



Historian Vijay Prashad - Reality & Context of the Ukraine War

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome to another episode of The Source. I am your host Zain Raza and today, we'll be talking to historian journalist Vijay Prashad. Vijay Prashad is the author of 30 books, one of the latest being "The Withdrawal Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the Fragility of U.S. Power". Vijay Prashad, thank you so much for your time.

Vijay Prashad (VP): Thanks a lot. Great to be with you. After a long time, I should say. Yeah, great.

ZR: All right. Let us begin with a fundamental discussion that has failed in the corporate media regarding Ukraine. Russia justified its war based on denazification and demilitarisation. Do you think these reasons had any legitimacy?

VP: Well, you know, when countries go to war, they often create the most proximate reason to go to war. For instance in the US case, the war on Iraq was justified, as you well know, based on the argument that there are weapons of mass destruction or indeed in 2003 that Iraq somehow colluded with Al Qaeda against the United States in 9/11. The most proximate, emotional reason is often utilised. That's common. So it's not unusual for the Russians to say, Well, we are out there to denazify. That's a very emotional issue. And also, it's an issue that impacts people in Russia because they say we're trying to help our fellow Russians who are in the Donbass region and in Crimea and so on. I don't think that's actually the reason for this conflict. That's just the proximate argument made by the Russian government. The reason for this war goes back much longer than that. It's not about the emergence of Nazi forces in Ukraine or the kind of revival of Stevan Bandera. All of that is not really the centre of the table. At the heart of it is a question that I think Europe, and particularly Germany and maybe

France need to answer; which is what is the role of Europe? Is Europe principally to be yoked to an Atlantic alliance with the United States to such an extent that Germany would then forgo cheaper energy from Russia in order to buy liquefied natural gas from the US? Is that the choice or the only choice available? Or does Europe integrate itself with the rest of Asia? You know, Eurasia is a very artificial construct because one doesn't know where the border that divides Asia and Europe should exist. So this integration of Eurasia has been a process ongoing since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the central, you know, Eastern European communist states. This integration is taking place through energy dependence on Russia and through massive investments from China after the world financial crisis. So the US trying to prevent this historical integration of Europe and Asia, you know, used Ukraine as a front line for that. And that actually, in my opinion, is the heart of this conflict. This conflict is about the integration of Eurasia versus the Atlantic alliance, as it were. And, you know, in particular, it comes down to the fact that Russia and the United States have allowed the arms control regime to collapse; so the confidence between these two countries around the idea that nobody's going to either put intermediate nuclear missiles at each other's border or that they would launch a nuclear strike at each other. There's no confidence in this because the arms control regime has collapsed. That's really what this war is about. And unfortunately, Ukraine is caught in the middle of it.

ZR: You talked about the arms control treaty, I would like to touch upon that. In 2002 we saw the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty being unilaterally thrown out by the United States. I think it was then under the Trump administration that the IMF Treaty [Inter Ballistic Missiles Treaty] and the Open Skies Treaty were also thrown out. And now the START treaty is also in question. Talk about the significance of these treaties and what it meant from the Russian perspective and even perhaps the Chinese perspective when these treaties were thrown out by the United States.

VP: You have to remember, and it's important for people to recall that in 1961, in Belgrade, in then Yugoslavia, the countries of the Global South gathered together, created the Non-Aligned Movement. And it's often forgotten that when the Non-Aligned Meeting ends in Belgrade, two representatives from the Global South go to Moscow and two representatives go to Washington, where they plead on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, on behalf of the Third World countries, they plead with them to come to the table properly in Geneva and conduct arms control. Because the argument made both in Belgrade and in Bandung in 1955, is that this arms control not only endangers the planet because nuclear weapons are so dangerous, but it also takes precious social wealth and diverts it off into things like, you know, weapons, systems of great expense and wasted expense. So that was the, in a sense, origin of the arms control regime. The Third World really plays a major role here, bringing these two nuclear powers to the table, forcing them to construct a range of treaties. You mentioned three of them, Open Skies, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. But of course, there's also the SALT talks, and the START talks, which are to minimise the number of warheads. I mean, one was to minimise the number of

missiles. And then these powers got clever and they put many warheads on a missile. Well, it was to decrease the number of warheads on missiles and so on, each of these had to be negotiated down in these treaties. So by the collapse of the Cold War, in fact, the treaties were quite significant. There was an arms control regime. What you didn't have from the United States and have never really had was an acknowledgement that it wouldn't do a first strike on any country. You know, the Soviets had no first strike. In fact, the Russians also have a no first strike doctrine. But the United States doesn't have a no first strike. At any rate the point is that there was an arms control regime in place, and that's important. Well, in the last ten years, after the world financial crisis in particular, but also in 2002 when the US walked away from the anti-ballistic missile, you've seen an attrition as the United States has felt- it's the only major power in the world, maybe now 20 years, I think it's safe to say 20 years or the last 20 years, the US has walked away from arms control regimes. And has broken the arms control regime entirely with the unilateral withdrawal in 2019 by Donald Trump from the Intermediate Nuclear Missile Treaty, INF. There was a real sense that, look, the US is going to place intermediate nuclear missiles in Ukraine, just, a few minutes of launch time to land in Moscow. And the Chinese are afraid that if the US does this in Taiwan, which has a dispute- in fact, there's no dispute by the way. Everybody agrees that Taiwan is part of China but there's this bizarre dispute set up by the US with the Taiwan act that it passed. After they agreed there's only one China. Anyway don't get sidetracked by that. Because let's stay focussed on this point, which is that the Chinese have figured that in South Korea, President Yoon, who's a kind of Trump-like figure, has said we can put missiles in South Korea, in Taiwan and so on. The Chinese also fear that because the US has walked out of the INF treaty. So in that sense, this has really destabilised the world. And I'm interested that in a country like Germany, the debate is so much around Ukraine and Russia that these broader points, these broader issues are not really part of the general political discussion. Which would, I think, enable people to have a much wider and deeper understanding of the issues that are taking place in and around Ukraine.

ZR: While all these arms control treaties were thrown out by the United States, we also saw within this time frame NATO expanding despite the promises made after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Talk about what the role of NATO is; in particular, there's this perception in Germany and in Western world, I would presume, that NATO is a defensive alliance. However, others argue that it serves the US interests and also divides Europe with Russia. What is your assessment of what NATO role has been within this time frame towards the Ukraine war?

VP: It's a very good question, Zain. I mean, NATO was created, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, after World War Two with a pretty simple premise. The premise was that the United States, with the world's largest military, was going to, in a sense, provide a military shield around Europe to protect it- it was argued- from the Soviet Union. That was the general assumption, and NATO wasn't the only one. There was a Central Treaty Organisation, the Baghdad Pact, there was a Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, the Manilla Pact and so on. NATO outlived all of them and continues to live. When the Soviet Union collapsed, there

was a serious discussion: Should NATO be wound up? But the idea was, no, no, we'll keep it going. Why? Let's go back to the question of what is Europe. In the immediate aftermath of World War Two in France in particular, Charles de Gaulle tried to articulate the view that Europe should have its own foreign policy and its own security architecture. You know, the European army, perhaps, or a French army and a German army and so on in a sort of collaboration, should protect Europe, and didn't need to be under a US umbrella. This tradition or this form of thought was called Gaullism. The idea was to be European and independent of the United States, one can't be the poodle of the US. That was the general argument made by de Gaulle. So that tendency, that Gaullist tendency remained in place from the late 1940s up to today. It's still there. So inside Europe, there is a dispute. On the one side, there are those who believe that being under the US umbrella, being in a sense, a poodle of the United States- because NATO is a Trojan horse, it's effectively a US military operation conducted on European soil, bases in Germany, bases in Italy and so on. It's basically a US operation. It's not really European. I mean, it would be trivial to call it European. You know, when Trump came and scolded, Stoltenberg told him, What are you doing?! I mean talking to an employee; not to an equal. So in that sense, there's a debate in Europe and has been for a long time between this NATOist, Atlantic project, where Europe has to subordinate itself to the United States and then a Gaullist idea of Europe having its own foreign policy objectives. These tensions have been there. After the fall of the USSR there was, again, a revival with the European Union of a discussion: Should there be a European foreign minister, European security agenda? And in fact, those institutions were created in the European Union. But I mean, to what end? They are completely parroting the US doctrine. Well, interestingly, after the war in Yugoslavia, when NATO went into operation, the idea was that Yugoslavia is part of Europe. So it's still within the European sphere, although I must say there was no real reason for NATO to enter the Yugoslavian campaign because no security of any of the NATO countries was threatened. But anyway, that was off the table. The United States was attacked in 9/11 and then NATO goes to Afghanistan. Because the charter has a trigger that if one of the countries is attacked, that's a security pact, others must come to its aid. But interestingly, with Libya, there was no attack at any European country, a NATO country- no attack. So NATO again violated its own charter like it did in Bosnia in 1999. It violated its own charter in 2011. By the Madrid summit of this year it became perfectly normal and natural to talk about global NATO. You know, Ivo Daalder, the Washington based theoretician of the globe, had been calling for a global NATO for almost over a decade. What is this global NATO? There is no room for it. It's not there in the UN charter and so on. Now NATO is poking its nose into the South China Sea, getting involved in the US conflict on China. NATO has become an issue in the Ukraine conflict. Frankly NATO is not an issue because after all, two of the three Baltic states are NATO members. Russia didn't have any problem with NATO after all. For a long period under Yeltsin and early Putin, Russia was a part of NATO's Partnership for Peace. You know, Russia was not outside that. The issue isn't NATO expansion. The issue is, what's going to happen in these countries? Will they allow nuclear weapons to come in? You know, you don't need to be a NATO country to house US nuclear weapons. You can have a Stand-By Agreement and so on. So the anxiety was not NATO's

presence in Ukraine. It was what this military pact thinks it can do with countries, let's say in this case in Asia and also in Africa. NATO has been playing a big role there and it's almost going by without comment, despite the fact it's a violation of the NATO charter.

ZR: I want to talk about more context, specifically what you touched upon earlier, the integration of Russia. Why do you think it has failed to be integrated by the West? Was it either Russia's fault- for example, Russia has been accused by Western states for violating democratic rights. It's been accused of conducting wars such as in Chechnya or in intervening in democratic elections, etc.. Is that the reason why the West was unable to integrate Russia into, let's say, the capitalist sphere or the political sphere? We've seen the West integrate former foes, or the US particularly such as Vietnam, Germany, Japan. They have been integrated into Western capitalism and even political talks. Why was Russia left outside, in your view?

VP: Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, firstly it's important to recognise Russia as a major country, it's very large landmass, it has nuclear weapons. It's a country with a major self understanding. You know, they have an understanding of themselves with a long history and so on. These things matter in international relations. They are important. Well, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States basically thought it had won the Cold War. And US advisors arrived in Moscow. People came and they set up the kind of kleptocratic structure that was enjoyed by the so-called oligarchs. I mean, what's an oligarch, if not a billionaire? I mean, isn't Elon Musk an oligarch? And isn't Jeff Bezos an oligarch? But anyway, somehow this word is used only to refer to Russian billionaires. Never mind. The US set up the structure for this. They created the structure for this sort of Russian kleptocracy that was created. And the US basically treated Russia like a doormat. I mean, Yeltsin was begging Clinton; in fact, in one of the elections the US government had to intervene to make sure the communists didn't come back to power. I mean, Time magazine reported the story initially and then others followed up. What happened was that at a certain point when Russia was in great dismay, you know, when the middle class, for instance, was out there on the street selling books and selling whatever they could get their hands on, essentially breaking down the society. I remember in India, Russians would come in the plane loads in the 1990s to buy stuff from cut price markets, carry big sacks of clothes back to Russia to sell on the streets. And these were middle class people that were doing that. The country was destroyed. Well, when Putin came in, he was the chosen heir apparent of Yeltsin. They brought him in as safe hands because the assumption was he would not allow any kind of court cases against Yeltsin. That was the idea. I mean, he was Mr. Safe Hands. But over the course of Yeltsin's presidency, they rebuilt the Russian systems. They sort of tried to yoke in the oligarchs. They brought Russian oil and natural gas back into the public domain and so on. And Russia began to then assert its older understanding, that it's a great country and the Russian people should not be the doormat for the West. So in 2007, Putin goes to the Munich Security Conference where he says, There should be no single monster in the world. That's the first shot across the bow at the United States. I think that's a very important gesture. It's not that Russia couldn't

integrate. Russia might have integrated, but it wanted to integrate on its terms, not to be just a poodle. You know, they didn't want to be treated as second class citizens. You know, we're seeing this now. Look, earlier this year, the countries Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia conducted a very good agreement to share resources to build an electric car battery supply chain, because they between the two countries have 80% of the components of the electric car battery. So they said, Let's create our own supply chain. A very good move, you know, backed by the Economic Commission of Africa and so on. And then the United States pokes its nose in and says, No, no, you can't do this deal by yourself. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia can't be by themselves. So during the US-Africa Summit, Antony Blinken forced these two governments to sit together and write a new agreement with the United States as the third party. Why do you need the US there? Why can't two African countries do it by themselves? They were treated essentially as second class citizens. You can't do it yourself. So Russia, in a sense, was cavaling against that second class citizen treatment. That I think is the reason why it could not integrate. It might have integrated, but it would integrate on its own terms, not as a second class citizen.

ZR: Let us move the conversation towards 2014. For a lot of young viewers, they don't know the history of Ukraine, what happened. Can you talk about what unfolded after 2014 and what eventually spiralled towards the Russian invasion of this year?

VP: Well, it's a complicated business. You know, when the Soviet Union was created- I'm sorry, I keep going back into history.

ZR: Go as far back as you want. We need all of this context and understanding to understand this conflict.

VP: I think it does make a difference. You know, the USSR was a very interesting creation. It first started as the Soviet Republic when the Bolshevik Revolution took place in 1917, in October. But then, you know, within a few years, it became clear that there were several other nationalities other than Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Chechnyans, you know, they were Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen and so on that were going to be part of the Soviet Republic. So at that point, the leaders of the Soviet Republic reorganised the system and made it, in a sense, a confederation of nationalities, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. One of those republics was Ukraine. It was to be a Soviet socialist republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Now, in order to make Ukraine in a way a coherent country with agriculture and industry and so on, it was the decision of the Soviet leadership to add to Ukraine sections of Russia. In other words, where the Russian speakers predominated. That is what people now know as the Donbass region, Lugansk, Donetsk and so on. And at the same time, Crimea was attached to Ukraine, largely because it's contiguous. You know, even though Crimea doesn't really have that easy a history, it's largely Russian speaking population, but nonetheless, Ukraine was created by the USSR. That's the key thing. With the fall of the USSR, it's pretty interesting that a lot of the tensions that you'd imagine with the collapse of something so major didn't

happen. You know, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, they went their own way. And there was no problem. There was no dispute at all. They became coherent countries. The dispute was there in Armenia and Azerbaijan. But by the way, that dispute predated even the Soviet Union. The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. I mean, that's an older dispute which had revived during Gorbachev's time in the leadership of the USSR. So that was not a consequence of the collapse of the USSR. Georgia and Armenia had border issues that were unresolved, and in fact they returned. So the Georgia dispute returns in 2007, 2008, where there's a conflict again on the border. Because Georgia and what was first the commonwealth of independent states and then Russia were not able to delimit properly their border. In the Ukraine the same. There was a conflict. What is the status of Donetsk? Lugansk? What is the status of Crimea? So I just want to put people's minds in one way at rest. That this is not something that started in 2014, you know, when the Maidan protests began and so on. There's an older story which has got to do with the fact that when a major country has such a transformation as the Soviet Union had in 1991, it often has a lot of violence attached to it. Strikingly, there was not. And the violence comes later. In fact, Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014 to the present is a delayed violence after the collapse of the USSR; so point number one. The second point is that inside Ukraine there was a dispute between two fractions of the ruling class. Again, over whether it should be, as it were, Moscow facing or Brussels facing. These are two fractions of the ruling class. And in a way, the ruling class in Ukraine was not really able to come up with its own understanding of whether there should be an Ukrainian dispute about this. They allowed everybody to come in. They internationalised their intra-class dispute. You know that's an error of the Ukrainian ruling class. Why did they internationalise the dispute? One section of the Ukrainian ruling class brought in the United States. They began to have Washington as their network and framework. Others were looking at Bonn or Brussels and so on. And then the whole section was looking to Moscow. So that comes to a head in the early part of the decade of the 2010s. And by 2014, there's a major problem in Ukraine. There's a legitimacy crisis for the government, there is the Maidan protest and so on. And the United States, as we know from Victoria Nuland's leaked phone call, dictates the terms of who should be the next government in Ukraine. Well, the government comes in, but it has very little legitimacy. It makes alliances with all kinds of unsavoury characters, including these sort of neo-Nazi groups and so on. It literally makes alliances with people that should have been outside the pale, as it were, of politics. But they bring them in. They bring them to the centre of things. And this becomes quite dangerous. And you see violence breaking out in the eastern section of Ukraine. At this time, now, here's the tradition of Gaullism or independent European foreign policy. Both Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel come to the table and try to mediate this conflict, and they create the Normandy format or the Normandy four, which basically was an agreement where the Russians, Ukrainians said, Look, we can work with this. And that's known as the Minsk agreements. They take the Minsk agreements and they say, Can we implement them? The implementation of Minsk, from at least 2016 till 2022 was the real dispute in and around Ukraine. And there was no really easy way to implement these, partly because, again, you had internationalised the conflict. The US was at the table. They understood this was a way to

weaken Russia. You know, that was very clear from the US standpoint. From the Russian standpoint, they saw this as an existential threat. They wanted Ukraine not to slip into US hands. So there was really very little appetite to implement the Minsk agreements. I would say that neither Washington nor Moscow was that keen. You know, even though they both said, Let's implement the Minsk agreement, there was not that keenness. And I have to give it to Macron and Merkel, you know, I may not like them politically, but they were quite sincere about trying to get this done. Now, of course, Merkel has recently given an interview to the press where she has said, Look, the West was not serious, the Ukrainian ruling class, not serious about Minsk. They were just biding time to rearm. Maybe that's true. She's better informed. I'm not sure she said those things out of factual, putting the facts on the record, or out of bitterness. I don't know. I didn't hear the tape of that. I don't know what her voice sounded like. But when I read the interview, it felt to me there was an edge of bitterness there. That she was saying "the West", in other words, Washington was putting pressure on them not to let this go past. They just wanted to drag it on to be able to resupply the Ukrainians. I actually don't know because I don't know Mrs. Merkel. I don't know what her motivations were for this interview. But certainly it looks to be the case that nobody really wanted to settle this. It was really ugly. And, you know, you got to a point, breakdown of relations. And I think Mr. Putin was pressured into this war. In fact, interestingly, it was the left inside the Duma in Moscow that put forward a resolution calling for the incorporation of Lugansk and Donetsk. And he was sort of dragged into this war. I'm not sure he actually wanted this.

ZR: We see that there's a lot of argument being made about Russia's existence or existentialism threat. Do we really think that's the case? Because if we look at what Putin decided to go to war now there's more existential threat today than there was before the war. For example, NATO has come together. Western nations have come together. There is talk about expansion of NATO, now. This was not the case. That means in the future we can see more military exercises happening at the borders of Russia, perhaps in Scandinavian countries, if they join. We are also seeing the Russian debate against anti-war growing bigger and bigger. And we're seeing certain fractures now appearing and a lot of Russia's setbacks on the military, according to the Western press. I'm saying we don't really know if they are setbacks or they are just repositioning. But let's just take the Western argument that Russia has entailed big setbacks. We're seeing big fractures right now, appearing at least on the front. So do you really think that Russia was really under threat or is it actually the case that *now* Russia is really under threat?

VP: You know, honestly, I don't think there's a question of being under threat as such because this is a nuclear armed country. I think the West, or at least Washington was under the approach: Put enough pressure on Moscow and the government will fall. This was a kind of regime change operation. That they thought they could repeat Afghanistan. You know, Hillary Clinton, in fact, went on a US talk show and she said Ukraine will be Putin's Afghanistan. They misread what happened in Afghanistan. The Soviet entry into Afghanistan

wasn't the reason for the collapse of the USSR. The USSR collapsed because Gorbachev was not able to actually manage a proper reform agenda in the country. I mean, it was chaos. It was an internal surrender of the Gorbachev leadership. It was not because of- Afghanistan played a role. It, of course, had an enormous economic impact on Russia and so on. It demanded a reform agenda. But the reform agenda, surrender was by Gorbachev, not by the Afghans. So there was a misreading of the Afghan story for the Soviet Union. And here there was an assumption, Okay, we'll put a lot of pressure on Ukraine, that will create instability in Russia and then there'll be the overthrow of the government. You saw initially there were some protests in Moscow against the war, but those have all disappeared largely. Now people will argue that it's because of repression, that they've disappeared. Could very well be. Could also be that a lot of people who are unhappy with Putin have left the country. That had also been happening. They just said, Look, there's no point. We're going to the West. And that's probably, likely, what happened. That the appetite to run a move like that is not there. Partly, and here's the point to go back to the thing, is that Putin has been able to tap into a great seam of Russian nationalism. This feeling that under Yeltsin, Russia was a humiliated country and that now Russia is back, Putin's alliance with the Chinese, for instance, economic alliance has helped stabilise the economy. So there are people out there who have absorbed the nationalist storyline. You know, it was there for Putin to pick up. I don't think Putin created this. It was there for him to pick up because it's got an old history. You know, Lenin warned against this history in the 1920s. He warned against great Russian chauvinism. It's available for anybody to pick up. We're seeing many leaders in the world lazily pick up the theme of ultra nationalism because it's available. Like in India, for instance. Narendra Modi has picked that seam up, even though other political forces have tried not to use that kind of ultra nationalist, Hindu nationalist kind of ideology. It's available to you. You know, socially it's available. So Putin picks that up. I don't think his government is going to collapse. I don't think that's in the nature of the existential threat. Also, I think initially there was a great enthusiasm in the Scandinavian countries and so on. We'll all join NATO. Okay, go ahead. Join NATO everybody. What's it to the rest of the world?! As if people are waking up in Zambia bothered whether, you know, Sweden joins NATO or not. Frankly, I don't care. They, as it is, are almost as if they are part of NATO they might as well join. They always do military exercises with NATO. They might as well join. It's hardly a big deal for us. These are, you know, not countries of great significance on the world stage. Let them all join NATO. Doesn't make a difference to me. In fact, it could be interesting because the more of these countries that join NATO, the more complexities there are within NATO. What do I mean by that? Well, because some of these countries have social democratic heritages which are not available that easily inside NATO. And they also have a vast belief, an arrogant belief in democracy. Well, go into NATO, go into the council meeting and argue with the Americans. Could be interesting for me. So I would like to see Scandinavians sitting there in the chamber, you know, surrounded by US advisors, trying to argue with them about climate change and so on. Look, it wasn't Russia or China that went to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and exempted the US military from carbon accounting because they said this was going to harm the national security of the United States. Now let these self-righteous people, who keep talking about climate change

and so on and do nothing about it, let them go into the NATO chamber and have a dispute. Look at the German Green Party. Okay, the name is Green Party. It's supposed to have emerged out of the debate around environmentalism and then supposedly climate. Great, your name is still Green Party. Meanwhile, they are the greatest wardogs. They want to persist with this war with Russia. And as a consequence of the war and the difficulty for Germany to get energy supplies, the Green Party is saying, Okay, we'll continue with nuclear. Your entire agenda- you were formed against nuclear. And then why not start up the coal fired plants in Germany? Why don't you burn down the Black Forest while you're at it? Great charcoal. That's the Green Party. So this idea of expanding NATO is going to have its own contradictions. As the cost of living crisis emerges, these political forces are going to be under immense pressure. And by the way, I said social democratic forces in Scandinavia, increasingly, as a consequence of these contradictions, far right groups are winning power in Scandinavia. This is not your old Subaru driving, IKEA kitchen kind of social democratic Scandinavian. These are rightwing Scandinavian. So you're going to have NATO be, in a sense, filled with all kinds of debates. But also they will be writing Scandinavians at the table, arguing an agenda that maybe people in other parts of Europe don't like.

ZR: Beginning December, we saw President Macron stating that the only way to end the war is with negotiations. He also held a joint press conference with President Biden in which Biden said that he would consider diplomacy. The German chancellor Scholz also recently spoke to Putin for an hour on the phone. It seems that the West is shifting its position from supporting Ukraine military aid at all costs towards diplomacy. How do you assess the shifted rhetoric? Is the price of supporting Ukraine becoming too high?

VP: Look, that is something that we're going to have to see. Because it actually begs the question of Europe's democracy. So Italy, for instance, had an election during this war where the Italian people voted for a far right candidate, Giorgia Meloni, who basically took a position during the campaign against NATO, against warmongering and so on- from a rightwing perspective. You know, there is the right wing perspective on these issues, but she took a right wing perspective attacking the Atlantic Alliance and sort. She comes into office, there is a whole different atmosphere. We are with this war with the United States and so on. Where's democracy? That's interesting. You came to office saying one thing, you were running on the other. So we'll see a lot of this in Europe, a lot of two faced politics. Look, frankly, you can continue to believe that two things are going to happen. One, Putin's government is going to fall and then a blind pro-US government will come in Moscow and then the gas can come flowing through Nord Stream three. That's one fantasy. Second fantasy is that Europe can survive by liquefied natural gas coming from the United States in the Gulf- very expensive, liquefied. You're in the middle of a cost of living crisis. That liquefied natural gas is much too expensive for European households. You're going to have to come back to make a deal with the Russians or you're going to have to, as I said, start your coal fired plants again. So the opportunity, number two of continuing with liquefied natural gas, it's not going to continue for too long. It's too expensive. Secondly, I doubt that Mr. Putin's government is

going to fall. And even if it does fall, I doubt that a subordinate pro-US government will come in Moscow. Something else will come in Moscow. Putin is not going to be there forever, but there will be some sort of nationalist force in Russia. It's not possible that there won't be. And in that case, Europe has to come to terms with it, you know, so Europe has to understand that there are only a few rational ways out of this. One, some negotiated settlements around Ukraine, negotiated security agreements with Russia, and then the Russian energy comes back to Europe. That's the only actual solution. The other is not a solution. You know who's going to pay for the expense of the liquefied natural gas? Who's going to pay for coal fired power plants? You know, once European skies again are covered with coal dust, how are Europeans going to enjoy that? You know, they haven't seen that in generations. So there's only one solution. Frankly, the solution is to negotiate an end to this war, going to give Russia some security guarantees and you allow Russian energy to come back to Europe. That's the only answer.

ZR: I would like to also examine the perception that we have about the debate about the war in Ukraine. For example, understanding the war which reveals a provocative role can create awareness of our mistakes and pay for a better foreign policy going forward. Instead, this approach is demonised and labelled as Russian propaganda, Putin talking points or even justifying the war. Why do you think this is the case and why is the media culture so afraid to look in the mirror?

VP: I mean, it's not just about media culture. It's the whole, in a sense, elite class. You know, I mean, one of the tragedies I would say about the Atlantic countries, Europe also, is that there is a great sense of self. A superior sense of self. Josep Borrell said it best of all. You know, he's apparently the European Union's man for the foreign desk. He talked about Europe as a garden and the rest of the world is a jungle. I mean, what an expression to use?! The rest of the world is a jungle. Europe is a garden. That's actually a great line because it represents what illustrates the hidden transcript of thinking of Europe's ruling class. That's how they think. They think of themselves as in the Garden. Superior. And the barbarians at the gates. Therefore the anti-immigrant kind of thing within and the attempt to stop immigrants from coming into the continent. Great racist understanding at the core of their thinking. The garden versus the jungle. I don't think that's an inappropriate thing that Borrell said. I think it is very appropriate. Because Borrell was actually speaking honestly about what he actually believes and what the ruling class actually believes. That contempt for the rest of the world is then mirrored by Christine Lagarde, the head of the European Central Bank, who just a few days ago said that, Well, you know, the reason that there's a problem in the economy is that there's wage price inflation. In other words, wages are going up all over the Eurozone. That the European Central Bank is going to increase the interest rates because there's a strengthening of wages. But, on what planet is she living on? Where are wages going up in Europe? You know, what is she talking about? You're in the middle of a cost of living crisis. The principal objective of the European Central Bank should be to create policies that deal with the cost of living crisis. The principal objective shouldn't be to, quote unquote, manage inflation. You

know, if you need to flood more money in there to allow people to survive the winter, you should do it. You should do it because you can take care of the fundamentals later. You know, you can create capital controls. You can do other things later if you need to. But right now, you have to help people get through a difficult winter. You know, energy supplies won't be coming in in the amounts that you need. You're going to have to manage energy prices. You know, there is a squeeze in the market. There's a contempt, you know, contempt for ordinary people in Europe, contempt for the nations of the world. That defines them. So I don't think there's any real, you know, crisis in the media or crisis in this or that European institution. I don't think so. I think what we need to understand is that these people have a contempt for the rest of the world. And that contempt is shown principally by the way in which European and US journalists are challenging heads of governments in other parts of the world, saying, Why aren't you supporting us on Russia? And people are saying, Look, we don't want to. I mean, that's all. We have a different view of the world. We see things differently than you. How dare you see things differently? How dare you? I mean, that is the condemned. Got to come to terms, got to have Europe decolonise itself. European politics needs to undertake a long process of decolonisation.

ZR: There was a lot of hope and optimism when Joe Biden became president that he would re-enter and renew negotiations with Iran and revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, that was agreed during the Obama administration, but scuttled under the Trump administration. Instead, now we are seeing Iran's heavy crackdown on its people and people are rising up against a theological and religious government. Should the United States and the West re-enter negotiations with Iran about the nuclear war deal while this is happening?

VP: Well, firstly, the Biden administration is a lame duck administration on many of these issues. Biden also campaigned for normalising relations with Cuba, which he has not done. He has maintained the 243 extra sanctions placed by Donald Trump. So, you know, Biden hasn't moved either on Iran or Cuba. I think Iran is an interesting question. Iran has a problem within the country. Because you can't manage to have a country where there's such a strong social policy run by the government. You know, if the country were conservative, allow other institutions to manage the conservatism. In my opinion, states should not manage social convention in the way in which Iran is doing or, you know, the United States with abortion policy and so on. Allow society to create different arbiters of social policy just so that you can have diversity in social life. Some people may want to wear the headscarf. Others may not want to wear it. You have to allow diversity in social life. You see, on the one side, you have Iran saying everybody, all women have to wear a headscarf. And then in France, they're saying nobody is allowed to wear a headscarf. In both cases, the government is intervening in a social dispute. I think governments need to step away. I mean, I'm not against privatisation, but on social disputes I'm in favour of other institutions in society taking the impact of that as it is. One of the most comforting and onerous contradictory institutions, is the family. And the family manages a lot of these things. Children are raised in families. In families, there would be disputes about modesty, about behaviour and so on. In all families all over the world

parents tell children, you can do this, you can't do this, this is what's allowed, and so on. The family is a major institution that in a sense exercises moral judgement on generations to come. Why should the state get involved in this? I'm very opposed to that as an idea. You know, I think that the United States should enter negotiations with Iran again, having unilaterally walked out of an already negotiated treaty. That's a separate issue. That should have happened. That should happen because it's only just that a treaty that was already negotiated in good faith and agreed upon by all parties should be returned to. I mean, I don't know why there should be renegotiations. The US should merely return to the treaty. They already negotiated and already agreed. That's a separate issue. On the question of what's happening in Iran, I would very much say that states should not enter into the adjudication of morality. I think that's a big error in the modern world. We have such robust institutions out there. As I said, the family may be one, but there are also political and social movements. There are civil organisations and so on that regulate social norms and morality. We don't need a morality police. And I think the Iranians, thanks to the major protests in Iran, I think the government is now having a debate about that, a dispute about that. I think there'll be rational and reasonable people in that government who will try to push this aside. Now, there is a debate on the streets whether this government is capable of learning the lesson and whether it therefore should go. I don't want to participate in that debate because I'm not an Iranian. I think that's up to the Iranian people to settle. I think it's an error for people outside to say, Oh, let the government come, let the government go. We don't have that kind of papal authority, you know, of excommunicating a government. That's for the people to decide. Now, I'm in full solidarity with the protesters against the idea that morality can be adjudicated. But on the other hand, that doesn't mean that I would stand alongside a YB 35- if it ever flies- bomber to bomb Tehran. I think that is a ludicrous approach.

ZR: To my last questions. Jana Zakarneh, a 16 year old Palestinian, was shot on the roof while she was playing with their cat in their pyjamas. She was shot by Israeli sniper multiple times in the face. In Israel, we saw Israeli forces and settlers who killed 78 Palestinian children in 2021. And in 2022 we are already somewhere between 30 to 50 children. When we compare this to Masha Amini, the person that died under Iranian police custody and sparked anti-government protests and worldwide recognition, we don't see any Western politician speak up for the Palestinians or let alone the people that get executed every year under the Saudi regime. Why is there no media campaign when it comes to our allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia? And there's a huge media and political campaign when it comes to our adversaries in Iran.

VP: Well, you answered your own question because the question is allies and adversaries. I mean, these are not principled reporters. These are political reporters. They're reporting things politically. You know, you can have a principled objection to militaries shooting innocent people. Right. That's a principled objection. I'm opposed to all militaries or police killing people. Right after Armini was killed in police custody in Iran, I went out in public and said: This is custodial killing. Totally against it. Whether it's in Iran or wherever. I don't

believe that if you have a principled objection to that kind of custodial killing, you should have it for everybody. Every government needs to introspect when people die in police custody like that. Now, you might die in police custody, no fault of the police. You had a heart attack whatever, but there would have been a situation of tension created that could have impacted somebody and so on. Well, the press is not principled like this. They are political. When there's an event, particularly in Palestine, routine, punctual killing of Palestinians in cold blood, very little is reported in that kind of way. And the protests by Palestinians are then reported, as you know, neo terrorist actions almost. Very disturbing how limited the media has become. We used to say that the media, particularly in the Western world, are stenographers. They're not journalists. And that's true.

ZR: Vijay Prahsad, historian, journalist, thank you so much for your time.

VP: It's my pleasure. Thanks a lot, Zain.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel and alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram and to donate to our year-end crowdfunding campaign so we can continue our independent journalism going forward in 2023. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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