

Trump's Naked Imperialism & How the British Empire Never Died

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Abby Martin (AM): I'm joined now by Matt Kennard, investigative journalist and author of *The Silent Coup* and *The Racket*. Matt, thank you so much for coming on The Empire Files. It's so great to talk to you.

Matt Kennard (MK): Good to be with you. Thanks for having me.

AM: So *The Racket* is such an important book, exposing the inner workings of global capitalism, the way that the US empire mafia really operates. I mean, today we live in this imperial wasteland under basically this neo-feudal tech dictatorship. Matt, talk about, I guess, first what *The Racket* is and how it operates under Trump 2.0.

MK: Yeah, well, so *The Racket*, the title comes from a speech by Major General Smedley Butler who you will probably know, he died the most decorated Marine in US history. He was a senior figure within the US military, served in all the interventions in the early 20th century and Central America and China and places. But interestingly, when he left, he had an awakening about what he'd been doing in those places. And what interests, he had been serving, he said I was a high-class muscle man for big business, I was a racketeer for capitalism. And I used that, that quote starts the book and it's the title because having been at the Financial Times I feel like his analysis was totally right that the US Empire is run in the interests of American corporate power and the American financial elite and all these government institutions that are funded by the US taxpayer are actually set up to promote their power around the world and make it easier for them to make money. It was me collecting evidence from the inside, which I obviously couldn't publish in the Financial Times because – and we should talk about this because it was quite an insight into how the American empire is protected by the corporate media, in my experience within the Financial Times, but I soon learned I couldn't published articles critical of the American empire, or even mention that America was an empire; you can't even say that term. So I gathered all that information knowing I couldn't write the truth of what I was seeing. And then the book is

basically me cross referencing that with the truth that I saw on the ground that I wasn't able to publish in the Financial Times and the truth that I saw in the WikiLeaks cables.

But interestingly, to go to the second part of your question, what the American Empire is becoming under Trump and what we're seeing is a huge rupture with what went before, because *The Racket*, a lot of it was written and reported during the Obama administration. And it was really an analysis of liberal imperialism, you know, this imperialism runs through these fronts like the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID. Those are two organisations which are all throughout the book. And in that kind of liberal Imperialism, they felt they had to manufacture consent for the American empire. And it was actually very effective. A lot of the global population really believed that these institutions were there to help them. But what Trump seems to be doing is just saying we don't need all that anymore. Let's just be honest about what we are. Early on he said, let's just annexe Greenland and annexe the Panama Canal, you know, which obviously he's a monster and he's not in any way going to dismantle the US Empire, but it does make our job as anti imperialists and people who are interested in truth easier because that's all the illusions that actually have managed to co-opt the liberal classes around the Western world and other parts of the world are up in smoke. We're definitely seeing a rupture with the blob effectively.

It's not a rupture from the left, it's not an anti-imperialist one but it's a rupture all the same. And I just was watching before we came on air the interaction between President Trump and President Zelensky in the Oval Office and again that's something we've never seen. It's just absolute, but America has often used client leaders and then discarded them when they're not useful and also has done what he's done with the mineral deal with Zelensky, which is basically behind closed doors, say, look, we'll sort you out if you just give us all your minerals. They did it in Indonesia, actually, after the genocide there. But it's always behind closed doors. Trump's just out in the open, so it's a much more blood form of imperialism. It's a much more honest form of imperialism, but it's a form of imperialism all the same, obviously. And I do think, I'll just finish this, I do it's extremely dangerous. I don't think it's something that – we should welcome some parts of it, like the end of the proxy war in Ukraine, hopefully that will happen and we should the dismantling of the National Endowment of Democracy in USAID, but he's obviously, I believe his real purpose with all this is to get rid of the kind of the propaganda apparatus for the American Empire operated more honestly and actually take the war to China.

AM: There does seem to be some difference today with, you know, what should be just this united opposition against oligarchy. Unfortunately, the political establishment has co-opted a lot of the resistance still. And you see this kind of cult-like adoration under the MAGA movement that I think traditionally you wouldn't see libertarians folded into the mainstream conservative Republican party. So there is something unique about Trump, I think uniquely dangerous in the sense that he's able to capture such a wide variety of people and consolidate his base. And of course we've seen, you know, the extraordinary power that he has and that he's able to barrel through his agenda. But there's so many things to unpack with what you just said. I mean, USAID, I mean first of all, I agree with you. I mean on one hand,

everyone's applauding this because of course USAID is just this notorious front for regime change. You have people like Elon Musk calling it a viper's den of Marxist thought. It's hilarious considering what we know it really to be. But then it's like, to your point, I mean, on one hand, it seems like the symbolic manoeuvre to abolish this agency because it was quote unquote "too woke", right? Because it was operating under the guise of democracy and human rights. But then on the other hand, is it just the utter lawlessness that they're embracing that they just don't give a shit? Like, why do we even need the auspices that we're doing this? Why can't we just do it? You see someone like Marco Rubio basically just declaring, like, yep, we're gonna get real creative when it comes to Cuba. You see Pete Hegseth being like, yep, we're firing all the military JAG (Judge Advocate General) lawyers and all the top lawyers who basically determine the rules of engagement on the battlefield, all this shit. Like, we're not holding anyone back. Like, we are going to go for it and no one's gonna stop us.

MK: It's interesting what you said about what Elon Musk said about the Marxists in USAID, because I also feel like it's quite interesting that the liberal propaganda has been so good and has infested the minds of the whole of Washington, including the right, that they believe that Elon Musk is...

AM: They believe their own propaganda.

MK: ...and is dismantling the American Empire unwittingly because he believes all the stuff in the New York Times that USAID is doing all this wonderful stuff around the world for poor people. So that's interesting. But to go to your point about it being dangerous because they're just saying, we'll do what we want. That is true. And rhetorically, it's different. But actually, the American presidents throughout the 20th century have done the same thing. You know, the famous case is The Hague Invasion Act of 2002, I think, where they basically said that if the ICC has jurisdiction and actually takes in any US personnel, they reserve the right to invade The Hague. That's something that sounds Trumpian, but that was done under Bush.

AM: Oh yeah, you have Tom Cotton invoking that today. I mean, I guess I'm just talking about things like Doge. I mean obviously when it comes to US foreign policy, yeah, of course there's total uniformity and a complete disregard for international law norms.

MK: Well, it's scary for the American domestic population more because, you know, that bill that's just been voted through the House of Representatives that they say they're going to cut \$818 billion from Medicaid.

AM: Which is the entire budget. That's the entire budget and what's crazy is none of the headlines are saying they're abolishing Medicaid they're just saying oh they're cutting this much from Medicaid without actually articulating that's literally the budget and that affects 73 million Americans.

MK: Yeah. It's scary. It's like you said, it is like tech feudalism and I think we shouldn't be scared to say it's fascism in many ways. You know you have Elon Musk doing a Nazi salute

and you had Steve Bannon doing it. We would be silly to turn away or dismiss it as like, oh, he's got Tourette's or whatever they were saying, you know, aspergers. But like these people out there, they are... It feels very much like a 1930s moment. We're entering a really, really scary moment in world history, and also the left is nowhere. The left is absolutely nowhere. In the United States, you've got, who's the most prominent leftist in Congress, is Bernie Sanders, well, AOC, but in terms of someone who's run for president, it's Bernie Sanders. And he seems weak, sort of.

AM: He's just a social democrat. I mean, that's what it comes down to. We saw everything kind of laid bare during the Gaza genocide. All of these so-called progressives just folded immediately. And Bernie to this day, I don't even think has called it genocide. It's just absolutely shameful, Matt. You know, I really want to get into what you just said, I mean the spectacle. And it does seem like the right wing is ten steps ahead, like they always have been. I mean they've seized every institution, every centre and mode of power structure in this country and it seems like around the world, especially in this county though. I mean, the left is completely nonexistent, very obsolete. We have no power whatsoever. But I think what's so jarring and disorienting today that differentiates this era is just the spectacle and the constant influx of information that our brains, frankly put, are not supposed to like absorb information in this way. And so it's just such a schizophrenic feeling. Like, for example, one day, I mean, just that AI video that Trump just put out that shows Gaza as this, you know, his golden head on a balloon and then the sigils with Bannon and Elon Musk and – oh, I'm sorry, the stiff armed salute. Sorry, the awkward hand gesture that Barri Weiss calls it. Let's not call reality what it is. So it's like, on one hand, you have this bizarre reality being fostered where we can't call a spade a spade. You can't say this is what we see with our own eyes, but while we're calling people Nazis and calling ethnic cleansing, ethnic cleansing and genocide, they've already passed a thousand executive orders and annexed ten more villages. It just seems like we cannot win and they are so far ahead of us, Matt.

MK: Yeah, it does. And I'm reading a book actually, at the moment, called *The Rise and the Fall of the Third Reich*, it's by an American journalist. I think it was written in the 60s. But he was in Nazi Germany from all through the period from when Hitler took power. And it's quite scary reading it. It's quite sinister parallels with the moment we're living in now, because another facet of it is the conspiracy theories, you know, because I feel like – and again, I put a lot of blame on the liberal classes for this. Because the liberal media is so bad, the corporate media is so bad people know they're being lied to and they're right about that, but they have no access to good information. Any independent journalist or a journalist who's doing work, which actually exposes truth is smeared by the liberal classes and the right. So there's a complete vacuum. And in that vacuum, it gets filled up with people needing answers, not getting the answers about how the world really works, the corporate power, the role of the 1% and all the mechanisms they have to retain control. They're getting the message from the right wing media. It's all about immigrants or Muslims or whatever it is. Similar stuff was happening in Weimar Germany before Hitler took power and when you have that kind of disorientation and the high levels of poverty, people searching for answers, all you need is a demagogue to come along. And in the case of Hitler says it's all the fault of the Jews. In the

case with Trump, it's the fault of, well, Muslims, his previous presidency focused on that a bit more. But, you know, he's a demagog in the same vein. And although he's maybe not a fascist in the sense that he doesn't really have politics, I don't think, he is a businessman and he's a gangster and he will just go with the flow what's good for his status and power.

In the current climate, he's leading a fascist movement. MAGA is or elements within MAGA are fascists. And it can turn very quickly. There is legislation going through, which is basically, it's similar to what Hitler did with the Enabling Act, you know, when he basically just got rid of democracy in Germany. And there's barely any kind of pushback. The founding fathers created all these checks and balances, but it does seem like a lot of them are being overridden. And you've got people like Elon Musk, who's never been elected by anyone who has extraordinary amounts of power within that system. And as you say, it's corporate oligarchy. And to be honest with you, as someone with children, you do feel quite helpless because as you say, they're so far ahead of us. I dunno, but things can change quickly as well, you know. With Jeremy Corbyn, everyone has a go at me because I still talk about him. I should get over him, people say, which is true, but it's been a long time. But it was a big moment. In 2015 he came out of nowhere. I think the odds on him becoming Labour leader even when he started running before he got some momentum was like in hundreds to one and then he became leader and that just was a spark that was lit that we didn't even know there was any kind of a touch paper there to be sparked. And so I feel like some interesting stuff will happen and has to happen but I can't envision it at the moment. But I think it will.

AM: Well, it will indeed. I mean, especially, yeah, things are happening at such a rapid pace. It's like you said, I mean the centre cannot hold and as you articulate, I mean, a militarised society is so ripe for demagoguery and the abject failure of the liberal establishment and the centre of the status quo party has paved the road for fascism to take root. You mentioned just these conspiracy theories that are flourishing with the further detachment from reality. As crises become more existential, facing, you know, down people who are barely living paycheck to paycheck, they're seeking for answers, and unfortunately, the liberal establishment has just mirrored the right wing in so many policies that people are seeking for blame. I mean, it doesn't matter if they're punching down or not, they want someone to blame for their problems. And so, the Republicans come in and syphon all of this energy. The pseudo-populism— that we all know is fake, but a lot of people don't and they're angry, they're pissed off and they hate the status quo. But when you have this deep distrust with something like the corporate media – I mean, Trump and the Republicans are the only ones talking about fake news, right? They're talking about the legacy media and people are going to be attracted to that kind of rhetoric and gravitate toward it. And it's just a really unfortunate situation because we don't have time to waste. And we don't have the energy to spare. And for the last 15 months, we all have activism fatigue for protesting genocide under liberals in both of our countries. So it's just horrific.

So I wanna ask you this because not only MAGA, but there does seem to be this kind of bizarre current with like anti-establishment contrarianism and just anti-liberalism that's taken hold of a lot, like filled some vacuum of like ideology that there's no root like ideological

premise in actual socialism or anti-capitalism. It's just more like we reject liberalism and so you see that kind of dangerously adopting a lot of like right-wing rhetoric too and saying what Trump's doing today is actually genius. It's a genius realignment, you'd be a fool to not understand how this is actually like attacking the deep state, he's going to war with the deep state, all of these things are good. And I am confused about that because I do see a lot of ostensible leftists kind of jumping on that bandwagon.

MK: Well, I think it's all an expression of the corporate takeover of our societies, which has ratcheted up, which has been going on for hundreds of years, the corporate attack on the state, ever since the first joint stock company was created. But after the end of the Cold War, there was really no obstacle to the big takeover, corporate power internally and also globally. And I feel like that's had an impact on the discourse. Like the move towards identity politics or corporate friendly identity politics is an expression, and on the left as well, is an expression of the fact that the corporations have a greater control of our discourse because there's nothing that corporations want more than us arguing about culture wars the whole time. It's an expression of just the corporate control of our whole society. And you see that also in terms of the media, academia. Even the generations previous to us, in the 60s, 70s, 80s, there was a significant descent within the mainstream media and academies. People like John Pilger, Seymour Hersh, Pau Foot in the UK, very good dissident journalists would get – John Pilgrim wrote for the Daily Mirror, which was the biggest selling newspaper in for years and had front pages, had documentaries on ITV TV, which is one of the main broadcasters here. You couldn't get any of that now, which is insane because while the internet has opened up the discourse to more actors and has allowed us to comment on stuff outside of the legacy institutions, you would have thought the pressure that would put on the legacy institutions is they'd have to open up to deal with that, otherwise they'd get outflanked. But in the same period, they become much, much more closed. And I think that's basically because they've been completely co-opted by corporate, also state power, but mainly corporate power. If you look at media now, like The Guardian has whole sections run by corporations that Tesco have like write their own articles in The Guardian.

AM: Well, let me jump in there because – I mean, I want to talk about the Financial Times, but let's just jump into The Guardian now because you write in your book that newspapers like The Guardian, which is probably the most influential left wing journal in the Western world, which even I think is much better than a lot of, you know, so called papers of record here in the States, you call it actually one of the worst, I mean progressive outlets are vital to maintaining the facade of the free and fair media. So it almost is more insidious than the openly conservative flank of the corporate media. So just talk more about that.

MK: Yeah, I think there was borne out by two cases really with The Guardian. One was Julian Assange. His initial leaks were done with The Guardian, you know, in 2010 and 2011. And then they became the biggest kind of vehicle for the information war being fought by the US and UK governments and other sinister actors against him when he was in Belmarsh. And they actually ran a whole campaign in the six months before he was put in Belmarsh. And it was a campaign, I've kind of delineated it, they trying to link him to Russia. And that ended,

the new month was when they had that front page where they said that Paul Manafort had been into the Ecuadorian embassy three times for meetings, which was completely invented. That hadn't happened. And that was fed to them by some sinister actor.

And then Jeremy Corbyn, basically, he was destroyed by obviously a confluence of different factors, the whole of the British establishment, the Israel lobby, blah, blah blah, arms industry. But The Guardian led the anti-Semitism campaign against him, which was a completely invented campaign. And all of their columnists came out and attacked him relentlessly and destroyed him effectively. So that shows you what their role is. Their role is to project the image of pushing for progressive change of being a beacon of independent journalism against corporate state power. But when the chips are down and stuff gets serious, when there's a chance that we could actually have a significant structural change in the country, they went to bat for the establishment and they would do it again. And that was a realisation for me that that's the role of the legal media, the establishment of legal media. And it's also the role of the liberal establishment, liberal party, the Democrats in the US and the Labour Party in the UK. I think that the two-party system is an outgrowth of oligarchy because the oligarchy, if you have an oligarchy, it's very, very easy for them to control two parties. They hate when that splinters, it becomes much harder to do. And unfortunately, the right have realised this in the United Kingdom and have started their own party, this reform one. The left hasn't started a new party. But we're hamstrung in this country, and I think it's in the States as well, that you have the many, many leftists feel like the only change you can do is through the Democrats or the Labour Party. And that is so toxic because you realise they're set up to absorb and neutralise the left. That's their role in the oligarchical system we live in.

And I'll just finish with this; if you look at Latin America, which I know you've done a lot of work on, all the leaders that are actually genuine liberation, anti-imperialists, or even just leaders that were actually concerned with bettering the lives of their people, they all had started new parties to get into power. Lula started the Workers' Party in 1980, Evo started MAS in the 90s, Chávez started his party as well in the 1990s. They realised that the traditional liberal left oligarchical parties were set up merely to make sure people like that couldn't get into power. So you have to break the two-party system. The two-part system is the problem. It's a two-party elected dictatorship effectively, where the oligarchy wins whoever gets voted in. Organised labour is the major way we're gonna have any change that's gonna actually bring about something good.

AM: They can shut down and business as usual. And that's exactly what we need. Unfortunately, union density here is almost at an all time low. It's basically been a full fledged war on organised labour for the last 60, 70 years. And we've been so beaten down in the US that all the attempts to invest in third party politics, organise around third party politics, it's been so absolutely outrageous how everyone – you know the left is basically blamed every time a fascist wins or a republican wins. And so it's such a dystopian kind of landscape here in the Empire where we just have no avenues whatsoever and third-party politics seems like a dead end. But I totally agree with you. I mean if this election didn't reveal the true nature of our system I don't know what will. I mean I'm hoping that at least it's been a galvanising tool

for radicalization for so many people, and the younger generation especially, seen the absolutely abysmal fate that we're entering into with climate change and with Trumpian politics. I just hope that people have awoken, you know, that the mass consciousness is exploding in the wake of Gaza and such, that now people are really realising that democratic party politics is a complete dead end, that they do not give a shit about us, about anyone. So why would you invest your energy into a party like that?

But Matt, let's talk about the Financial Times really quickly because you mentioned that you went into it kind of an earnest reporter – I'm not sure how anti-imperialist you were before working there, but you certainly were very awakened while working there. Talking to high level people all over the world, everywhere you travelled, kind of having doors open for you. You mentioned that you weren't able to publish some work about the American Empire and in fact weren't even able to call the US an empire. I think this is really fascinating. It's the empire hidden in plain sight. You know, the US at one point wanted to call itself Imperial America because they were so proud of all their territorial acquisitions. But now it is a great hidden truth that's right in front of our faces but is never acknowledged.

MK: Yeah, and it is an amazing illusory act. And there's actually an amazing book, I don't know if you've read it, called *The Cultural Cold War* by a British journalist called Frances Stonor Saunders. It's about the CIA during the Cold War and how they basically created this very, very potent propaganda system that means that it's actually impossible to get a job in mainstream media if you believe that America is an empire, or if you believe that America, maybe does stuff that in their own interests, and invasions like Iraq were a crime rather than a disastrous mistake, which is mad. It's for me, like American exceptionalism is more crazy than religion. And I'm an atheist. But like, at least with religion, there's a lack of evidence. But with American exceptionalism, there is loads of evidence in and it's all saying the opposite thing. So saying that actually America is exactly like other empires. It's interested in its interests, not morality and principles. And to go to your question about what I thought beforehand, you know, I'm not going to lie, I wasn't a naif in that sense. I did have a understanding of imperialism and actually I was politicised mainly by the war in Iraq. In 2003, I was at university in Leeds and that's when I really kind of got involved in politics and also started to understand how our governments did not mind lying to us to launch a criminal war that killed a million people and steal all their resources. And a couple of years before I started the FT, I'd gone to Columbia Journalism School in New York as well, Columbia University is seen as like the top journalism school, and basically what it does is produce the next generation of corporate journalists. So the education you get is just extremely narrow, extremely pro-American power, all the ideology to talk about, all the justifications. And I found it extremely stultifying.

One example is Henry Kissinger came in to give a speech at the journalism school. And he did this every year. I was 24 at the time. And that was like, this is not cool. So I put my hand up when he was speaking in what was called the World Room and I bear in mind, I was 24. I was quite shy at 24. People don't believe that, but I was quite shy at 24. And I was like, I can't let this go, I can let this go, Henry Kissinger is coming in and they're saying to him: What do

you think about China's human rights record? Like the usual CNN questions, students were saying. So I put my hand up and I said: How do you sleep at night? The whole, you could hear an audible like ssssssss and everyone turned round. And I was like, oh shit. And then the Dean got up and stood next to him and then he was like, do you think you are morally superior to me? And then I was like, Henry Kissinger asking you, if you are morally superior? So I was, like, yes, I do actually. And then I listed some like Chilean and Bangladesh and some other things. And but interestingly after that..

AM: What a genius retort from him, like yeah, that's an easy yes, man.

MK: Yeah, exactly. But firstly, the student body were like, you shouldn't have done that. That was really out of order, blah, blah. And then one of the professors actually came up to me a few days there and said, I heard you disgraced yourself the other day. And I was just like, how is this happening? It's one of the worst mass murderers of the 20th century, and literally, all the elite journalism school students don't know anything about what he's done. The academics, either know and they don't want to rock the boat or they don't know either. And I'm like, this is insane. It's basically a massive system of filtering where anything that's not conducive to the state corporate narrative doesn't exist. It just enters the memory hole. And everything that is conducive to it becomes salient in the students' heads. And that's why it's such a beautiful propaganda system. And this continued on into the Financial Times because it's not done in a way of like Soviet Union, it's no Pravda, it's not telling journalists you can't publish this. What it does, it is propaganda by a mission. It's just ideas that would be subversive to the system just aren't talked about and are filtered out completely. And then at the Financial Times, that's what happened as well. I entered then and I was like, people don't know like half the stuff that our country's done or the United States has done for 50 years.

AM: It's the power of omission, it's the chilling effect that people have no idea that they're even censoring themselves. I mean, that's the whole point. I mean you would never get the job. That's the point too. It's like, you would never get the job unless you were a true believer and that's why you obviously didn't fit within the neat mould of somewhere like Financial Times. I mean did you see Jeff Bezos today declaring, he was like, I am no longer going to allow any discourse that is not just completely dogmatically, like pro-US capitalism on the pages of the Washington Post. It's like, oh, I'm sorry, I think I missed where you did allow like socialist or like anti-capitalist.

MK: But it's good that it's more out there though, that is good.

AM: Exactly, I mean that's...

MK: The way that system is able to operate so freely is because it's very hard to divine. So these people making it much more overt is great, I think, for us. Like, obviously, it's not great, but...

AM: No, no, it is. Because especially all the tech overlords who were doing all this virtue signalling during Trump's first term, you had Zuckerberg, you know, all of the algorithmic

like, you know, tie in with the Atlantic Council to scrub the unsavoury viewpoints on Facebook. I mean, all this was kind of under the auspices of like the liberal establishment trying to sanitise our reality from like the basket of deplorables or whatever they called Trump supporters. And you even saw Google executives going out and doing protests against the Muslim ban in 2016. Google's mantra, don't be evil. So now I think they've all, I mean, obviously they all resigned to the fact Trump is here and we're just gonna capitalise on it and we'll just gonna reveal who we really are, which was right-wing billionaires all along. We don't give a shit about DEI, or wokeism or any of that stuff, it was always just a cover for actually the Republicans to pretend like they were somehow populist and anti-corporate, but it was always fake. And it was never based in any reality. It was just them capitalising on where the current of culture was at the moment. And now they don't have to do that anymore.

MK: Yeah, exactly. It's true. It is true. It's interesting. Like the other point about the propaganda system and how it operates so well is that it is bifurcated in the sense of like, there's the establishment media where you can't talk about American imperialism, British imperialism and whatever, and then there is the media that you can, but that's the only place with a significant amount of funds that you could fund that is places like RT or PressTV or like - which if you start there, you'll get smeared, you'll be attacked by the mainstream. So there's nothing in the middle of that.

AM: Once a Russian agent, always a Russian agent; I'm never getting that of me.

MK: Exactly. You're a good example. I mean, your preference wouldn't have been to start at RT, I'm sure, but where else were you going to get a show where you could do anti-imperialist...? And that's why it's so effective. And actually now there are more and more spaces and they've come up with a new way to take back control of the narrative, which is to sully any information which isn't got through legacy institutions by starting this whole campaign that it is disinformation and misinformation. Now there's loads of new organisations against those. And if you start looking into who their funders are, it goes back often to the UK Foreign Office, USAID, all those kinds of things. And it has happened at the same time as they've lost control over a lot of narratives because of social media and stuff. And now there's this attempt to smear any information not got through the New York Times or the Washington Post as misinformation; this is you can't trust anything you read on.

AM: Yeah, exactly. And because of the censorship called decried by liberals and called for by liberals, now everything's being syphoned and funnelled into right wing media spheres, especially pretending like there's some sort of vanguard or bulwark against like the liberal media monolith. But really, they are just as powerful. They control much more actually, at this point. I mean, every AM talk radio station, every top YouTube channel, every Twitch streamer, I mean, it's all right wing. But because really, like you pointed out earlier, the real threat is left-wing politics, is actually a challenge to capitalism. Of course, this is just gonna be the inevitability of that, right? So they're gonna suppress anything that's actually a challenge to power or undermines the status quo. And just everything's gonna be gravitated over to the right wing.

I wanna move on to the power of Britain still around the world. You know, you're working on a new project that really does a deep dive in this, Matt, and I'm super excited for it because, you know, this show is called The Empire Files, obviously, we focus on the US, but you've been doing such close study on how Britain has been actively involved as a junior collaborator, how it's just folded in its empire previously into the US as its subservient, you now, as its little junior partner here. I guess let's start by talking about how that happened, how the British Empire never really dissolved. It just simply tethered itself to the US.

MK: Yeah, so the fable is that after the Second World War, India got independence soon after the end of the Second War, then into the 60s, all the African colonies got independence, colonies in East Asia. And everyone thinks this in the UK, that that was the moment the empire was decommissioned, it was over. But what you start seeing if you look into it is that that never happened. Obviously the formal colonies went. In fact, not all of them, you know, we still got 13 British overseas territories and plus military bases all over the world from Bahrain to Qatar, Nepal, Cyprus, Gibraltar. The infrastructure of empire was never decommissioned and it's still used for an empire. Yes, it's now, as you said, we're an adjunct to the US empire. But interestingly, before we started Declassified UK in 2019, and as we've been talking about, most of my work beforehand focused on the United States. Mainly because I was like, the United States is the most powerful country in the world, what happens there and what it does around the world is much more important than everywhere else. And I still believe that's true, and I always thought that Britain was kind of like a nothing. Uh, like it was just an embarrassment. Well, it is an embarrassment in terms of its relationship with the US power. But I always thought they didn't have any role. But then when we started to declassify, I realised Jesus, we have an outsized role, even in the Gaza genocide, for example.

I've been doing a lot of work about the role that Cyprus plays in the US, UK, supporting Israel in the genocide in Cyprus. And actually Cyprus is another good example of how the empire was never decommissioned because Cyprus got independence from Britain in 1960. But what happened? We retained 3% of the island, which is still British sovereign territory and turned it into massive intelligence and military bases, also US ones. And that's one of the ways we remain relevant to the United States is we opened up all our overseas territories, all our bases to the Americans to use as they want. And the other interesting thing is, as a journalist, you can get information about what UK forces do on UK bases, or some. But there's no mechanism for getting any information about what the Americans do. So they operate as black sites to the Americans. The Cypriot base that I'm talking about, where special forces, American special forces have been flying to Israel from, I've never been able to get any information. They just say we do not comment on allies movements on our bases. So there's this whole infrastructure of empire, which is now an appendage to the American empire, but we do have a hugely important role.

The other part of it is the city of London, which in many ways is the financial capital of the world. Obviously, there's New York, but the city of London through these overseas territories runs most of the tax havens in the world where all the 1% in the world stash their wealth so they don't have to contribute to any public goods. And that has a hugely important role as

well. And also the city of London. Outside of the UK, not many people know this, but it's a whole different jurisdiction to Britain. It has its own government. So there's that role. Then there's the corporate role, you know, which is like we have some of the biggest corporations in the world, like Exxon Mobil, BP, BAE Systems, one of the big arms companies, which is actually expanding rapidly in the United States as well. And they're all operating out of London and have huge impact on the world and also have colonised our government. Our government often works for them. So MI6 is famous for being very, very close to BP. And then if you look at covert operations, wars, the British are always there. Look at what happened in Syria, the dirty war in Syria. The British were major players in that. Seymour Hersh found that the CIA, when they were trying to get approval for it, and they were wanting to run guns from post-Gaddafi Libya to Syria, they couldn't get approval unless they ran it as a liaison operation, so they ran as a MI6 liaison operation and then MI6 were getting the guns from Gaddafi's Libya to Syria.

If you look at every single American imperial crime, the British are there, and in some places they're there in bigger numbers than the Americans. Ukraine is a very good example. Boris Johnson was the one that went and said, you can't accept this negotiation to Zelensky early on, which could have stopped the war in its tracks. And Britain now is just gung-ho on Ukraine like no other country. And what it is, I believe is, it's like when British power waned, we have a really ugly establishment here that is pickled in ancient-private schools and this kind of Mason style elite that ran the world for a couple of hundred years but they didn't want to lose it and they haven't lost that mentality so they'll do anything to retain it and if they didn't make themselves basically a servant of the United States they would be a country like Italy or France or something. You know, like a country which I much prefer. Like, I don't want us to be – I mean, France is involved in its own imperial stuff, but it would be much harder for us to give this pretence that we're this major global power if we weren't a servant of the United States. Now, they don't present it like this, they present it with these words like special relationship and stuff. But you see that the British literally don't do anything that is against Washington.

AM: And you've also said that the US has quite a bit of soldiers and boots on the ground as well.

MK: Well, again, and this is an amazing part of what you're talking about, about the invisible empire, and this is shocking. But like we've had a US military presence since the early 1950s. And now there's over 12,000 US troops in the UK. Now, that figure, which I did a story on, I got the details from parliament, that figure has never ever been in a British newspaper or on any British media. So no one ever had, no journalist in the whole of the UK has ever thought that someone might want to know how many foreign troops or how many American troops are in this country. Amazing. But that's that's the way it goes. It's just assumed that we just do whatever for the United States. And then the other part of that is the intelligence ones. And obviously, we don't have any information about how many CIA and NSA are in the UK. But Edward Snowden's leak showed that GCHQ Bude, which is the huge intelligence site in Cornwall, where all the transatlantic cables go, Edward Snowden found that 50% of the

upkeep of GCHQ Bude in the UK is paid for by the NSA. And also in Cyprus, his leak showed that the Dhekelia, which is the intelligence station in Cyprus on the British colony, is 50% paid for by NSA as well. So there's this hand in glove. And basically the relationship is we do what we're told. We do completely what we're told.

And you see that with Starmer's visit to Washington, you know, he was with Trump in the Oval Office yesterday. He was just like uhhh, uhhh, like it was embarrassing to watch. He's a nonentity. And also when he was in opposition, and then in power during the Gaza thing, I literally could trace it when the policy changed in the Biden White House, like even the wording, the next day, the policy of the Labour Party and Starmer would change; literally word for word. So our foreign policy is written in Washington completely and that's not just rhetoric, that's a fact. And it doesn't have to be like this. We could be an independent nation. In 1966, Charles de Gaulle kicked all US troops out of France and they're still not there. Most of them came to the UK actually, but it is possible to stand up to the United States, but there's no appetite for it. So it's this invisible empire. It's a whole infrastructure of control that literally doesn't exist in the mainstream. So, it's quite astounding and quite scary as well, because you realise that they control other parts of our society that really you should really worry about, like the Julian Assange case showed; you know, like the judiciary. Why was he in Belmarsh maximum security prison for five years after he hadn't been convicted of anything? And in fact, you that Yahoo news article that came out where the CIA or the 30 US officials talked about what happened under Trump during the first administration when Pompeo said, we want sketches for how to assassinate him, Julian Assange in London in London, in the article, it said British police agreed to do the shooting on the street, if need be. So you're talking about the Home Office, MI5, just basically saying, okay, for this crazy

AM: We're gonna go and kill a journalist. What do you want us to do? Let us know.

MK: And again, never been mentioned. The whole article has never been mentioned on the BBC, so no one knows about it.

AM: It was probably, the lead was probably buried in paragraph 20 and you know, it's just the thing that's so creepy I think just as the Gaza genocide has unfolded is seen just how subservient European powers are to the US dictates. I mean just doing whatever they want going and just arresting and raiding journalists homes. I'm surprised you haven't gotten raided yet, Matt.

MK: I know that's what people say. But it goes to the same thing, look what happened here. So you had Sarah Wilkinson, Asa Winstanley, who you know, who's a brilliant journalist, Richard Medhurst, another independent journalist, Kit Klarenberg before that, there's a whole list of them. Not one word has ever appeared in a UK newspaper, including The Guardian, about any of those things. Is that not scary to you?

AM: Because they don't...

MK: To me that's more scary than the raids themselves.

AM: Of course. But the thing is you know why?! It's the same reason they don't talk about why Palestinian journalists are being gunned down. They don't consider people who are not within the establishment circles, real journalists, Matt. And so there's no worry.

MK: But it means that the public realm is completely undefended. You realise when they come for any of us, all the institutions telling us will defend us, they won't exist. And a lot of them actually are funded, civil society, it came out, didn't it, during this USAID scandal, I guess, with, BBC was one example, but Index on Censorship, which is a free speech organisation got huge funding from the National Endowment for Democracy article 19, it's millions from the National Endowment for Democracy. There is a structural reason as well why they won't defend people who are speaking out against the empire. But then obviously, you don't believe in a principle if you only apply it selectively. That's the thing. And as you say, like they don't see us as journalists. If they allow it to happen to us then it will start happening to more and more people and they start with easy targets...

AM: Of course, well, I wanna just say something really quickly before we wrap up here. The ASPI, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which is one of the world's premier avenues of anti-China propaganda. This is insane. It's an Australian pro-war anti-china think tank. The executive director just wrote today on Twitter, basically that we need to suspend our operations because of a lack of state department funding. I mean, what on earth? That the State Department was funding this Australian anti-China think tank. It's like, hold on, hold one, what is going on? Like I thought, think tanks by definition were incubators for government policy and ideas and instead you have the State Department directly funding foreign think tanks to then undermine – I mean, it's just an unbelievable incestuous relationship here. But Matt, it's all out in the open now, which I guess is one benefit is just, yeah, Trump's really unmasking the nature of empire. I want to wrap with this, and I've heard this question so many times and I'm just curious what your response would be to it, that if we weren't the empire, then China or Russia would be. So isn't it better that we're on top, Matt? Because naturally, their question is like the hierarchical nature of just society. It's like you have to have a dominant ruling power.

MK: Well, firstly, my analysis of empire is not that some are good. I mean some people do that. I mean, on the left, there is a kind of some people that will – I think if there's a massive imbalance of power and power naturally tends to want to dominate the lesser powers, but a better system for me in that with that premise is that you have a multipolar world where when there's independent countries that actually are working for the interests of their people and are independent of external power have different poles they can organise around and they can play them off against each other and they can survive in that ecosystem. The problem after the end of the Second World War was that there was no competitor to the United States and it was a bleak time for the left, the 90s particularly before Chavez got in but there was like the Zapatistas in 1994, but it was a pretty bleak time. But as the power of China particularly has grown, it's allowed countries to escape the clutches of the American Empire. For example, like Venezuela is a good example, Bolivia as well. I doubt if there was not the infrastructure of Chinese power, and that includes spies and the high-tech defence mechanisms against US

power, they wouldn't have survived. Interesting, I do feel like the empires also do have different dynamics and different complexions and China does seem a less militaristic empire, even though it's obviously much younger than the American empire, but a Chinese power doesn't seem to be as militaristic as America was at the same time in its development. If you look at the interventions in Central America during the early 20th century, it was just wild. They invaded Honduras like five or six times in 20 years. They invaded Haiti in 1915 and stole all their gold. Like it was everywhere. And China hasn't done that. They've got one overseas base so far in Djibouti compared to 800 for the Americans. So that might change. It might become that they're more militaristic but they seem like they are more like, they're not going there for charity. They want to get resources and stuff but they say, look, we'll build this for you if you give us these resources. And if they say no, they say all right, we'll move on to the next one. And whereas the Americans are like, if you say no, we're gonna take you out. I would prefer no empires, obviously, but I think the best scenario is a multipolar world. And also the best scenario is to have an empire which is not as militaristic and as avaricious as the American one, because the 20th century is littered with just unbelievably awful crimes. I mean, often aided and abetted by the British too.

AM: Wounded empires will lash out. I mean, even if the aspects are paper tigers, they're going to be very militaristic and desperate as their power wanes. And so as we enter a multipolar world with burgeoning things like BRICS, the Global South taking matters into their own hands, hoping to make these Western institutions irrelevant, I mean that is my hope, but I'm worried about what we're going to see as a reaction to that power shift.

MK: I agree with that. And the other dangerous thing about the American wounded tiger or whatever you want to call it, is that it is a very unbalanced empire. It's very, very strong militarily, extraordinarily strong military, but not economically anymore. And the propensity in that situation is to use your comparative advantage. So America's comparative advantage is massive military, which is a trillion dollars a year, the Pentagon budget. Then you've got all the intelligence stuff. You've got the base infrastructure around the world. I mean, someone like Trump's gonna be like, why aren't we using this? And there was a famous Colin Powell quote, where he was talking to someone and he said, "What's the point of having this massive military if we don't use it?" And that is, if you have a military that big, you're spending that much of your GDP on it, and you got a hammer that big everything starts to look like a nail. So yeah, it is extraordinarily dangerous. And it's very, very hard to fight because that is overwhelming power. You know, you've got six carrier battle groups as well, which can basically put planes anywhere within, out like a couple of days.

AM: Well, it's kind of a crazy note to end on, but I guess we'll end it there. Matt Kennard, author of *The Silent Coup*, *The Racket*. Thank you so much for coming on The Empire Files and breaking all this down. I cannot wait to read what's next from you.

END

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