



## Trump's 'Grand Protection Racket'. w/ John Helmer

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**Dimitri Lascaris (DL):** Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Kalamata, Greece for Reason2Resist on April 24th, 2025. When Donald Trump returned to the White House in January, he flamboyantly embarked upon an initiative to stop the fighting in Ukraine. In our coverage of Trump's efforts to end the Ukraine war, we were skeptical from the outset. And as we've explained many times on Reason2Resist, our skepticism was based on foreign policy record of Trump's first administration. You are after all what your record says you are, and Donald Trump's record says that he is a warmonger. Nonetheless, when Trump's second administration began, we maintained an open mind. We did so because it was quite refreshing after four years of reckless militarism by the Biden administration to hear a US president finally talk about peace and diplomacy, and also because it wasn't vitally important that the Ukraine war be ended on terms that were sustainable. Indeed, there has never been a moment in my lifetime, I believe, when the threat of nuclear war was as elevated as it has been since NATO provoked this proxy war in Ukraine.

In the early stages of Trump's second administration, there were some promising signs, such as direct dialog between the Russian and US governments and the acknowledgement by Trump's new Secretary of State Marco Rubio that the age of multipolarity had arrived. But then things started to unravel. About two months into the second Trump administration, we came to a firm conclusion that the administration had no real interest in a durable peace in Ukraine, and not just in Ukraine and not just in the Indo-Pacific region, and certainly not in West Asia. The reasons for which we came into that conclusion included the resumption of Israel's obliteration of Gaza using bombs supplied by the Trump administration, Trump's illegal, barbaric, and ongoing attacks on Yemen and Trump's brazen threats to bomb Iran. But it wasn't only in West Asia that Trump revealed his true colors. We also saw distinct signs of a neocon agenda in Trump's dealings with the Russian Federation. For all of its talk of peace in Ukraine, the Trump administration continued to arm Ukraine and to provide Ukraine's military with battlefield intelligence. It continued to do so despite the repeated proclamations of the Ukrainian autocrat, Volodymyr Zelensky, that he would make none of the concessions demanded by Russia as a condition of ending the war.

Yesterday, Trump's so-called peace initiative in Ukraine suffered a major setback. Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff, Trump's real estate golfing buddy termed globetrotting diplomat, pulled out at the last minute from peace talks with Ukraine and European leaders that were scheduled to take place in London, England. The administration then sent J.D. Vance out to tell the press what the Trump administration wanted from the negotiations with Ukraine, Russia, and the Europeans. And here's what Mr. Vance had to say.

**J.D. Vance:** We've issued a very explicit proposal to both the Russians and the Ukrainians, and it's time for them to either say yes, or for the United States to walk away from this process. We have engaged in an extraordinary amount of diplomacy, of on-the-ground work. We've really tried to understand things from the perspective of both the Ukrainians and the Russians. What do Ukrainians care the most about? What do the Russians care the most about? And I think that we've put together a very fair proposal. We're going to see if the Europeans, the Russians, and the Ukrainians are ultimately able to get this thing over the finish line. Again, I feel pretty optimistic about it. I think everybody has been negotiating in good faith, but it's now time, I think, to take, if not the final step, one of the final steps, which is, at a broad level, the parties saying, we're going to stop the killing, we're gonna freeze the territorial lines at some level, close to where they are today, and we're actually gonna put in place... The kind of long-term diplomatic settlement that hopefully will lead to long-term peace. The Ukrainians and the Russians are both going to have to give up some of the territory they currently own. There's going to be some territorial swaps. So I wouldn't say the exact lines, but we want the killing to stop. And the only way to really stop the killing is for the armies to both put down their weapons, to freeze this thing, and to get on with the business of actually building a better Russia and a better Ukraine. We're certainly invested in that effort. We hope the Russians and Ukrainians will meet us halfway.

**DL:** According to the Western corporate media, which remains irrationally committed to this proxy war, the reason for the rupture between the US and its European allies was first Zelensky's refusal to recognize Russian sovereignty over Crimea and second, the European refusal to lift any sanctions on the Russian Federation. Western media reported that these two points were key parts of a peace plan formulated by the Trump administration. But for those of us who follow Russia's statements carefully, that peace plan, as we understand it, was doomed to failure. The terms of that plan, even if all of them had been accepted by Ukraine and Western European governments, fell far short of Russia's core consistent demands. Russia, amongst other things, has stated repeatedly in over many months that it has no interest in freezing the conflict, as J.D. Vance urged them to do.

Now here to discuss all of this with me is John Helmer. John Helmer is the longest-serving foreign correspondent in Russia and the only Western journalist to direct his own bureau independent of national or commercial ties. Born and educated in Australia, then at Harvard University, John has also been a professor of political science, sociology and journalism and an advisor to governments including those in Greece and Australia. He has also published several books on military and political topics. His latest book is titled *Long Live Novichok*:

*The British Poison Which Fooled the World.* Thanks so much for coming back to Reason2Resist, John.

**John Helmer (JH):** Thank you for having me, Dimitri. I'm happy to be back.

**DL:** So John, let's start by talking about the Trump peace plan as we understand it and which Zelensky and Western European powers appear to have rejected. What do you understand the core terms of that plan to have been? And in your opinion was there a realistic prospect of Russia accepting them, if US allies had agreed to them?

**JH:** It's difficult to answer that question, Dimitri, because the London meeting that's just been canceled – it was canceled yesterday – followed up a series of meetings in Paris last Thursday, in which the Ukrainian delegation was led by Andriy Jermak, the alter ego of Mr. Zelensky in Kiev. And there were British, French, and German senior officials attending, plus the Americans. And the terms that have leaked out were apparently agreed – that is to say the US side at stage, Rubio and Witkoff, said that there'd been agreement on the outlines of a deal. Now Rubio then went to Le Bourget airport on his way out of France and said last Thursday pretty much what you've just shown Vance as having said at a New Delhi airport as his plane was leaving India. Rubio repeated five times in five minutes – not a very smart guy, Rubio, but he was clear what the script was: either the both sides agree to the terms we've laid out on the table, or we pack up and leave. The question then remains not only the question you asked me, what are the terms on the table that the US has put there but where the US goes, where it goes as Rubio said it would go, what's its default position as Vance has just said.

Now on the one hand we could say and you said it very well, Dimitri, that there were terms in the US plan which they already knew – and they certainly were told last Thursday – were unacceptable to the Ukrainian side and unacceptable to the Russian side. As you said, any attempt to freeze an armistice, freezing troops in place that doesn't allow the full incorporation of the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk regions, not to mention Crimea. Anything like that has been repeatedly rejected by the Russian side, whether it's President Putin himself or Foreign Minister Lavrov or others. That's the first thing. So a freeze on the lines in place was never acceptable to the Russian side. Equally, on the Ukrainian side, no concession of Crimea, much leaked by Mr. Witkoff, is unacceptable to the Ukrainian's side. So what do we have when the US insists on positions neither side will accept and then promises to walk away? In my belief this is an orchestrated display designed to protect Donald Trump's PR-effort to show he's the peacemaker in a deal in which the default is a trillion dollar premium for the US and the Trump administration and its various officials, especially big businessmen like Witkoff and Scott Bessent, the treasury, and Steve Feinberg, the Deputy Secretary of Defense. These are businessmen. These are men who are determined to make very substantial sums of money out of the premium of obliging Europe, the European states including Greece, to spend billions of new dollars on buying US weapons, some of which will be used to support the ongoing war in the Ukraine. So I don't

see the display over the last few days as a serious negotiation of either an armistice or a form of peace settlement, at the very best a free –I'm sorry, go on.

**DL:** This takes us, I think, to an excellent and enlightening article that you published on your website, Dances with Bears, I believe it was yesterday. Now, ever since we came to the conclusion on Reason2Resist that Trump has no genuine interest in a durable peace in Ukraine, we've talked at some length about his true agenda in that part of the world. And I think your article revealed some very important background about what that true agenda might be. Your piece was entitled: *The Real Trump Default Is European War With Russia So The US Can Escalate War With China*. Now, before I ask you about your article, I want to remind our audience of something that we've talked about previously, and that is a speech that US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth gave in Brussels in February of this year. In that speech, Hegseth did the precise opposite of encouraging Washington's European vassals to make peace with Russia. On the contrary, he encouraged them to increase their military spending drastically and to use their massive new military budgets to arm Ukraine while America shifted its focus to China. Hegseth used the term "division of labor" in urging that Europe focus its military resources on Russia while the US focused its military forces on China. That speech, by the way, is part of the reason that we have argued that Trump has no real interest in ending the Ukraine war. He simply wants Europe to shoulder the burden of continuing that war while the US devotes its efforts elsewhere. Now, in your article, John, you talked at length about a person I had frankly never heard of before. I can't believe that I hadn't heard of him. And his name is A. Wess Mitchell. Could you tell us about Wess Mitchell's background, first of all?

**JH:** Well, the A stands for Aaron, and I don't know what Wess is short for, and it's not a misprint for mess. Mitchell claims in his wiki profile to be a sixth generation Texan, who was initially educated in a technical university in Texas, and then graduated to Ivy League getting a degree in Georgetown. He then moved to study, at graduate level, German and Austro-Hungarian Empire politics in a German university. So he's a German speaker. His ambition is to become a kind of Brzezinski or Kissinger, the strategic brains of the Trump administration. And he had a first shot at that when he was an Assistant Secretary of State in the first Trump administration. And he had a falling out, as I understand it, with Secretary of State Pompeo at the time. What he is, is not only the ambition to be as Brzezinski was to Jimmy Carter or Kissinger was to Nixon, his ambition is to make money. And to make money, his business partner is a man called Elbridge Colby, grandson of William Colby of the CIA. Fame, or infamy if one wants to put it that way. Colby's just been approved by the Senate as the third-ranking Pentagon official under Hegseth. He's the undersecretary of defense for policy. Above him is the Deputy Secretary, Steve Feinberg, who's a businessman. So, Colby is, let's call it the strategic brains of the US Military right now. Between the two of them, they created something called the Marathon Initiative. There's nothing particularly Greek about that, except that Mitchell likes to pepper his papers with references to ancient Greek military matters. And the most recent one that appeared this week on Tuesday is full of Sparta and Ancient Athens and the conclusions that Mitchell wants to be respected for having drawn from that time. The two of them create, what's under the IRS rules, a charity. And into

that charity went some defense department money and some contributions from well-heeled foundations – about a million three, one point three million dollars went in, if I'm not mistaken, in 2021. And most of it went into Mitchell's and Colby's pockets. They took about \$370,000 in annual salary. So essentially the Marathon Initiative was set up to feed their pockets with the tax advantages of being a charity. It's now something completely different because Mitchell's writing papers that essentially appeal to a range of foreign states – particularly Germany in Europe and Taiwan in Asia, Israel in the Middle East, and Japan– to join his theory of grand strategy which is now being implemented. During the period of 2021-2024, you can see that Mitchell's papers and these positions fed the sloganeering that appeared in Trump's campaign. Boil the papers down, those of our audience who want to still read instead of listen to podcasts, who want us to see exactly what these guys are saying and understand the implications, can go to the Dances With Bears site at the moment.

**DL:** If I just may just intervene, I'm going to also put up on the screen –because there was a more recent article. I did read those articles. They were quite enlightening. But there's a more recent one that I shared with you and I'm gonna put that up on the screen and I do urge people, as you did, to read all three if they have the time to do that. Go ahead.

**JH:** Yeah, the new foreign affairs piece appeared on Tuesday. And the importance of that one is it restates the strategy but applies a gloss, endorsing everything Trump has already done. So it brings up to date what they're doing, what they intend to do, what they want to say is the grand strategy behind Trump's tweets. And what is this grand strategy? Well, it's the brilliant common sense that you can't fight two very powerful enemies at the same time and hope to win both wars. Mitchell calls it sequencing. It's the clock. It is an admission – and that's, I suppose, unusual for an American imperialist like he is – that the United States is no longer strong enough and its enemies are too powerful, China and Russia, for the United State's military to prevail in wars against both at the same time. Ergo, he proposes a policy of blocking Russia in Europe and having the Europeans do the dirty work with the financial benefits that accrue to the US military suppliers. He's not saying don't fight, don't continue the war – he is not saying don't stop the war, he's in fact presenting the view, and this is quite interesting, that he thinks that Russia is now being seriously weakened by the war in the Ukraine. Its military resources are devastated, and it needs to rebuild. It's vulnerable economically, and it's vulnerable militarily, so it's susceptible to a combination of massive US bribes, promises of economic investment, and promises of a range of terms of the kind we've just seen tabled.

So on the one hand the strategy is: minimize US involvement and downplay US engagement in Europe but keep the war going. On the other hand: reorient US strategy and repoint US guns to China. And there his view is exactly what Trump's tariffs and sanctions are doing, which is to say, trying to isolate and disconnect China from the entire trading world and begin to rearm all of US allies, from little ones like Australia to bigger ones like South Korea and even bigger ones like Japan, in the long-term plan to either fight a war against China, or deter and destroy China's willingness to fight. Now, that's the strategy. It's not a strategy of coming to durable peace in Europe. On the contrary, it's not the strategy of the US abandoning its

empire or its protectorate of Europe. On the contrary. Europe is to pay more for the protection. It's a grand protection racket. That's what it is. But all of the funds received, some of which will fall off the truck and end up in the pockets of Mitchell, Colby, and if you look at their advisory board, there's the son of the Indian foreign minister, there's a former German defense minister, there is Dennis Blair, the former Pacific fleet commander of the United States Navy and a former director of national intelligence. A whole bunch of people that are worth looking at to understand that these are the conduits of future influence as this sequencing strategy plays out. We can come to the big problem that this strategy of the clock presents in a minute, but let me just signal it, if the US wants to play this game, what does it mean to the general staff of the Russian intelligence services and the Kremlin on the one hand, and the Chinese General Staff and Intelligence Services on the other? They look at them and say, hey, this guy is writing Trump scripts. This guy and Colby have got other brains behind useful idiots like Rubio and Hegseth and Waltz. And these guys admit that now is not the time for the US to conduct these wars. But soon they will be.

Well, what do you conclude from that reading of that clock answer? Russia's bound to say it's in our advantage to go now to maximize our gains on the battlefield while the US and the Europeans are weaker than they will be in five years time. One. Two, the Chinese are bound to say, if this is what the Americans, the Japanese, the South Koreans and the little leagues like Australia intend to do, let's go now against Taiwan because they will be stronger then. So the strategy of the clock presented as a brilliant Brzezinski or Kissinger strategy to Trump, is a boomerang. The clock's a boomerang. But they think that they are still powerful, Russia weak and China growing. And they think they've got a clock and a sequencing mechanism and these phony negotiations which Rubio, Vance, Waltz and the others are conducting as camouflage.

**DL:** Great. You know, John, if you and I come to know of Mitchell and Colby and the remarkable similarity between their writings and the actual policies of the Trump administration, we can all be damn sure that the Russian government and the Chinese government are fully aware of this and are paying very careful attention. And I just want to say one other thing, John. I think for good reasons, you describe them as apparently the brains behind the foreign policy. And I suspect you'll agree with me that that's not intended necessarily as a compliment because when I was reading their articles, I mean, you mentioned this belief that they have that Russia is weak economically and militarily when all the evidence indicates that it's certainly stronger militarily, may well be stronger in certain respects economically – I read their articles while I found them fascinating and amazingly similar to Trump's foreign policy and explained a lot about what's going on – these people live in an alternate reality. I mean, literally, there was one delusional statement after another, not just about the power and strength of Russia, but about America's role in the world, about America's military strength. And in that regard, you know, you mentioned the background of this guy, Mitchell, as far as I can tell you he has zero training in military matters. And yet he's liberally dispensing grand strategic military advice to the United States government and apparently the Pentagon. So, I don't want anybody to come away from our discussion thinking that these are actually brilliant strategists. I think that these people are extremely

dangerous and as I mentioned, living in an alternate reality. And in that regard, John, one thing I want to touch upon before we move to where this is all heading um, you know your article also talks about chatter about the withdrawal of u.s military forces from Europe, particularly Poland. Can you tell us about the reality? What is the narrative around the US posture in Europe? And what is in fact the reality on the ground today in terms of US military presence on the continent?

**JH:** Well, thanks for the question, Dimitri. I need to sort of shape it and reduce the amount of evidence that I can talk from. What I learned over the last week and what's reported in that Dances with Bears piece, is that at the beginning of March, an opposition Polish Euro-MP, made a little video and then tweeted a text in which he said, look here, the entire US multi-hectare storage area around the Rzeszów airport. This is an airport, I should say, it's got two names. Jasionka is the village, Rzeszów is spelled R-Z-E-S-Z-Ó-W, is a southern Polish city 100 kilometers to the west of the Ukrainian border. And it's been the transportation hub for the supply of men, material, command, and staffing of the war in Ukraine. Planes come into this area bringing political leaders, bringing troops, bringing missiles and material, and then unloaded on the trucks and on the rail cars and then run into Ukraine. So this area has been a major staging area for the US to run its war in Ukraine, and if anybody doubts that, just read The New York Times version of how this was done. But that part of South West Poland has been crucial. So when this guy says, look at this, what's happened is the Americans have lifted the entire concrete structures of this storage area and moved out. And he interprets that in his tweet to mean that the US is pulling out of the war and pulling out of Poland. And he does that for domestic Polish reasons, related to the confederation party he represents versus the two other major ruling parties in Poland. And in Poland right now it's very close to a new presidential election. So he's pitching this story as an argument for Poland can't rely on the Americans. Poland must develop its own arms industry. It must develop its own capabilities to defend against Russia. This is nonsense, but this is the politics of Poland right now.

Okay, within two days this chap's video is described by the Polish state media as fake news. What they point out becomes very interesting. They say, look, what is happening has been in planning for years and certainly months and definitely before Donald Trump took over. The Biden administration had agreed with the Germans, the Norwegians and the Poles that the US troops would be withdrawn but moved elsewhere in Poland. The Norwegians would come in with a squadron of F-35s. The Germans would come in with patriot missiles, US supplied patriot missiles but German crews, and that the hub would continue but under European management. And that was a Biden administration initiative. What the Polish state media then said was that the default position was a Biden administration initiative to which the Trumpies were complying. They were implementing through the US Army, through the relationship with Germany, Norway and Poland, what had already been decided and planned over some time, including years. So, then something very funny happens. The Polish government implements a regulation requested by the general staff of Poland making about several hundred installations in Poland, sites where Poles and everybody else are forbidden to

photograph. In other words, they made illegal what the MP had done. As if that fools anybody using drones and satellite intelligence to see what's happening. It fools nobody.

In any event, what I've done is to say this little story tells you a lot. First of all, the Trump default is to Biden policy. Biden policy. And Trump never misses a tweet in which he can accuse Biden of having failed to do this and failed to do that on the ground, and he's repairing the damage. In fact, what he's defaulting to in Poland is a rearmament in which there will be more US forces. And Hegseth said it in Warsaw. He wants to see more US troops in Poland. Second, this story shows how much more threatening to Russia Germany is becoming under the new acting and soon-to-be Chancellor, Friedrich Merz. Now this is so serious from a Russian point of view, the rise of German rearmament, that ex-president Dmitry Medvedev has said in his telegram account – he simply called Merz a Nazi because Merz has already said he's in favor of supplying longer-range Taurus missiles and use them to attack the Crimean bridge. And that's been referred to by not only Dmitry Medvedev but the foreign ministry spokesman Maria Zakharova as a declaration of war by Germany. So all of a sudden what we see is the default position of the Trump administration being played out in Poland already, not just in future. If and when peace negotiations fail and President Trump announces that he tried for peace and he strived to stop the killing but neither side would agree so he's picking up his marbles and going to play in another place.

In fact what's happening is already happening and I use this little incident to demonstrate but it is happening not only in Poland and not only with Germany. We can see NATO escalation against Russia from Finland and Sweden up to the Arctic Circle and up to Greenland. Yes, Vice President Vance has a problem of taking over Greenland with the disregard of either the Danish sensitivities as the colonial power or the Greenlanders as the indigenous population. But the strategy is the same, it's a collective NATO strategy to increase the pressure on all Russian fronts at once. So what have we got here? We've got evidence of the default position of the Trump administration that's back to Biden administration warfighting tactics with one terrific brilliant Trump idea: money. Trump has come up with the idea that he and his business friends, Witkoff, Lutnick, the Commerce Secretary, I mentioned him, Feinberg at the Pentagon, and Scott Bessent, not to mention Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, the oligarchs behind a lot of these people. They are going to make money off European budget increases in a way that the Biden administration hadn't thought of. It's going to cost less to fight the war in Europe, but enrich the Americans more.

**DL:** I'd like to switch to the subject of Iran, John, and I need to sort of share with you my perspective on what is going on there and how all of this relates to the Trump administration's posture with respect to the Ukraine war. I believe, for a variety of reasons, that the Trump Administration does not envision a direct pivot from Russia to China. My sense is it feels it must first finish a task that the US government embarked upon probably during the Bush administration, if not before then. I'm sure you'll recall, John, that Wesley Clark, the US general who commanded NATO forces in Europe, revealed years ago that the US government had developed plans to take out seven predominantly Muslim states. Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, and finally, Iran. I think one could fairly describe Iran as the last



functioning state of that group of seven that remains under the rule of a government, a well-entrenched government that refuses to bow to US hegemony. And personally, I can't believe that the US, having taken out the first six of those states, isn't going to stop there and leave Iran standing. And in this context, an interesting op-ed appeared in Newsweek earlier this month, and the op-ped was authored by Yaakov Katz, the former editor of The Jerusalem Post. So he's obviously a person of some influence in US-Israeli foreign policy circles, I would imagine. He begins his article by accusing Russia of arming Israel's enemies, not just Iran, but also Hezbollah. And then he writes: "If and when a broader Ukraine ceasefire is formalized," – he doesn't say peace, he says ceasefire, – "it must address Russian behavior in the Middle East. A sustainable peace in Europe should not enable Moscow to bankroll war against Israel. Any deal that eases sanctions or normalizes Russia's global standing should come with an end to weapons transfers to Iran and Syria and a cessation of military cooperation that enhances Iran's nuclear missile programs. Such demands may be seen as peripheral by people focused on Ukraine, but for Israel they are central. The country is engaged on two fronts, Gaza in the south, Lebanon on the north, with a third more existential threat looming in the east." The impact of those Israeli officials' message appeared recently in the readout of a phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to the White House, the two leaders discussed both Ukraine and the Middle East agreeing in principle on the need to further prevent conflict and to ensure Iran can never threaten Israel's existence.

Now, a number of factors which kind of influence my interpretation of all this, John, I mean, first of all, we know that US weapon stocks have been heavily depleted by the wars Israel has waged and by the Ukraine war. We know that China has a voracious appetite for oil. It's an industrial powerhouse with a very large population, a very large economy. And much of the oil that China imports comes from West Asia, including from Iran. I believe it's the largest buyer of Saudi oil now, in addition to being the largest buyer of Iraqi oil and Iranian oil. Facts of which I'm sure the US government is acutely aware. And it seems to me that the US Government, given its overall agenda, is likely to want to cement its domination of West Asia and effectively acquire the ability to constrain or limit China's access to the fossil fuel resources of the region. And of course, there's also the importance of West Asia to international trade routes. So I suspect that what's really in the mind of these people, and this is reflected in the belligerent rhetoric they're directing at Iran, is they want to finish the job that was set out for the US foreign policy elite decades ago to destroy those seven Muslim states, cement their control of the resources and trade routes of West Asia, and then move on to the decisive confrontation with China. Sorry for the long-winded sort of explanation, but I'm curious, what are your thoughts about all of this, John?

**JH:** You weren't long-winded. You were as precise as can be. I'd go further back than General Wesley Clark. I wrote the book *The Jackal's Wedding with Claudia Wright, The Jackals Wedding: American Power, Arab Revolt*. And that documents the history of America's attempts to first of all ease out of the Middle East, the British and the French, and replace them. And second, eliminate any Arab nationalist threat to the predominance of US influence in the Arab world. And that included putsches, assassinations and the entire program of the

destruction of the secular nationalist Arab states, starting with Nasser's Egypt, going on to Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, Syria was a target from 1947 on, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq followed. These stories are told in the book, but the book stops in about 1990, the history. Subsequently, as you say, the destruction of Lebanon, the destruction now of Syria as a nationally sovereign Arab state, these destructions leave only Iran as a major national sovereign power. Of course, in Yemen, the Houthis are putting up an extraordinarily capable military resistance, and that will continue.

Iran, however, is a special case, and the reason I believe the United States will not go to war and will not allow Netanyahu to dictate the terms of an attack on Iran, is that Iran is the best armed state left, much better armed than the Arab states have been, to inflict a level of damage on both incoming US aircraft or ships and Israeli aircraft and ships. That is unacceptable to the Trump administration. The generational attempts by the United States can be described as imperial, and we shouldn't be shy about using the words empire, imperial, imperialist on a podcast. We should, however, understand that it's not simply a case of oil and gas, access to oil and gas, or denying one's enemies access to the oil and the gas in the region. At the beginning of the period of *The Jackal's Wedding* story, it was clear that the United States Air Force – Curtis LeMay was the chief of the US Air Force at the time – saw the Middle East air bases in Saudi Arabia, in Libya and other, including Greece, as necessary platforms to use US nuclear force against the Soviet Union. So there were strategic military requirements to keep Arab territory out of Arab hands, through military bases and the subversion and overthrow of their governments, when they tried to get rid of the Americans. So there are many reasons for the empire, and they've changed over time. It's necessary now, and you heard it partly from Vance in India, that the United States wants to use Indian competition with China, both as economic power and with border conflicts, to use India to begin to threaten the roots through which China takes its oil from the Middle East, as you've said, across the Indian Ocean to China. So it's clear from a US military strategic point of view that it wants to use Europe to threaten the northern route the Russians have developed to carry oil from Russia to China and use India to begin to assert control of the Indian Ocean, potentially against Chinese movement of oil to China. The Chinese understand this pretty well. Vance's recent statements in India indicate the belief that the United States can manipulate India into an even more hostile posture towards China. And it regards the quad, the so-called combination of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, as an anti-Chinese alliance. It's not that from the Indian point of view, but it definitely is from Australian, Japanese, and US points of view.

So, I'm agreeing with your presentation, Dimitri, that there is a major focus on Iran as the last of the Muslim or sovereign nationals in the Middle East sitting on oil and gas that are resisting the US and its Israeli aircraft carrier. The logistics, the military strategy, the political costs of losing in an attack against Iran have now risen to the point where, as we've seen, Iran is capable of destroying, breaching Israel's so-called Iron Dome and other air defenses with hypersonic weapons it can't defend. The Iranians have made demonstrations of their capability to attack any target in Israel, but they've limited themselves to digging holes in Israeli air bases. They have not attacked resources like electricity generation or gas platforms,

but they could. And there's no doubt because Israeli generals say so – that Israel's ability to defend a small country like it is and its economic infrastructure from the capabilities of Iran are very weak. So this entire effort by the Israelis and the Americans is not only aimed at stopping the Iranians acquiring nuclear deterrent capability. But destroy or demolish Iran's capability to counterattack Israel with hypersonic missiles and drone swarms against which neither the United States in its bases in the Middle East, nor Israel in its little country, can defend adequately. So the cost of taking out the last, as you said, a resistance state is now too high.

**DL:** So I agree with virtually everything you said, John, but I'm having difficulty persuading myself. I very much hope you're right that they appreciate, I'm sure they appreciate the cost would be very high. But the question is whether that's going to be enough to stop them from attacking Iran. And the problem I'm having with the proposition that it will be enough is I don't see an off ramp for the United States in these negotiations that the United States can live with. Trump has staked his prestige on the idea in the region that the Obama era nuclear deal with Iran was pathetically flawed. And he's going to come up with something much better. But if you actually look at it, I'm no expert in nuclear technology, but the limit of enrichment in that agreement was 3.67%. And it's my understanding that in order to use uranium to operate a commercial nuclear facility, you have to enrich it to the point of 5%. How much lower are the Iranians going to be willing to go? And they've said very clearly, we're not giving up our power, our ability to enrich uranium. We're just not doing that. I think it's inconceivable they're going to give up their hypersonic ballistic missile capabilities or their drone capabilities. They're not going to give that up. They're not going to undertake to stop supporting the resistance groups in the region. Maybe they would accept some constraint on their ability to do that, but I can't imagine they're going to cut them all loose. So how do you end up with a deal that the Trump administration, the Israelis, can live with and that allows them to avoid war in Iran? That's the question that I'm not able to answer. And there's a lot of people in the US government, people like Tom Cotton, that psychopathic lunatic who lusts for the blood of Iranians, who are pressuring the Trump administration to go to war and a lot of people are saying that Iran is unusually weak and we'll never have a better opportunity – you know, Assad is gone, Hezbollah is greatly damaged and so forth, Yemen is being pummeled. Will Trump actually be able to resist those pressure points and will he be content with an agreement that isn't objectively a dramatic improvement on the JCPOA? I have serious doubts about that. I don't know. What's your thought about all of that?

**JH:** I have to agree with you, and I'm not sure I can add anything to what you've said, Dimitri. The pressure that the Jewish lobby and the Israel lobby apply inside the administration and from the outside, that there's never been a better moment to attack, is a serious inducement to attack. On the other hand, some of the in-fighting at the top of the Pentagon, resulting in the dismissal of three senior staff and the reassignment of the chief of staff of Hegseth, has been described partly as an argument over whether to go to war against Iran. We can't answer the question you've raised. It needs to be raised as often as possible for our audiences and it needs to be understood that what has happened under this pressure is a display of the new troika. Forget the quad. The troika is China, Russia and Iran. Now, there

are clear lacunae gaps in the strategic agreement signed in January between Mr. Pezeshkian of Iran and President Putin of Russia. There isn't the kind of Article 5 – they attack you, we join to defend you – provisions in the Iran-Russia agreement that exist in the Iran-North Korea agreement. But let's be clear from a Russian point of view, Iran is the southern defense front of Russia. And it always was. It always was, whether the Ottomans, whether the British manipulated a weak Shah. Persia was a soft underbelly threatening Russia. And Stalin, after World War Two, wanted to make sure that Iran would not be a British controlled platform for attacking the Soviet Union and he sent troops to occupy parts of northern Iran. And he used resources, political and material, to encourage the Tudeh Communist Party of Iran to overthrow the Shah and produce a regime that was friendlier to Russia or the Soviet Union and would prevent a British launch drive against the southern front of Russia. So to have a nuclear war on the southern border of Russia is a very dangerous development from a Russian point of view, and it needs to be deterred. There's no doubt about Russian policy on deterring nuclear war, on its southern border and on its eastern border with North Korea.

Second, it's a permanent existential interest on the Russian side to prevent Iran becoming an anti-Russian platform. And that would happen if the Americans, partnered by Israel, do the level of destruction, either militarily speaking or diplomatically speaking, that has been put on the table in the so-called negotiations that Witkoff has been having with Araghchi, the Foreign Minister of Iran, through Omani mediation. So the stakes for Russia with Iran are different from the way in which Russia has always viewed the Arab world – much more serious and much more directly threatened for that reason. And also for the Chinese reason we've discussed. We have the presentation that against the United States and Israel there are now two rounds of the highest level of demonstration that Russia will assist Iran and China will assist Iran to defend itself from any serious attacker. Now that's pretty new. And I would say, without wishful thinking here, it's deterring for Trump. But as you say, Demetri, what if Trump and Witkoff can only get a renewal of the JCPOA with a higher level of nuclear enrichment in order to keep their reactors going? How do you tweet that as a success? You can't.

From the way in which we take the Mitchell papers as an example of the brains behind Trump's tweets, we'd have to say that it would be likely that Trump will try to bury this negotiation and let it go on for a long time without any significant military event that will be as damaging as Jimmy Carter's hostage rescue mission where the planes come down, US soldiers lose their lives, etc., etc. Trump cannot afford a sideshow in which he takes political punishment. He's only got 18 months before the midterm elections come on and he's got inflation and a variety of other miseries that US voters are going to vote against the Republicans at that time and he cannot have an oil disruption that might result from a losing, costly attack on Iran. So my guess is that politically and diplomatically, this will be stretched out indecisively. And that's, let's say, a good outcome for the Iranians. It's a good outcome for the Russians, a good outcome for the Chinese, and actually it's a good outcome for the United States, too.

**DL:** So lastly, John, in our exchanges before we began our interview today, you referred to competition amongst powerful players within the Trump administration over military contracts. And you mentioned people like Peter Thiel and Musk and so forth. What can you tell us about this competition and to what extent is this related to these extraordinary events where – I think that the person was the chief of staff of Hegseth, apparently was frog-marched out of the Pentagon, Caldwell, I believe his name is, who was apparently exercising or urging restraint with respect to Iran. So what can you tell us about this competition for military contracts?

**JH:** You understand, Demetri, I'm a Moscow correspondent, so I don't actually focus as much as your question requires on the inside beltway politics of the current administration. What we can say is, no one else is. No one else there is. The mainstream newspapers, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times – these are the people with inside access who have the capacity, especially since they were oriented so obviously towards the Democrats, to come up with analysis of the way in which these contracts are flawed. You know, an F-47 contract for Boeing is a multi-billion dollar contract and it would be normal practice to understand who the Boeing lobbyists are, did they meet with Trump officials, whose wives are connected with one another in what businesses, how the commissions are laundered so that they aren't criminal violations of bribery and corruption. That's a job that US investigative reporters should be doing in Washington, but they're not. So, what do we do? Here's my method. Anyone in the audience want to do this? Good luck to them. You can see that the US commerce secretary, one of these New Yorkers who are around Trump, Howard Lutnick, has created a business called Cantor Fitzgerald. You can see his sister, his son, are deeply involved in investment in crypto systems. And they're going to be involved in financing all sorts of crypto related businesses. Steve Feinberg used to run, until he became Deputy Secretary of Defense, a money bag called Cerberus Capital. I guess he thinks that the multi-headed dog was a good name for his investment fund. But, what we would look to see is how that particular dog gets fed with what bones of what contracts. We know that Musk is getting significant contracts, multi-billion dollar contracts over long periods of time for space-related military applications, the technical details of which I haven't the time or the technical capacity to follow. Peter Thiel has a bunch of companies which also pick up significant contracts from the new Pentagon.

So what we've got here is a system for collecting multi-billion dollar contracts out of the defense budget. At the same time Musk and Trump say they're cutting budgets. Well, they are and they're employees, but they're feeding themselves more money than ever before. And how is it done? Well, it's standard Washington practice. The president gets to appoint thousands of individuals to high-level jobs like Feinberg, like Caldwell, like, what's his name? I've forgotten all the names. I've provided a couple of references to these names in a website called dropsite.com. Go to my website and you can follow their efforts to understand what this in-fighting is about. My interpretation is as follows, with very big bags of money – call them Musk, call him Thiel, call them Feinberg, call them Lutnick, call them Witkoff – I mean, very big bags of money aim to make more money, including the Trump family, out of the defense budget. How is it actually executed? Well, they put their placemen in jobs to

supervise. And so Caldwell and these other chaps who started to fight each other and then got escorted out of the Pentagon, these are placemen who represent money bag interests outside of the Pentagon in a process that is understood to generate vast rewards. There's nothing uniquely American about this. It happens in Moscow. You've got the Prigozhin of infamous fame, which was one of the corrupt beneficiaries of much of this wartime contracting in Russia. And the same you'll see in Germany and in England and in France and so on. But right now what we can see is much bigger sums are being divided up under the supervision of placement, who represent the interests of US oligarchs like Musk and Thiel, filtered through so-called negotiators like Witkoff, cabinet secretaries like Lutnick, and deputy secretaries, like Feinberg. That's the way the system works. The rest is up to everybody listening, to watch very carefully as DoD hands out its contracts, which they're legally obliged to publish and which in the past these supervisory committees and subcommittees of Congress are required to observe and record and analyze and look for conflict of interest. Now conflict of interest is a principle nobody in the Trump administration has ever heard of.

**DL:** I'm going to conclude by pointing out to those of our audience members who are from Canada that Mark Carney, the current Prime Minister who's on the verge, it seems, of being elected the Prime Minister, had something in the range of a million stock options from Brookfield Asset Management at the time he left the chairmanship of that board and decided to enter politics a few months ago. And Brookfield Asset Management has a majority stake in Westinghouse, Canada, which has a whole bunch of interests in the nuclear industry in Ukraine. Now, anybody who's looking at this objectively would say when it comes to formulating Ukraine policy, Mark Carney has a conflict of interest because he stands to see a significant increase in the value of his stock options, the more money that Westinghouse makes from the Ukrainian nuclear industry. And of course, if Russia ends up being in control of the Ukrainian nuclear industry, I think that's going to be bad news for Westinghouse and by extension, Brookfield and Mark Carney. In any event, I hope that they'll be – sorry, go ahead.

**JH:** Well, just a wee footnote there, Dimitri, you're quite right. Westinghouse does have current contracts, which used to be funded by USAID, to repair the damage to the electrical systems associated with nuclear power generation in Western Ukraine. But if you look at – and we go back to where we began our conversation today – at one of the provisions in the alleged outline of a peace agreement that the US presented to the Ukrainians, one of terms frequently reported is that the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in the Zaporizhzhya region, which is now Russian and which has been under constant artillery bombardment from the Ukrainian side for several years now, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is to become an US controlled entity. Now, guess who would get that contract to control the Zaporizhzhya NPP if that provision of the agreement were accepted by the Russian side. Well, it would be Westinghouse because it has the contracts on the other side and therefore, we would come to Mr. Carney and ask him how much more his options are worth with US secured guarantees of an expanding business in Ukraine. All we can say is that if that's the basis on which the present and the future prime minister of Canada counts his wealth, he can't be very pro-Russian, can he?

**DL:** Well, all of this sounds like yet another compelling argument for dramatic reductions in military spending. In any event, John, it's always a great pleasure speaking with you and I look forward to our next conversation.

**JH:** Me too, Dimitri. Thank you for having me.

**DL:** And we're signing off from Kalamata on April 24th, 2025.

**END**

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