



Vijay Prashad – The Collapse of NATO and Europe's Dilemma

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host Zain Raza. Before I start this interview, I would like to remind you to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. If you've been watching our channel, you know from our content that YouTube is owned by Google and Google has a long history of shadow banning independent and critical voices such as ours. If that day ever comes, we won't be able to reach you with our information, let alone letting you know via an announcement. Hence, we are asking all of our subscribers on YouTube to join these channels as a precautionary measure. You will find the links to all of these channels in the description of this video. Today, I'll be talking to historian and journalist Vijay Prashad. Vijay Prashad is also an author and has written more than 30 books, one of them being *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of US Power*. Vijay, welcome back to the show.

Vijay Prashad (VP): Great to be with you. Strange times, but great to be with you.

ZR: A lot has happened since our last conversation, Vijay, so it will be quite interesting as well as challenging as well today. Let's start with the exchange that took place in the Oval Office more than a week ago between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. They were supposed to sign an agreement on mineral rights, but ended up having a heated exchange in front of running cameras. I'm sure that most of our viewers have seen this exchange, so we will spare that part. In essence, Donald Trump warned Zelensky that peace was essential to avoid millions of deaths, the destruction of Ukraine and a third world war, but Zelensky insisted that peace and diplomacy with Russia was not possible unless the US provided security guarantees. A few days after the incident, the US decided to end all intelligence cooperation with Ukraine, as well as freeze all military aid to Ukraine, including delivery of Patriot air defense systems, missiles and military vehicles, and made it clear that it would only resume once Ukraine was ready for peace. The actions of

Trump and the US not only drew widespread criticism from European NATO members, but also triggered a wave of announcements by European governments such as Germany to increase military spending and reaffirm their support for Ukraine. Can you give us your assessment of the significance of the exchange between Trump and Zelensky and what this means for the long-standing transatlantic relationship between the US and Europe?

VP: Well, you know, it was a very interesting event and events are interesting because you can't over read an event. It's not because of that exchange that things have changed. Things were already changing. There was a process in motion. Mr. Trump had made it very clear during his election campaign that he was not going to tolerate this war in Ukraine. He didn't see the benefit to the United States, maybe there was a benefit to the Europeans, but he just didn't see it. And his approach in this second term in office is actually guided less by neoconservative idealism which was represented in his first term by John Bolton who was basically by his side all the time. Bolton believes that you can actually use US power to change the world, to make the world different. I don't know about better but different; control people and so on. That's an idealist approach to foreign policy. This run through in his presidency, he has actually brought in a number of conservative realists, including people who say: Well, you know, if the Iranians get a nuclear bomb, it doesn't really impact the United States because they would never dare to use it against the US. It's a correct realist assessment. His realist guy, who's going to run his Asia policy and in fact is going to run a lot of his international policy, Elbridge Colby, the grandson of William Colby, used to be the head of the CIA. Elbridge Colby told the Senate committee in his confirmation hearings, that, look, the United States shouldn't spend so much on Taiwan, that maybe Japan needs to ramp up its military spending in order to defend East Asia if there's any aggression. Because you know, in fact, China is never going to really attack the United States militarily. I mean this is a realist approach. Similarly, the people running Ukraine policy believe that Russia is not a threat to the United States. It's not really powerful enough to be a threat to the United States. Therefore, why should the United States treat Ukraine as some wall to defend against Russian expansionism? The Russians aren't interested in driving their tanks into Poland or Germany or France or, you know, of course, not to the UK, who wants the UK?! It's not on the table. So what is the war about? And Trump has interestingly said: Look, this is not a prestige issue for us in the United States. We don't care about winning, losing. We're going to cut a deal, get out of this. It's too expensive. There are no US interests at stake. Now, for the Europeans – actually, they know, I mean, Friedrich Merz, the new chancellor of Germany, is not a stupid man, okay?! He knows that Vladimir Putin isn't planning to send tanks into Berlin. The Soviets did that already, that was to liberate Germany from the Nazis. Very unlikely that they're going to send Russian tanks now into... Friedrich Merz knows that. For the Europeans, Ukraine has become a prestige issue, much more than a security question. They cannot afford to lose. Trump says: I don't care about the prestige. The United States is the greatest country in the world. We can destroy anybody. We don't have any problems here. We are not embarrassed by this. We're going to cut a deal, save lives. And when Trump jumped on Zelensky and said: You are risking World War III, in fact, there was truth to that because last year, Joe Biden, former president of the US, people may have forgotten about his existence because Trump makes so much noise in such a short period, you sort of forget that it's only

been six, seven weeks or so, anyway, Biden last year change the nuclear doctrine of the United States saying that the United States is quite capable of having a nuclear exchange with two countries, in other words, China and Russia. And anyway, Trump has signed the Iron Dome executive order which allows the US's long-standing doctrine of a force to remain in place; that if the US feels threatened they are willing to fire a nuclear weapon against an adversary. That is a violation of the no first strike policy. They have a counterforce strategy. If they feel threatened, they'll fire. So Trump turns to Zelensky: Are you nuts? You're risking World War III, between say the United States and Russia, that's a correct assessment. I mean, in a sense, it's between the United States saying: Look, we don't have any real interests at stake here. We can work this out and the Europeans thinking: Oh my God, we're going to look like amateurs. I mean, nobody's going to respect Macron and Starmer and Mark Rutte – I mean, who respects him anyway. But these people have this feeling that it's a prestige issue. This is not a security issue. I mean, these people are intelligent. They're not stupid.

ZR: [00:07:39] Let's take a closer look at the European response. After the incident at the White House, Europe sided with Zelensky in Ukraine, strongly condemning the withdrawal of US support. They not only reaffirmed the military support for Ukraine, but also showed willingness to pursue diplomatic initiatives. On the diplomatic level, differences are beginning to merge on how to end the war, if at all. European leaders recently met in London where both French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer signaled their willingness to send troops to Ukraine as peacekeepers if any peace deal is to materialize. Macron even proposed extending France's nuclear umbrella to its European allies. Germany, on the other hand, which is still being led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz until a new government is formed, is reluctant to deploy European troops on a peacekeeping mission, as he believes discussing this at this time would be a premature move. How do you assess Europe's new approach of at least considering the idea of diplomacy? Do you think that they can play a constructive role at the negotiating table and help secure peace in Ukraine?

VP: Well, let's be frank for a little bit. Europe simply doesn't have the military ability to go to a battle with something like a country like Russia without the United States. Actually, this whole episode, since Vice President J.D. Vance's comments at the Munich Security Conference, this whole episode, demonstrates, in a sense, Europe's utter subordination to the United States. I mean, there is really no NATO. NATO is being shown in this period as effectively a shell company owned by the United States. If the US is not in the game, the Europeans can't act. There was a study done that showed that Germany has basically just a few days of fighting ability against an adversary like the Russians. If they had to fight the Ukraine war, just a few days. France doesn't even have that. I mean, they have a nuclear umbrella, but they don't have the conventional ability. I mean, which working class German, precarious German is going to go and fight in Ukraine?! You know who in Britain and France? They are not going to fight there. I mean it's a curious class substitution that's happening. The Ukrainian middle class is fleeing as refugees to Western Europe and now they are expecting working-class Western Europeans to go and fight their battle. This is a class substitution that's taking place. No Ukrainian middle class person wants to go and fight

there. And I don't think any, I'm speaking very frankly and bluntly with you, I doubt that young German people are saying: Hey, let's go and fight a happy-go-lucky war in the ditches of Ukraine. They don't want to do this. This is highly unpopular. The majorities in countries like Germany want the war to end. That's why I say this has become for Europe a prestige issue. Why? A) there is really no security challenge. What the Russians have been asking for since, in fact, around 2007 is some security understanding with NATO. They don't want NATO advancement. You know, it is aggressive for NATO to go right up to the Russian border in Ukraine and Georgia. It's one thing in the Baltic States, okay? It's another thing – I mean, there's the Kaliningrad Oblast, which borders Poland. It's a small strip on the Baltic Sea. It's one thing for those countries to border these parts of Russia. But, you know, if you look at a map, Ukraine and Georgia, it's a large border with Russia. They don't want NATO sitting there. They don't want intermediate missiles with nuclear warheads sitting on their border. That's what they don't want. The Russians aren't saying we want to come in and take all of Eastern Europe. There's no ambition. So there's no security challenge. OK, firstly. Everybody knows that. Yes, you're right. Merz is not the Chancellor already, but he seems to be already making statements as if he is. He is a clever guy. I think he's more intelligent than Olaf Scholz. You know, if anybody can go toe to toe with Angela Merkel, they must be pretty clever. Okay? And he went toe to toe with her for a very long time and was defeated because Merkel is something else. But anyway, you know, they know there's no security challenge.

Secondly, their populations want the war to end. So a democratic question is: Let's listen to people and end the war. Thirdly, this war is expensive and increasing military spending is nuts. In Britain, Rachel Reeves has said they're going to cut welfare. But why? Because she said we have to make the tough choices. Zain, every time they say we have to make the tough choices and whether you say this in English, French, German, Italian, Polish, whatever language, they are lying to you. It's not a tough choice. It's an easy choice. Because when they say we've got to make the tough choices, they make the same choice, which is let's screw the poor to increase the military spending. So that's also going to be hurtful for the ... Four reasons why the war should end now for most of Europe: You know, there's no security challenge, the people don't want it, the inflation has to be brought down because this is ridiculous – I mean, it's just painful for the population – and the fourth reason is, well, you don't have the US umbrella anymore. They've withdrawn it. And what's the point of a French nuclear umbrella? Is France really willing to go into a nuclear war with Russia? I don't think so. They don't have the capacity. Even France lives under the US nuclear umbrella; fourth reason, it's gone. Sue for peace, go to the table, sit down there and end this. I mean, my feeling is Ukraine has to live next to Russia. It just can't move. We've discussed this before. It has to live next to Russia. Make a deal. I put on the table, why don't the countries that border Russia on this side, you know, whether it's the three Baltic states, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, bring in Ukraine, bring in Georgia, go all the way out to Azerbaijan, bring that country in, all of them called for an international conference of peace and security for the border. In 1975, there was something called the Helsinki Dialog, which started in Helsinki and Iceland. By the way, Iceland is a NATO member, no military. Okay, that's interesting. But US bases, because they are entirely subordinate and reliant on the United States. This is an empty ship, this NATO thing. You can say: Oh, we don't have a military. Wait a minute, you are subordinated

to the US. That fourth lack now is important. So I would say, these countries call for a conference, you create a new kind of dialog, call it what you will, the Baltic dialog, the Kiev dialog, whatever. Sit down with a Russian stock talking piece. You want an external broker? Bring in somebody other than the United States and the European Union. Why? Because the European Union has completely marginalized itself. You know, Ursula von der Leyen has become a war minister. The former Prime Minister of what, Estonia, who's now the head of the foreign department, which she has no mandate, is a war minister. Bring in other people, bring in Brazil, bring in China, maybe India to sit and broker an agreement between these countries. Why not? Think outside the box. You don't need the Europeans and the Americans to broker this peace. Maybe Mr. Zelensky needs to get out of the rut of thinking that Ukraine is a Western European country and remember that Ukraine is really, it's kind of slipping further and further into Asia, and away from Europe.

ZR: You talk about this being a prestige issue, but let me challenge you on that. Militarization is on the rise and is the agenda throughout Europe. Under the name ReArm Europe, EU Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen has proposed a five-point plan that could mobilize around 800 billion euros for the military. In Germany, Friedrich Merz, the leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union, which we've been talking about, who also won the recent election with 28.6 % and is expected to become Chancellor, also presented a plan this week for a 500 billion Euro special fund to promote and invest in infrastructure and military spending. The media and the political establishment are arguing, as opposed to what you're saying, that Russian President Putin intends to expand his imperialist ambitions, and after Ukraine, has set its sights on Poland and the Baltic states. The German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock recently reinforced this view in a press statement, from which I would like to quote a few passages. Quote, "A ruthless time in which we have to defend the rules-based international order and the strength of the law more than ever against the might of the strong. For otherwise no free country with more powerful neighbors will ever sleep well at night again". And she further claimed, quote, "If we fail to achieve this, Putin's forces might soon be in the Baltic region or even directly on the doorstep of our Polish neighbors. We cannot ignore this reality any longer", unquote.

I know you have addressed that Putin does not have any imperialist ambitions. However, when I talk to even normal people on the street that voted for the CDU or voted for the SPD or even for the Greens, they tell me that they're afraid of a Russian threat. I'm not saying that this is the majority opinion, but a large section of the German population still believes in this mainstream opinion. So why do you think Russia does not have imperialist ambitions? Does it even have the capability to come to Germany and Poland and the Baltic states and take them over?

VP: Firstly, why would Russia do that? I mean, you know, experience has shown us in the last, say, 50 odd years that most countries simply do not have the capacity to hold a foreign territory for very long. Russia discovered that in Afghanistan, but much more severely, NATO discovered that in Afghanistan. That was a NATO war. NATO had to withdraw, flee, in fact. The United States discovered that in Iraq, it's very hard to hold a foreign territory.

Why? Because you don't any longer have two aspects that were there in the era of colonialism. One, you don't have a middle class or an elite that is willing to leave their homeland and go and work as imperial administrators for the rest of their life. That's what we saw in South Asia and Africa, minor British royalties were sent off to go and live in the colonies for their life and they did that. And secondly, in places like, you know, Afghanistan or Iraq, you no longer have a population that believes, okay, we live under colonial rule, simply unacceptable for people these days, they will fight to be independent, to be free. Look at the Palestinians, still now fighting. This is a new consciousness. On the one side an emergence of a modern middle class that doesn't want to join the military, doesn't want to go and fight, let alone go and spend their lives administering the town of Rostock on the Baltic Sea. Which Russian middle class person wants to go out there and carry a gun and patrol Rostock? It's an absurd idea. This is off the cards. What Russia wants to hold in Ukraine isn't Kyiv. They are not seeking to take Kyiv. They want the Russian speaking parts, which are in the Donbas region. They are not seeking to go beyond that. It shows you that they don't have a colonial ambition. Why haven't they flattened Kyiv? It's a question. The Israelis flattened all of Gaza. The United States flattened Ramadi, flattened Fallujah, flattened large parts of Baghdad. The Russians haven't flattened Kyiv. They haven't flattened Odessa. They haven't just wiped out the city center. In fact, the airport still functions in Kyiv. That's where Zelinsky flies out of. What airport was there in Gaza? Baghdad airport was destroyed. But the Russians aren't. They don't have colonial – I just don't see it on the one side.

Secondly, let's talk about the Baltic states. The Baltic states are tiny. In fact, it would take a day for Russian motorized forces to just enter and take Estonia and Latvia, it would take nothing for them. In fact, the provocation is not on the Russian side. It's on the German side. Germany is building a military base in Lithuania for 5,000 or plus German soldiers. Is that actually necessary? The new German naval base in Rostock, which was inaugurated recently by Pistorius just a few months ago in 2024, was that really necessary? I mean, the Germans directly said we are building a new base so we can confront the Russian Baltic Fleet in Kaliningrad. Is that actually what...? The Germans are saying this. The Russians are not saying that we have a fleet in Kaliningrad which is going to come and attack Germany. No, they are not saying that. They have a Baltic Sea fleet. They've had it for what? a hundred years really. But the Germans are directly saying, you know, Madame Baerbock who's supposed to be a believer in feminist foreign policy is directly saying that we are going to have a new fleet on the Baltic Sea which will confront the Russians. That is aggressive language. I mean, the Russians aren't building a giant base in Estonia, which they could. You know, they could walk in and take it. I don't think they have those ambitions. I think this is a misreading of the Russian situation. The Russians have certain ambitions, certain anxieties. They've articulated them. Let's take them at their word, just as I would take the Germans at their word. You know, when they say we are going to confront the Russians, we'll go ahead. Go ahead. You're going to actually impoverish your country. It's very interesting. Mr. Merz has said: We're going to break the debt brake and we're going to go ahead with – break the debt brake. Just let's pause for a minute and just reflect on 20 years of history. When Yanis Varoufakis as the Greek finance minister came to the Germans and the European Central Bank and said: Look, we are having a serious crisis in Greece we're going to have to increase

deficit spending because we have to salvage the situation, we can't pay you guys back, the Germans turned to them and said: No, you don't get to do this. This is a rule. So why is it that what's good for the goose is not what's good for the gander? When you want to break the debt brake, you go ahead and do it. Secondly, in Germany, die Linke, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, these people have been saying for a long time: Hey, let's get rid of the debt brake in order to provide relief to the German people because of the Ukraine inflation. And you know, my God, Olaf Scholz said: No, we can't touch the debt brake. Yes, of course, we did that special 100 billion Euro fund, but we can't do the debt brake. And now, let's break the debt brake; for what? Not to feed German people, not to help the German people with their fuel bills. No, but to build more Leopard tanks. You can build the best military, who's going to sit inside the tanks? This is my question to young Germans. You know, the young Germans I meet roaming around the streets of Germany with tattoos and piercings. Are you gonna get into a tank and spend, you know, a hot day sweating in there without access to your phone, looking at your TikTok? I mean, once a society middle classes, people don't want to join the military. They don't want to go to war. They don't want to lose limbs. It's a structural issue. I'm not making a personal remark about this or that person. So the Europeans can say whatever they want, the Germans, but they are not being honest with themselves. That's the real issue. They are faking this Russian threat, which is not a threat. And at the same time, they're not being honest with their population saying: Sorry, guys, you're going to have to stop. We're making the hard choices. We're going to continue prolonging a useless war, which has no good ending, useless war, and you're gonna just go and starve, and German trains are going to deteriorate, more car factories are going to leave. We don't have enough energy to run our industrial plant, the rich will get rich because they'll move their factories to China or to Malaysia, wherever. But sorry, ordinary Germans, your life is going to stink. And the only way you're going to be able to survive is if you go to the local recruitment center and say: Okay, I'm going to take my piercings off, put my phone aside, I'm going to sit in a Leopard tank basically just to feed myself. Welcome; welcome to the new period.

ZR: You talk about the debt brake, that was actually going to be my next question. It's not just in Germany, but also we're seeing the same thing happening on the European level. For example, von der Leyen's proposal includes number one, relaxing the rules on the amount of deficits that European governments can run, which is currently 3% of GDP. Secondly, a 150 billion Euro loan program. Thirdly, use of cohesion funds that was initially designed for regional development of weaker countries. And four loans from the European Investment Bank and the private sector. Germany's debt brake, how the government is trying to circumvent that, you already mentioned, but let me go a little bit more into the details. They're creating a special military fund which will not be part of the household budget and therefore will not follow the rules of the debt brake. And this special military fund cannot be reviewed by the parliament and the taxpayer. Even though the taxpayer will be taken on this credit and will have to foot the bill in the future.

Can you talk about why we were hearing this mantra of fiscal discipline throughout the 2010s when it came to social spending, for example, tackling unemployment, housing shortages,

education, health care, but when it comes to militarization, this fiscal discipline rule completely falls out of the window?

VP: What do you want me to say? I don't know if you read von der Leyen's letter, it's an incredibly crazy letter. It opens with the line: A new era is upon us. Really? What is the new era? I don't get it. Is the new era that Papa USA is gone and now the kids have to basically figure out what they're going to do for the first time since maybe 1941? When the United States came into the Second World War and the Lend Lease Program provided material aid and then my grandfather came to Italy from India and my grand uncles came to Spain. They were killed on the way to Spain, torpedoed. Their ship was torpedoed. Maybe your relatives came as well to fight for every inch of European soil? Why were Indians fighting to save Europe from fascism? Because we were under colonial rule. And that's why we were fighting European battles. So many people from the colonies, from West Africa, from Asia came to fight. My father was out there in the Burmese area fighting. The whole thing is insane. This whole thing is insane; this idea that a new era is upon us. Nobody is threatening you. It's very interesting. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, there was no border dispute immediately. All these old SSRs, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, Ukraine SSR, Belarus SSR, they all formed independent countries. There was no immediate dispute. Why? Russia was weak. Yeltsin was completely beholden to the West. In fact, the West helped him win in 1996. He lost the election to the communists. They falsified that election; a very well documented situation. Yeltsin was completely weak. Yeltsin's protégé was a young Vladimir Putin, also weak in his first term. Then in 2007, he comes to Munich, gives a speech, says, there's no single master on the planet. Why? Because Russia, suddenly, its economy increases tenfold. It starts to rebuild its military and so on. And then Russia says: Hey, listen, what happened when the Soviet Union collapsed. What happened with the border with Georgia? Why are there so many Russian speakers on that side who want to be part of Russia? Ukraine, you know, why did we give up Crimea? That's crazy. I mean, this all starts after Russia effectively stops being as weak as it was between 1991 and about 2005, 200., the Russians realized, now we are not weak anymore, we have to really question what happened in 1991. Why did NATO advance between 1991? Baltic states joining NATO? What is this? What happened? How can Georgia, Ukraine join NATO? It took a long time for the Russians to come to this realization. But this realization is a realization of what are the borders of Russia. This is about Russia's security and Russian borders. This isn't about Germany. This isn't about France. Why is it about Ukraine? Because there's a section of Ukraine where there are Russian speakers and the government after 2014 started discriminating against them, made speaking Russian illegal, didn't allow Russian signs and so on up in public places. So the Russian population turns to Russia for assistance and help. And they were confronting what they considered to be a fascist force attacking them, coming in and attacking them in the eastern part of Ukraine. That's the reason why they voted to join Russia. I mean, I don't even care if that vote itself was legal or illegal. The question is, this is about the 1991 settlement. I mean, people may not remember this, but when the United Nations was being formed, Stalin, in his meetings with Roosevelt and Churchill, said that, look, the USSR can't just have one at the UN because we are a union of republics. All the republics should be represented in the United Nations and you know Roosevelt and Churchill said: No, no, no, that's not possible.

You can't have Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, you know the Mongolian SSR and so on – that's not... Azerbaijan, Armenia. No, no, they have a vote at the UN. But they agreed, we'll allow Belarus or at the time, Belorussia and Ukraine to have votes in the UN. That was a deal struck between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill to have Ukraine be – but Ukraine was a part of the USSR. That was just a deal, you know, and the borders of Ukraine were drawn so that the mining areas were in the same SSR as the industrial belt. I mean, that is why that eastern section is part of Ukraine. It hasn't been part of Ukraine since the 11th, 12th, 10th century or anything like that. It was a construction of the Soviet Union. So, this is what Russia is worried about; not Berlin, not Gdansk or you know whatever, they're not thinking about Brussels or driving tanks to Madrid. I don't think they care. I think they care about the Russian speakers who are along the borders of Russia and they care about their security. That's the issue on the table. You know if the Russians are not going to permit that part of Ukraine to return to Ukraine. I think that you have to be realistic. I don't think the Russians are going to permit Crimea to return to Ukraine. I think that you're just going to have to be realistic about it. But the rest of Ukraine, I don't think they have any agenda for it. In fact, they haven't even, as I said, tried to invade the rest. They just came in strategically from the top, I think, to take land which they would then swap out and say: Well, you can have this back, but we're keeping this. I just don't feel like the Europeans are being realistic and practical about Russian war aims.

ZR: Let us move to Israel and Palestine. Let me recap some of the latest developments since President Donald Trump assumed office. On January 19th, a ceasefire agreement was reached between Israel and Hamas mediated by the United States and Qatar, concluding a 15-month war that resulted in the killing of at least 48,000 Palestinian civilians and injuring another 100,000. Two days after the Gaza ceasefire Israel launched Operation Iron Wall in the West Bank to target what they call Palestinian militants. This operation so far has displaced around 40,000 Palestinian civilians and killed at least 40. Now, the Gaza ceasefire appears to be falling apart as Hamas is unwilling to release all the Israeli hostages before the second phase of the agreement begins, which would include a permanent ceasefire, and Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Last Sunday, Israel blocked the entry of all humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and today US President Donald Trump issued a final warning to Hamas to release all Israeli prisoners held in Gaza.

During the ceasefire, Donald Trump proposed a controversial plan for the Gaza Strip, aiming to transform the territory into a luxury resort which will be under US control. This plan involves relocating, or better said ethnically cleansing, approximately 2 million Palestinian residents to neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan. In response, Arab nations led by Egypt have countered with their own proposal known as Gaza 2030. The plan focuses on allowing Palestinians to remain in Gaza and aims to rebuild the territory by removing debris, establishing temporary housing and eventually transforming it into a Riviera of the Middle East. The Arab League endorsed Egypt's plan, signaling a unified stance against the US proposal. What do you make of the Egyptian or the US plan? Can one lead to long-term peace and security between Israel and the Palestinians? And secondly, do you think a rift or shift that we are currently seeing in the transatlantic relationship due to Ukraine is also taking

place between the United States and its Arab allies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, due to the question on the future of Palestine?

VP: Well, let's start here, which is that in late January, there was an enormous intelligence failure by the Israelis, an enormous catastrophic intelligence failure. I mean, there's something remarkable about the organization of the Palestinians in Gaza, because on the 27th of January, tens of thousands of Palestinians, you know, families marched northward, up to and into Gaza City. The whole thing was filmed with drones. There were young men climbing up cell towers and flying Palestinian flags, drones filming them. I mean the whole thing was a public relations spectacle for the Palestinians. So what did the Palestinians accomplish on the 27th of January? They basically reversed the whole genocide. Because they said: We're going back to our homes. And they did. I mean, the Israelis tried to remove Palestinians from there. The only way you could actually fulfill Trump's plan is if the Israelis had prevented the Palestinians going back home. Because you want to move them back and bulldoze everything and create the Gaza Riviera or the Trump International Hotel, you're going to have to do another genocide. So this actually invalidated Trump's plan. Trump's plan is useless because the Palestinians aren't going to move unless they're all killed again. So this is not going to happen. In fact, this plan shouldn't even be talked about because it was defeated by the Palestinians on the 27th of January. It's not relevant anymore. Gone. Now the Arab plan or the Egypt plan, the Cairo plan, okay; but you can't impose a plan on the Palestinians. They have to be at the table. I mean this is their home we're talking about. There's a UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) project with an Italian university and they propose some sort of strange model; some designers in Italy were thinking how we should design Gaza. One of the interesting things about the Palestinians in Gaza is they're highly professional people. If we just understand Hamas, they are highly professional. They built all these deep tunnels with ventilation systems. They have lots of engineers and architects. Let's talk to them. You know, what do you want to build in your own country? Why are we imposing plans on them? Let's actually not go to the plans, let's talk about the real issue. Israel destroyed all of this. Israel should pay for its reconstruction. There should be pressure right now by sensitive people around the world that Israel needs to put five billion dollars into a fund to reconstruct Gaza on the top and they don't get a say on how it's used; in Gaza, they want to do this, they can do this. It's up to them. Israel conducted a war crime, genocide. They need to pay up for it. In fact, Germany paid money to Israel after 1948 as compensation for the holocaust. Obviously never enough but Germany paid up. Israel needs to pay up. This was a genocide. They need to pay somebody, they need to pay the Palestinians. I think the real issue isn't what should be the plan – Palestinians are back in Gaza city, it's no question of bulldozing them out of there, they're going to sit there. You'd have to kill all of them okay? They know what death is like, they saw it next to them. They're not moving. So the question is: Who's going to pay for it? I would like to see the United States and Israel be forced by the international community. I would like to see US assets seized in Saudi Arabia and used to pay for – I'd like to see Israeli assets seized in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia pretends to be a great friend. I'd like to see Israeli assets in Turkey seized and turned over to the reconstruction of Palestine. Isn't that what the Europeans did to Russian assets? They just seized Russian assets. The British seized Venezuelan gold and just

said sorry you're not getting it anymore. I'd like to see Saudi Arabia, Turkey, seize US and Israeli assets, turn it over for the reconstruction of Gaza, and let the Palestinians come up with a plan. I've looked at the plans that have come from Al-Awda the hospital to rebuild, Al-Awda hospital, Al-Awda vocational school, there's lots of plans that the Palestinians are generating. I have them with me. I've looked at them. They look great. Why should we bother with a plan coming from elsewhere when the Palestinians know what they want to do? They want to build a vocational school so they can train people to be carpenters and plumbers and so that they can rebuild the housing. It's a very clever idea. One of the first things Al-Awda wants to do is to build a vocational school. Where's the money going to come from? Seize the Israeli assets.

ZR: To my last question, during the entire phase of the hostage release that happened in the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, I followed the German media quite closely. When it came to Israeli hostages, the media took a strong qualitative approach, in my opinion, and correctly so by emphasizing the emotions and suffering of the hostages, their families and so on and so forth. However, when it came to the release of hundreds of Palestinians, they were referred to as prisoners instead of hostages or captives, even though they included hundreds of women and children. We did not observe such a strong qualitative coverage focusing on the treatment and suffering of these people during detention as well as the pain and grief of their families. Sometimes there was only a short mention that there were women and children among them but the focus was mainly on men that the media claimed included many that were convicted of terrorism. Can you comment on the discrepancy in reporting on Israeli hostages and Palestinian captives. And can you shed some light on Palestinian prisoners, how they arrived in Israeli detention centers?

VP: Well, firstly, most Palestinian prisoners were picked up having done nothing, no crime. They were not arrested, they were not brought before a civilian court. They were picked up and held under administrative detention in terrible conditions. I mean, what you just mentioned is correct. But what I would like to say is that when you looked at the pictures of Khalida Jarrar when she was being arrested and then the picture of her when she was released, her health deteriorated dramatically. I mean, she was in a cell. She had sent a letter out with a lawyer. She couldn't breathe there. She'd have to lie. She found a small place, a little crack in the cell where she could feel air. She would lie down and put her nose there so she could breathe because the air was so stale in the cell. They looked aged. They looked broken. They had lost a lot of weight. On the other side, the Israeli hostages, prisoners being released, kissing their Hamas captors, hugging them, they all looked in perfectly good shape. Obviously, some had died. I mean, they were all under attack sitting in these deep tunnels and also they were in deep tunnels for a very long time. I don't believe in the philosophy of taking a civilian prisoner, of course, but some of them were military people, they were not civilians. The women, for instance, who I saw released, I watched the whole release, they were military people. They were combatants of war. They seemed well treated. Palestinians, not so. I mean, it would be interesting for the International Red Cross to do a study on this, not just go and monitor and so on, but to do a study, to check the medical records of, say, Khalida Jarrar just before she went into prison, and then look at her medical file when she came out. Do the

same with these with the Israelis. Because I mean surely the Israeli military officers have medical records and surely they can do a test and I think an International Red Cross, Red Crescent Society study, impartial study, of this would be very interesting. I don't have the means to do it, you don't have the means to do it, but the ICRC could actually request it. Now Israel has a policy of rejecting any of these kinds of studies; they know what the answer is going to be. They would reject it outright, but it would still be interesting for the Red Cross to raise this question, put it on the table and let's see where it goes. But I think it's a sad day for the Western media because they were able to humanize the Israelis, they couldn't humanize the Palestinians. It's what I consider, Zain, to be the international division of humanity. They see Israelis as Europeans. Israel weirdly performs in Eurovision, performs in the European League football. It's an Asian country. Why is it in Eurovision? But they see Israelis as Europeans, as one of them, as human, and they don't see Palestinians as humans. They see Palestinians as savages. This is the international division of humanity, and it was on display right through this issue of the hostage prisoner question. I'm very glad you brought this up because this is something I feel very, very much about. And again, anybody from the Red Cross has chanced upon this conversation, I very much hope the Red Cross will take this suggestion seriously.

ZR: Vijay Prashad, author and historian, thank you so much for your time today.

VP: Thanks a lot, take care of yourself.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. If you watched this video until the very end, please just take a few more minutes to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram, and a podcast called Podbean. YouTube, which is owned by Google, can shadow ban and censor us at any time. And if that day ever comes, we won't be able to reach you with our information, let alone with an announcement. You will find the links to all of these alternative platforms in the description of this video. I thank you for your support and for tuning in. I'm your host, Zain Raza, and see you next time.

END

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