Are Arab Autocrats in Danger of Being Overthrown? w/ Vijay Prashad

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Hi, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Montreal for Reason2Resist on July 25th, 2025. Today, we're very pleased to be joined again by Vijay Prashad. Vijay is a historian and journalist. He's the executive director of the Tri-Continental Institute for Social Research. He's also the chief correspondent for Globetrotter and the chief editor of LeftWord Books. He's the author of 40-some-odd books, including The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World, The Poor Nations: A Possible History of the Global South and The Fragility of U.S. Power written with Noam Chomsky. Thank you very much for joining us today, Vijay.

Vijay Prashad (VP): Hey, it's a pleasure. Come on. Great to be with you. Yeah.

DL: So much I want to discuss with you, Vijay. Every time I talk to you, I learn so much. And with the cataclysmic events going on in West Asia, I wanted to focus our discussion there today. Yesterday, as Israel continued its daily mass slaughter of Palestinians, French President Emmanuel Macron announced with much fanfare that France would recognize the state of Palestine. And you had some choice words for his announcement. Could you share with us your view on this supposedly historic decision by France's president?

VP: I mean, you know, the reason that that announcement bothered me, Dimitri, is that it's basically the UN position. The UN has recognized the state of Palestine. Three quarters of the countries in the UN have recognized the State of Palestine. It's just the old West that has been holding out – the United States, you know, most of Western Europe and so on. Just because a Western European country has now decided to say we recognize the state of Palestine shouldn't earn them so many plaudits. It's like Ursula von der Leyen finally saying, you

know, what's happening in Palestine is terrible. After so many years of a genocide taking place there they make these timid moves, you know. I mean at the same time will they continue to support Israel with weapons? Will they continue to support Israel with logistics and so on? Why not just come out and say we are breaking ties with Israel. That would be something. Then I would say Macron, you know, you are no longer the boy king – now you have become a man. Or something like that. You know, I'm not sure what I would say, but I certainly would appreciate it if he said something like even threatening to break relations with Israel on this – if you don't let food enter Gaza now, your ambassador goes home. But this is like as I said it's like saying that gravity exists.

DL: So let's compare this to the reaction of the Global South to this genocide. On July 15th and 16th, representatives of about 30 nations assembled in Columbia to discuss coordinated action to stop the genocide and hold Israel accountable. They called their initiative The Hague Group. Most but not all of the members of this group come from the Global South. And then, at the end of a two day summit on July 16th, as I understand it, 12 of the participating nations of The Hague Group signed a statement committing them to take various measures against Israel, including an arms embargo. All of the signatories of this statement were from the non-Western world. Not one European or North American country signed the statement. There's no indication that any of them will. One of the countries, however, that didn't sign the statement, but participated in the summit, I was surprised by this, was the People's Republic of China. And China, according to data published recently by Al Jazeera, remains one of Israel's largest trading partners. It is the third largest buyer of Israeli exports and the largest, by far, provider of imports to the State of Israel. Now, of course, I would be the first to say that Western governments are primarily responsible for this genocide because they're the ones that arm Israel and that protect Israel at instant international institutions. But I've been mystified by the Chinese government's approach. It would seem to me that this is an extraordinary opportunity for China to emerge not only as an economic, military and political leader, but as a moral leader. And I'm interested in your take on why China appears to have taken a rather restrained approach with respect to Israel's genocide.

VP: Yeah, I mean, I don't know what happened in Colombia. I mean most likely it was a junior official who didn't feel authorized to sign a statement. That most likely was the case. But I think we have to understand Chinese foreign policy with a little bit of history, if that's OK. I mean, initially, when the Chinese Revolution took place in 1949, China had a kind of forward policy. In fact, quite adventurous, enthusiastically telling other communist groups to start armed struggles and so on. This went right through the Cultural Revolution. You know, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government went in the opposite direction, having felt the negative impact of that adventurism. You know? "Go out and make a revolution" didn't really work anywhere. The Chinese government became, as I said, very much the opposite, which was "we don't interfere in other people's internal affairs". And in making that sort of pivot in the other direction, China made some foreign policy choices that I think in retrospect, even the Chinese government, even those officials then, would regret. For instance, you know, recognizing the government of Augusto Pinochet in Chile and so on.

When you go to the other end and say we don't interfere in your internal affairs, then you can make alliances with anybody because you're not interfering in the internal affairs.

China in the last 10 years has been, in a sense, trying to figure out what a modulated foreign policy would be, somewhere between the terrible adventurism and the terrible detachment, trying to find a way to engage. In fact, it's very interesting. Up to 2009, China never joined any international body. It didn't join the G77. It didn't join the Non-Aligned Movement. It was only from 2009 that we saw China start to join things. It joined the BRICS, became the C in BRICS – very unusual. Earlier, China had created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, bringing together various countries in Central Asia who were worried about the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s. But that was a Chinese initiative. It's different from China joining somebody else's initiative. So, it has begun to shift and shape a new foreign policy. I think we are in a kind of period of transition. Part of that period of transition meant that China brought the 14 factions of the Palestinian Resistance Movement to Beijing to sign a historical agreement for the first time in about 40 years that they were able to actually come together. I mean, they split in Oslo in 1994. There were those who accepted Oslo, like most of the PLO group – like Fatah accepted Oslo. And then there was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and so on, who rejected the Oslo Agreement. They all came together in Beijing for the first time since the early 1990s to sign the 14-party agreement to rebuild Palestinian politics.

It's not like China hasn't been involved. It's been making also strong statements against the genocide. But there is this side of Chinese foreign policy, which has not been extinguished, which says that we don't interfere in your internal affairs. And so the trade ministry continues with trade. I mean, you know, I would say that this is that period of transition where they are not willing to come out frontally and engage the United States when it comes to other parts of the world, not yet. And at the same time, they are trying to sort of enter into conversations where they had previously been a bystander. So let's see what happens. I mean, it's an enormous bureaucracy, the Chinese Communist Party, 100 billion people. The foreign ministry is extremely large and not all radicals. It is very wrong to think of them as all communists or something. There are lots of people who are career bureaucrats there. They have a certain view of the world. So it's a moment of change. And I don't think one can say, well, this or that based on – I saw the Al Jazeera infographic and I thought, well, it's really without context. What are they trying to say? It is without context.

DL: Right. Let's focus now on the other Arab states and the ones that are particularly well positioned to assist the Palestinian people. You know, after almost two years, I mean it boggles the mind, it's been almost two years that this genocidal rampage has been broadcast to the entire world. And even today, countries like Egypt and Jordan, their governments, their regimes, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, continue to stand by and effectively take no concrete action to put an end to the slaughter. And at the same time, there's plenty of evidence that the peoples of these countries are seething with anger. I remember seeing, I think it was only a few months into the genocide, there was a poll that was done in Saudi Arabia that showed an excess of 90% of Saudis at that time wanted Saudi Arabia to sever all ties with

Israel. And what I'm curious to know is whether you see any signs of political instability within these countries in the region that could play a part but have refused to do so. Of course they've used harsh language. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, I think on several occasions has actually referred to this as a genocide. But there's been no concrete action taken as far as I can see. So I would imagine that at some point, something's going to break. Do you see signs of political instability in any of the major autocracies in the region, Western-backed autocracies?

VP: Well, it's interesting, Dimitri, because there was a new moment that opened up in 1952 in Egypt when Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers took over the government and overthrew King Farouk. That was the beginning of a contest between republicanism, Arab nationalism and monarchism. You know, King Farouk in Egypt, but also monarchies everywhere. That was exhausted, in a sense, by the 1970s and 80s, that period. The peace agreement between Egypt and Israel done by Anwar Sadat in 1979 was in a sense the beginning of the closing of the Republican period and the monarchies. Saudi Arabia and the lead was strengthened by the emergence of the petrodollar in that same decade. It sort of lifted these monarchies up, which had seemed like they were all going to crumble in the face of republican pressure. Even in Iran, the Shah was overthrown in 1979, the monarchy ended, the Iranian people celebrated that they have a republic. Even now it's a republic. It may be theocratic, but it's a republic, it's not a monarchy. Big contest in the Arab world between republicanism and monarchalism.

By the 1970s, the Republicans started to lose remnants of Republican states who were overthrown later. Saddam Hussein's Iraq gave itself to the monarchies to do their bidding against Iran from 1980 to 1988, and then he was overthrown. Eventually, there was an overthrow of the government in Libya. In Egypt, they already surrendered to Israel. Now, President Sisi is basically an errand boy for the Saudis. And the regime in Syria was overthrown in December and Al-Qaeda fellow Ahmed al-Sharaa is in power there. So in a sense, the landscape of West Asia and North Africa are very bad for republicanism, which was the core of the support for the Palestinian struggle. They are the ones who provided military support are not the Arab countries, the monarchies. They did not. Saudis didn't provide armed assistance to them. It was the Republican groups that did. Anyway, they have been defeated. But this genocide has scunnered Egyptian society. And I bet you Mr. Sisi understands that somewhere at military bases across Egypt, there are patriotic Arab nationalists, people who fly planes for the Egyptian military, beautiful planes that they buy from the United States and France, enormous money expended on their military, doing nothing. They're sitting around watching the slaughter. I think Mr.Sisi must mark his words. If there is going to be a breakthrough, it will be if the Egyptian military moves against Mr. Sisi's government. It could happen. We don't know. I don't have any indication. I've met many people in the Egyptian military over the years, really authentic people, patriotic people. I bet they are seething, Dimitri. I don't what they will do, but they must be seetthing.

And I would like to say that in Jordan, you know, half the population is Palestinian. The Queen is Palestinian, she has made very strong statements. I would say that the King better

watch out. You know, if everything breaks out, there's no release for people. I don't know what's going to happen. A new dynamic might open. And we just don't have a reason. The Israelis went and bombed the defense ministry in Syria and areas close to the Damascus Palace of the president where Ahmed al-Sharaa has his office to put pressure on Syria, I believe, to quickly recognize Israel. Because Ahmed al-Sharaa is hedging his bets. He also probably goes to sleep at night thinking of what happened to Anwar al-Sadat. Anwar al-Sadat, the Egyptian president, recognized Israel and then was killed. You know, do you want that fate, Mr. Ahmed al-Sharaa? Because people are angry. So all I can say to you, Dimitri, is one cycle of republicanism has ended. And Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia thinks that he's cock of the hoop. He thinks they control everything. But I will say, I'm sorry, Mr. Ahmed al-Sharaa and Mohammed bin Salman, it's unlikely that you will carry the day after all.

DL: Now, despite all of this appalling failure on the part of all of these governments in the region to act and the West's ongoing, full-throated, multifaceted support for Israel, there are plenty of signs that Israel is in serious trouble. So, just to name a few: the port of Eilat, the only Red Sea port that Israel has, is shut down, due in large part to the efforts of Ansar Allah in Yemen. Israel suffered billions of dollars of damage and quite possibly tens of billions of dollars of damages in the so-called 12-day war with Iran, which just happened. Its debt has been downgraded, I think, twice by ratings agencies. There's evidence that many Israelis, including highly educated Israelis, are abandoning the country. Militarily, more and more reservists in Israel's military are refusing to serve. And Israel's Military recently admitted that there has been a massive decline and reservist turnout whereas there was a 120 % turnout of reservists at the beginning of the genocidal rampage. The level of turnout has now dropped to less than half of that, so it's less than 60 %. And I could go on, there are certainly other indicators of real trouble. How do you assess the sustainability of Israel in its current form? Do you think it's hanging by a thread? Or do you see a realistic possibility that it could maintain this position and continue to behave this way for many years to come?

VP: You see, Dimitri, I think the things that you talked about are very important, but I'm going to make some comments about it and then pivot to another issue. The comment I'll make is you're in Canada. The projected growth rate for Canada is about 1.2, 1.5 %. I mean, the Canadian government is a pathetic government. And, you know, with all that mineral wealth and all those mining companies that are exploiting the rest of the world – Canada has some of the most hideous mining companies exploiting the world and you can't manage more than a 1.2, 1.3% growth rate? It's pathetic. Israel in the middle of a war has a projected growth rate of 3.5 to 4%. So yeah, there's money coming in. There's money coming in from the West. There's a war economy. They are booming in terms of growth rates and so on. They're building all kinds of things. Now, that's not going to be their problem. War economies, when you are backed by powerful economies around the world, underwritten by them, by the United States, by Canada, by European countries, you'll be okay. I don't think we need to worry about the Israeli economy. It's going to putter along pretty okay, twice the growth rate of Canada. But where Israel, I think, is in serious trouble is on the question of Zionism, which is a decadent ideology. I mean, Zionism is Jewish supremacy. You wouldn't

tolerate white supremacy in Canada. I mean in Canada you can't even tolerate English supremacy, the language supremacy, forget white supremacy. It's not tolerable for us to have an ethno-religious concept governing our states in the modern world. States are too complicated. Zionism is in crisis and not just from those who are not Jewish, it's in crisis from within. The very fact that orthodox Jews don't want to serve in the military and want an exception has created a cabinet crisis for Mr. Netanyahu. Two parties keep threatening to leave and so on, likely that while we are talking, one of them has left the government. They are really very angry about this because they have a fundamental messianic idea of their mission that they need to pray all the time, they can't be fighting and so on.

But it's Zionism, that's the problem, the idea that those who are Jewish can just arrive in Israel and get land and a home and so on but the Palestinians and others, Armenians and so on, who live within the borders of Israel are second-class citizens. That is why international agencies of the United Nations and human rights groups call Israel an apartheid state. The apartheid state has nothing to do with the occupation of the West Bank, of Gaza and East Jerusalem. That's where the genocide is happening, the extermination, the land grabs. Those are different legal problems that Israel faces – war crimes. But within the borders of 1967 Israel, it is actually conducting an apartheid state. And that's recognized by even Israeli human rights groups. So that's the crisis. Zionism is the crisis. It surprises me that people in the West are having a debate around whether if you're against Zionism, you're an antisemite. Ridiculous idea. There are people who are anti-Marxism, for instance. That doesn't make them anti-German, because Marx was a German. I mean, Zionism is an ideology. I think that ideology is decadent and dangerous. And that's what it is, that ideology is actually crumbling inside Israel. Even those who support the genocide against the Palestinians are not really clear about their Zionism. They're not confident about their Zionism. It's not a confident ideology because it's decadent. It is anachronistic. We don't want supremacist states to exist in the world. It's a thing of the past.

DL: On that note, Vijay, when you talk about the crisis of Zionism, it's interesting to see how Americans – obviously the US is the most important ally that Israel has – how they are feeling about Israel nowadays. There was a poll that was put out by I think it was Quinnipiac University done in late May, published in early June, which showed that I think it was 60 % of Democrats, people who identify as Democrats, had more sympathy today for Palestinians than for Israelis and only 12% had more sympathy for Israelis. There was still a majority of Republican supporters who had more sympathy for Israelis, but the number had dropped by some 14 points since I think the last time they did the survey, which was in 2024. And that was a drop of about 14 points from the prior survey for Republican support. And this all happened before the Epstein scandal blew up. This poll came out in June. And that, of course, has started to raise very serious questions in Republican circles about the role of the Mossad and Epstein's heinous crimes. Do you see a shift, a permanent and massive shift in US public sentiment that could finally force the United States government to deal with this racist ideology in a way that is compliant with fundamental human decency?

VP: I would say that we need to watch and wait, Dimitri, because there's something called Project Esther, which is developed by the Heritage Foundation and others. They name many people, including myself, as foreign agents that are spreading antisemitism and corrupting the youth and that the US Congress should investigate. In fact, Congressional investigation is taking place and there are some – I can't get into too much – but there are some calls for people to appear before the US Congress and so on. So we can't tell because there is a use of the institutional machinery to go after people who are perhaps, I don't know how effective we have been in changing public sentiment, but at least Project Esther believes it. By the way, the list is very interesting. It had a picture of me right next to George Soros and Governor Pritzker of Illinois and my friend Manolo de los Santos from the People's Forum and it named a host of other people, code pink and so on. I just like the fact that I was right next to George Soros. I wonder how George feels about that, you know, probably not that keen to have me next to him. Well, you know, some people on the internet seem to believe that I do, which is another fantasy, a beautiful fantasy. Here I am always trying to get money for our projects. And people say, well, you know, he's hooked up with the Chinese government or some other nonsense like that. But this form of state delegitimization is coming. I mean, it's going to happen. They're going to fight back. So when you say tide turning public opinion, I just want to be careful that they are able to turn a switch and move public opinion in a way by really being quite nasty and the institutional machinery is on their side. They just bring one person in and arrest them and say they are agents of Iran or something. That really turns public. So I'm wary. The United States is a very, very peculiar communication landscape, a little bit like Canada. I mean, so peculiar the way in which the radio dial can be moved. You don't even know it's happening sometimes. But suddenly all the Canadian broadcasting companies are going in one direction. And you're like, but all the newspaper covers look the same. Why? Why are they all moving like that? It's interesting. I mean Chomsky has a theory but you know his theory and well so be it.

DL: Yeah, well, I happen to be [inaudible] having spent a lot of time outside of Canada – I'm sorry to say Canadians are amongst the most brainwashed people on earth, but that's just me, man. So I'd like to turn now to the subject of Iran. And since the end of the 12-day war, Vijay, there's been much discussion about whether the Islamic Republic is receiving military aid from Russia and China, and there were reports that China was providing air defense systems and its advanced J-10 fighter jets to Iran. But China's ambassador to Israel in an interview with Israel HaYom flatly denied that China was providing air defense systems and cast doubt, although it wasn't a definitive denial, he cast doubt on whether China would provide fighter jets to Iran. So I'm curious, what do you think is the reality here, Vijay? Do you believe China is providing military assistance or is poised to provide significant military assistance to Iran? And if so, what can you say about the nature and extent of that military assistance?

VP: I like the way you said, what can you say? Because this is a very interesting topic. Firstly, I would say that it is quite incredible that just as we talk, maybe 12 or 15 hours ago, the Iranians launched a communication satellite into space, which they released the video of the separation happening. Very extraordinary images. They have extremely sophisticated technological developments in Iran. I mean, it's Iranian drones that have been reconfigured by

the Russians to be used in Ukraine. It's not Russian weaponry that they seem to need. Iranians are also extremely proud. They want to build their own stuff. But it is true. They have used SU-35 Soviet era fighter jets for a very long time in Iran. They wanted to upgrade to the Chengdu J-10, which performed extremely well, an earlier version of them for Pakistan in the short one day, really one day air war against India. The other two days were mainly drones, drone swarms. One day the fighter jets were in the air, the J-5s at one side and so on. But anyway, it's very unlikely – if the Chinese provide equipment to the Iranians, it's very unlikely that they will broadcast it now. Very unlikely, because China is extremely wary of frontal confrontation with the United States. They very likely provided air defense systems because Iranian air defense systems operated really well. Either those were domestically made and we didn't know about them or they were the Chinese system which operated extremely well against Indian fighter jets. Neither Indian nor Pakistani fighter jets crossed the border. They fired from each side of the border but the air defense systems could not be taken out. And that's actually what prevented the jets from crossing the border. Because they couldn't take out the air defense systems. They were really sophisticated. No longer is it just like a howitzer, you know, a gun firing into the air. Now it's a sophisticated system of radar jamming and electronic warfare and so on. That's what you mean by air defense system. Unless the Iranians have developed it themselves, those were Chinese systems. Because they were really effective against the Israeli attacks. I mean, I don't know what the Russians could provide at this point. I know that the Iranians are providing drones to the Russians. Maybe the Russians modified the drones and provided them back to Iran. I don't know about that. It's very difficult to tell. But I think with the Chinese, Dimitri, the way you phrased your question is the correct one, which is what can you say? Because really they don't seem to want to say anything and I never believe ambassadors at face value. Never believe – ambassadors are ambassadors. They carry diplomacy to the top and they say things that are not always factual. I mean, we should never take those things altogether seriously. Sometimes they should be taken seriously, but not in this case.

DL: Especially when they're talking to the local media. But can you talk about the bigger picture here? Obviously, I mean, China and the Islamic Republic, I think it was a few years ago, entered into a 25-year strategic partnership. Why is the stability of the Iranian government, the preservation of its sovereignty, so important geopolitically to the People's Republic of China?

VP: Yeah, I mean, look, firstly, Iran is one of the countries that has been very strict about maintaining its sovereignty. As I say, it is a very proud country. People who've been to Iran know that Iranians have an immense sense of their country – the long history that they have and so on. It's a lot like China. They share that. The Chinese people have a very great pride for their country, for its culture, for its long history and so on. There are just a handful of countries in the old world that have been able to maintain this against colonial onslaught. These are very proud countries, very proud civilizations. I think they share that. Beyond that is the fact that Iran is central to the Chinese plans for the Belt and Road that would run into both Europe and to Africa. I mean, if Iran blocks the Belt and Road, there can be no Belt and Road. What are you going to do? Go through Russia and then what? You go through Iran and

then it becomes easier. You can go up into Turkey to Europe, which is what they've done through Lake Van. Now, maybe through Iraq. You can go down, maybe the Syrians would allow it, or most likely Jordanians, you'd run right through to Africa. Why not? I mean, but if Iran collapses, the stability of the region is going to go. Iran is three times the population of Iraq. And as I say, the stability of the Region would be greatly threatened. So, Iran's sovereignty – I think it's taken quite seriously. It's not that anybody is a huge champion of theocracy. Certainly not me. But I'm an enormous champion of sovereignty. I'm certainly not in favor of a theocracy, but sovereignty, 100%.

DL: I'm very curious to know your thoughts about this, Vijay, there's been a lot of talk about these snapback sanctions under the JCPOA. And as I understand these sanctions, it appears that the three European states are very intent upon triggering the snapback sanctions on Iran. And as I understand the way they structured this, neither the PRC nor Russia would be able to exercise its veto to stop the reimposition of sanctions on the Islamic Republic. And so I'm going to ask you to take out your crystal ball here and make a prediction, if in fact these snapback sanctions are brought back? Do you think China and Russia will comply with them? Or do you think that secretly they will do everything they can to continue doing business with the Islamic Republic?

VP: I mean, look, firstly, this is a unique instrument in UN resolutions. It's pioneered in the 2015 JCPOA. It was actually proposed by Sergei Lavrov, just to give you the history of it. It is put in there as a measure to pacify the West at a time when the West felt emboldened to do anything. Russia was dealing with the question of Ukraine at the time, the Maidan and so on, and I think the Russians proposed this just to get the JCPOA through. I don't think they were thinking about its implications. By the way, I think it's a horrible idea that – any power can just say, well, you violated it, so the sanctions are back. There needs to be a pause, a study, a look to see. There can't be something like that. You can't have a UN resolution that says that if you comply with something we're going to withdraw sanctions but then we're going to keep this as a sort of hijack in a way, we're going to keep this on your head, there's a gun at your head forever. I think this is very bad. You don't have confidence in the measure then. You don't have confidence in Iran. And I didn't like it when it was proposed. I don't like it now. I think it's a very bad precedent for the United Nations. A new study published in The Lancet authored by three people including Mark Weisbrot from the Center in Washington DC, CEPR. They do very good research. This study in The Lancet shows that sanctions are there over a quarter of the countries of the world. 40 % of them are US illegal unilateral sanctions, and that about half a million people die a year because of these sanctions. Half a million people! That's a sizable number of people dying because of these sanctions. I think sanctions need to be rethought as an instrument of war. You know, they quote from Woodrow Wilson, who said apparently at the time of the Treaty of Versailles that sanctions are more tremendous than war.

DL: Right. What really blows me away about this situation, Vijay, is that they apparently are able to bring the sanctions back into effect, even though the Trump administration pulled out

of the JCPOA at a time when Iran was complying with the deal. It just blows my mind. How could they possibly have seen that as a fair structure for this sanctions regime?

VP: But on the other hand, I mean, the United States is not a signatory to the international law of the seas, but uses that treaty to conduct freedom of navigation exercises off the coast of China. I mean they use the International Court of Justice when it suits them or the International Criminal Court. The United States has a scoff law, it uses international instruments that it doesn't belong to. Well, what can we say? I've always thought that Canada was supposed to be the liberalizing sort of cousin that whispers in the ear of the crazy American frat boy who wants to destroy – a sort of nice cousin saying, you know, maybe we shouldn't do that. But lately, Canada has been the one running "let's go and destroy the world", you know, in the lead, with people welcoming fascists to the Canadian Parliament and celebrating them. What's happened to that cousin saying "I don't think this is a good idea".

DL: Yeah, well, that cousin is now led by Prime Minister Goldman Sachs, as I like to call him, who just agreed to raise Canada's military spending to 5% of GDP annually. Just mind-blowing.

VP: Excellent idea. Excellent idea!

DL: Yeah, excellent.

VP: Well played, sir, as they say at my favorite sport, cricket.

DL: So lastly, I know you're probably running out of time, Vijay. I want to talk to you about the relations between Pakistan and Iran. You know, there's been a lot of interesting rumors flying around about that relationship. And you know, one of the more, perhaps the most explosive of them, I don't think there's any credible evidence to back it up, but is that Pakistan would consider providing nuclear weapons to Iran if Iran was existentially threatened. I don't want to focus on that, although I'm happy for you to comment on it if you'd like. What I'm more interested in is the prospect that Pakistan would provide conventional military support to the Islamic Republic, and certainly the rhetoric coming out of Pakistan would suggest that it is firmly in the camp of Iran in its struggle with the United States and the genocidal entity. But at the same time, a lot of us, including me, have always viewed the government of Pakistan as being rather, shall we say, deferential to the United States. And so it's hard to imagine, given the history of those relations, that Pakistan would do something as provocative to the United States government as providing any kind of weaponry to Iran. What do you think is the reality of the Pakistani government's perspective on this? Do you think there is a real possibility of them providing meaningful military support to Iran?

DL: Yeah, I mean, I would say that the situation is extremely fluid. I mean Pakistan and Iran, you may know, exchanged missile fire just a few years ago around the question of the Baloch population which straddles the border. Some Baloch militants went across the border to do an

operation. They have that contradiction. There are also lots of anti-Shiah voices within Pakistan. It's a very complicated thing. But when it comes to an attack on Iran, I think almost 90 percent of the public would support defending the Islamic Republic. I mean, there's no question about that. Look, if I was the Iranian government right now, I would say let's just go nuclear. You know, let's enrich and let's make a bomb because we take the North Korea road. They declared nuclear power in 2006. Nobody dares attack North Korea. Libya decided to surrender its nuclear arsenal in 2003 and was overthrown in 2011. I would – if I was the government in Myanmar – I would ask North Korea to send me a bomb. I mean, this is the problem with US foreign policy. It's not a foreign policy for non-proliferation. It's a foreign policy for proliferation. Countries are just going to say the only thing that could protect us is if we have a nuclear bomb. It doesn't make me happy to say that. I'm just saying it to you rationally. That's what they are probably thinking. So yeah, if Pakistan says we're going to drive a bomb across the border I don't see the Iranians saying no, no, we don't want it because Ayatollah Khamenei has given a fatwa against weapons of mass destruction. I mean the Iranian's faced West German and American mustard gas from the Iraqis. So that's the context in which Ayatollah Khamenei gave the fatwa against the use of weapons of mass destruction. Iranian soldiers were breathing mustard gas and dying in trains, taking them back to Tehran. They are firmly against these kinds of weapons, but they may rethink it saying, you know what? If it's regime change, it may be the only deterrence we have. And so, it's on the table. You asked, you said smilingly, Pakistani government or military differential to the US, things are extremely fluid in Pakistan, you never know what's happening. The most popular prime minister, most popular politician in Pakistan is sitting in jail, largely because of his policies of tilting away from the United States. He remains the most popular. If Imran Khan snaps his fingers tomorrow, things could happen. He's sitting in jail biding his time. Let's see what happens.

DL: Also, before I let you go, you mentioned North Korea. That is also a country one would think that is a very likely candidate to have provided or to provide in the future military support to Iran. Could you talk to us about that prospect and also what are the stakes for North Korea in this struggle between the Islamic Republic and the US and Israel?

DL: Well, the first thing one would say is that North Korea's adventurism has really calmed down a lot. They are watching what's happening in the South. One president indicted, thrown out, new president in, wants to have some kind of sunshine policy toward the North, also hemmed in by the US, an election in Japan, which brings forces to play who are not in favor of a very right-wing foreign policy. I mean, if you're in North Korea, you're watching the developments in Northeast Asia closely. So, too, in China. They are watching this closely. The Chinese don't want an adventurous North Korean foreign policy. You know, I mean I just think that North Korea has been rather quiet of late. I don't know if you have noticed that it is just sort of biding its time and watching. Now, whether North Korea has provided, it has certainly provided troops to fight in Ukraine. That is without a doubt. I mean, they are playing an interesting game saying, you know, well, it's not – but I think those are regular North Korean soldiers that are fighting in Ukraine because they understand a couple of things. One is, we don't know what a Russian victory is, but we certainly know what a

Russian defeat would be. A Russian defeat would embolden NATO. And nobody wants that. That's the reason why there's stalemate out there in Ukraine. None of these countries – you know, they may have been against Russia's entry into Ukraine, but we cannot see Russia be defeated. I think that's their position. They would say we cannot see Russia defeated. So I think certainly there was support for Russia. You are asking about Iran. I think that is to be seen. These things would be extremely secret because again, the Iranians are very very proud people, very against assistance. It's interesting. There are developments happening in West Asia that are interesting. The chessboard, as you know some people like to say, is moving very quickly including with the issue of Russia in the whole region. It's moving very, very quickly.

DL: The final comment for me is, it's very interesting to compare, contrast, how Western governments have dealt with their support for Ukraine, as opposed to how these major governments from the non-Western world address the issue of their support for Iran. How many press releases have we seen coming from Western governments in which they meticulously detail, we're sending this many 150 millimeter shells and HIMARS and Patriot missile systems and so on and so forth – but the non-Western powers play their cards very close to their chest, which is, I think probably the wiser course of action. I suspect you would agree with that.

Well, you know, in a way, Dimitri, I know this is a cliché, but it is the old world and the new world. The old world is to some extent shaped by the palace and the bazaar, by intrigue and carefulness and so on. The Soviet Union had a leadership that came from that old world. The only ones who were somewhat of a new world character were those who came from a genuinely very poor working-class background. The one that was most like that was Khrushchev – you know, takes his shoe off in the UN and bangs it on the table and so on. Stalin's mother was a domestic servant. His father was a landless agricultural worker. Brash in their language and style. But the others who come from, let's say backgrounds of petty professionals or petty entrepreneur backgrounds, some shop here and there, they come with a bazaar palace mentality. I share that mentality. I come from that world. I understand that world. The new world was a world of so-called self-made people, standing at their shops and yelling their wares, you know, "come and get it, come and get my new shoes or come and get this". And there's an attitude in the quote unquote new world of "we're giving weapons away". Whereas in the old world, you're like, you know, we think it may be useful. These are cultures. Cultures take a very long time to change. It's not just the West and the East, but these are cultures. Edward Said's critique of Orientalism sometimes was a little too far. There is something to the way these worlds are different.

DL: Absolutely. It is always a pleasure to speak with you, Vijay, and I hope we can have another discussion and we're still alive to have one in the months ahead.

VP: Well, it's that question of health insurance.

DL: Take care very much. This is Demetri Lascaris coming to you from Montreal on July 25th, 2025.

END

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