work. And that's my interpretation. And if you have further archival evidence that I'm happy to reassess.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

But anything else? Maybe not exactly like that, but something you've dug up that nobody noticed.

**Sarah Paine**

Well, I'm not a gotcha person, but working at the Naval War College. I started out my career studying Russia and China. I did not realize it but I'm learning about two of the greatest continental empires in human history. And it's fascinating learning about that. Then I get a job. My husband and I go to the Naval War College. And suddenly I'm teaching about British and US maritime strategy. What do I know about that? That's why my husband got me to do all these co-edited books about naval topics just to learn more about it. And that's where I got the idea about maritime and continental origin.

I gave the Marshall lecture that was published in General Military History. In it, I summarize my views on what the difference between a continental and maritime power is. And that's one of my big career takeaways. It's a fundamentally different way of looking at the world.

Putin honestly looks at the world like, "If I control territory, that's what makes me secure." Maritime powers, start with Britain, which is, "Hey, mine's secure if I can maximize money from commerce." Because then I can buy a Navy and buy allies with armies and stuff. And then eventually this order of organizing trade by international law, and the Dutch Republic is instrumental in this with Hugo Grotius, who is the founding father of international law. They want to run transactions by law, et cetera. This is an international order that's win-win. You join it, you get security. You have input on how it evolves because it's a work in progress.

Whereas this continental thing is negative sum. And you can see it in Ukraine. Putin wants more territory. Okay, he took Eastern Ukraine and he took Crimea in 2014. But it's negative sum because he destroys whatever businesses had been being run in Donbass and he absolutely kills most of the tourist industry. And then you can look to today, it's so negative sum in Ukraine. He is destroying wealth at a really rapid clip. It's really a stupid way to run things.

If the PRC tries to take Taiwan, it's a continental view. Somehow they think more territory is going to improve their security. No, they'll level it and they'll hurt themselves. Whereas if they just ignore the Taiwan thing and say, "Oh, they're so annoying, let them run their own place who wants them anyway." and then trade with them, they'll both make money. That's my biggest career takeaway.

Political scientists love to talk about America, the hegemony. No other country in the world wants an American hegemony. There may be some people in the United States who think that looks great, but no one's going to buy into a world order in which the United States is the hegemony who pushes everyone else around. I get it, we're big and we're influential, but other people are influential too. This maritime order where, yeah we're an important part of it, but we have many other people in it. It's a win-win.

Biden is doing all of these meetings with Europeans managing what's going to go on in Ukraine, et cetera. And it's based on agreement of all these different countries chipping in big and small. Who's prosperous and who's not, may I ask?

**Dwarkesh Patel**

The Maritimes.

**Sarah Paine**

Yeah, they're the ones who have massively increased their standards of living since the Cold War. It was really the third world. Except now we got Wagner or whatever's left of it and also China's now got these private military things running roughshod over Africa. All that's going to do is tank African growth rates, which for a while were going double-digit. So that's one of my big career takeaways. And I tried to put it into the one lecture that I was asked to do and the one article, which is like a 20-page read.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

That's a super interesting way to think about things. A couple years back people were looking at the growth rates in China and they were thinking that it's going to have the biggest economy and be the leader of the global order. Does your analysis imply that because it's not part of that maritime system, even if its economic growth picks up, it will still not be the leader of the world in the same way?

**Sarah Paine**

Doing what they're doing is all going to depress growth. They could join the maritime order any day. That is what at the end of the Cold War, everyone wanted them to do. Everyone wanted Putin to join it. If you think about all the money Putin has spent on his crazy military stuff, imagine what would have happened if he'd spent all that on the Russian road system, because their road system is deplorable. And imagine if he had devoted his attention to trying to have a better legal system so that small businesses could get bigger without having someone come to them for protection money. Think what Russia could have been now. It would have been dramatically better.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

They have so much energy, so many raw resources.

**Sarah Paine**

Oh, they have so many talented people, but the Russians don't see it that way. They see it in this continental view, and they're the ones who have to come to terms with what they think.

This is why containment is brilliant. In the meantime, those of us who joined the maritime order need to work with each other and then we contain the problem by saying, "You cannot join us on equal footing till you behave yourselves." You get a timeout from the global order, but we would welcome you back in. The problem with Putin is he's done so much damage to Ukraine, there are going to be reparations involved, and the Russians won't want to pay those.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

What are the mistakes and biases that come about from self-studying history, as opposed to formally studying it? In what ways is your understanding of strategy or history most likely to be incomplete as a result?

**Sarah Paine**

Let's do history. I think about my education at Columbia. I had the most absentee landlord professors. They just didn't waste their time on me. I just did a tremendous amount of reading, and while I was there, I did the equivalent of two PhDs of coursework as a graduate student. Because going to graduate school is such an expensive event. It costs time and money and everything else. So I just took massive numbers of courses to read the reading list of what they had given me and having some guided readings was tremendously helpful.

On the strategy part, this is where the Naval War College has been essential to my publications. In the strategy and policy department, what we do and what civilian academia doesn't do, and it's tragic because they're better positioned, is a big team-taught course, the strategy course. All the students at the War College have to take the main strategy course, the main joint military operations course, the main national security affairs course.

It's a one-year MA. In that one trimester in which we have them, our course is four-fifths of their coursework. And then there's a junior and a senior course, so we do teach two trimesters out of three.

Alright, so because it's team-taught and the lectures are given by different faculty members, so I attend everybody else's lectures, or I did originally, and I attend all the new ones. You learn so much from your colleagues and then they learn from each other. You were asking me about Bismarck. Why would I know about Bismarck? Because I had colleagues who actually knew something about him, which I don't, and I listened intently and I did the readings. And then from teaching strategy, I learned all these concepts and I've given you some of them, and they're tremendously useful for studying wars.

I never would have learned about maritime powers without being at the Naval War College. It is the only institution of higher education in the United States that focuses on the strategic prerequisites for and possibilities of being a maritime power. It is essential to know this to practice U.S. foreign policy. Why? Because unlike Ukraine, if you have a continental position, if someone threatens you and invades on a given day, you have a choice on that given day, the day they chose, either you're going to capitulate or you're going to fight. So they determine when the war is going to begin.

In our insulated position, unless we start doing terrible things to the Mexicans and the Canadians. Mexico is our biggest trade partner, and Canada must be not far behind. When there are wars that are important to our national security, we decide, like in World War I and World War II, do we get in? If yes, when do we get in? In Afghanistan, and in Iraq, do we get in? Do we not get in? We could have avoided Iraq altogether if we wanted to, and I'm not a Middle Eastern expert, so you'd have to talk to those people about pros and cons. Afghanistan, since we had been attacked, the chances were we were going to be in on that one because of a direct attack on us.

It is incredibly important to understand this maritime position. That's why I've co-edited all these books with my husband, the ones I mentioned to you about maritime things, which took us years to do. But if you want a short course, you get half a dozen of these books and it's actually a fast way of learning about what the maritime instrument can and can't do for you. The strategy course was absolutely essential from what I know about strategy. I have done my best in books to put what I have learned there. The one I'm working on in the Cold War is going to be organized around these strategic concepts of — How did each side try to manipulate the other? How did the medium powers try to wing in on the game? And what are the strategies that they're using? The paradigms, etc. So I'm going to try and pour as much of this in there. Because this is what education is. It's passing the baton from one generation to another saying this is what I've learned over the course of my career.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

I'm really excited to read that.

**Sarah Paine**

It'll take me years to finish it. It's not happening any time soon.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Final question. My audience probably is overwhelmingly representative of technology and those kinds of worlds. What is it that you especially want them to understand about history and strategy?

**Sarah Paine**

What I want them on history and strategy is it's going to be a well informed person and read broadly. But I think for them, in technology, they need to think broadly of these technologies about which they have deep expertise. Do these technologies privilege dictatorships or democracies? I do not know the answer. When you're creating architectures for things like the Internet, etc. Think about these things. Think about consequences. I suspect and I don't know this that when China does its Belt Road initiative, I would have presumed it's also selling a nice little I.T. package to keep the dictator in power that if you want to keep track of your population here, this is the I.T. thing you need to do to firewall this, that and the other thing.

The west is the part of the world that has developed most of these technologies and continues to be at the forefront of it. Think very deeply about whether you're going to ultimately privilege dictatorships over democracies because the reason tech has been able to be so vibrant is because you live within the castle walls of this maritime order where people follow the rules. You're protected on the outside. You have military things, etc. If those walls are breached by dictatorship or by really stupid grand strategy.. Our countries have come perilously close in the last few years. Perilously close. If Trump had been president at the time Ukraine was invaded, Ukraine would be no more. We would have Russian armies right up to the Polish border now. These things are terribly consequential.

And then another piece is – so you're well educated and you're in the growing part of the United States where you talk to each other at all of these meetings. Think about organizing things. For instance, we have tremendous problems with refugees or illegal immigrants coming over our borders because we have basically failing states to the South of us. Is there anything that foreign investment or anything can do over a 20 or 30 year period to help alleviate this because it will improve our own national security. If instead of refugees pouring over our borders, you have people making good t-shirts or eventually putting phones together. But that's the sort of thing that people who are in your world, who you meet each other at these business meetings and talk to each other and think about, "Okay, I

got to hear now." Maybe my charity work is to me thinking about these other things. So in my line of work, what do I do for charity? I talk to anyone for free.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

And I really appreciate that.

On the point about tech and whether it is enabling democracies or dictatorships. Isn't it very difficult to tell in advance? I'm sure that Gutenberg didn't think he was helping the Protestant Reformation or that the guy who made the radio didn't realize what he was doing for Hitler. Even with AI the thing that it was initially thought to help with, "It helps us collect information and congregate it." But we're seeing that China has been behind on these language models because it's really hard to align them to not say anything bad about the PRC, or the CCP rather. Isn't it hard to tell in advance?

**Sarah Paine**

It is hard. But the people you're talking about who are your prime audience are the bright people who might have some insights into it. Well, what do you want to do in your life? I would think one of the pieces would be contributing in some way that makes things a little better. However you're going to define better.

**Dwarkesh Patel**

Awesome. I think that's an excellent place to close this episode. Thank you so much for your time. And really, you've written the best books on military history. I highly recommend them to better understand not only those periods of history, but broader strategies and lessons and insights about our own time. Anyway, this was a huge pleasure. Thank you so much for coming on.

**Sarah Paine**

Thank you for having me and asking all the fun questions. It's been my pleasure.