



Trump Is Banging His Head Against a BRICS Wall w/ John Helmer

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Greece for Reason2Resist on September 5th, 2025. For some time now and long before Donald Trump met with Vladimir Putin in Alaska three weeks ago, we've been saying on this program until we're blue in the face that despite all of his pro-peace rhetoric, Donald Trump does not want to bring a sustainable peace to Ukraine. What he wants, rather, is for the war to continue, but for Europeans to fund it so that the United States can focus its increasingly limited military and economic resources on West Asia and China. On this program, we've predicted that the summit in Alaska would change nothing on the ground, that no meaningful concessions would be made to the Russian Federation, that the fighting would continue and that the Europeans would play the role of spoilers, which is to say, they would adopt a maximalist and inflexible negotiating position that would destroy any possibility of a peace deal with Russia. After that, Donald Trump would be able to say to his disgruntled MAGA base that he's trying really, really hard to bring the war to an end, but those damned Europeans and the Ukrainian president are unwilling to make simple and fair concessions to Russia. So far, in our view, this is essentially what has happened.

Not only that, but since the summit in Alaska, Trump's attitude toward Russia and its allies has become considerably more belligerent. For example, less than two weeks after the Alaska summit concluded, the Trump administration announced that it had approved the sale of \$825 million worth of 3,350 extended-range attack munition, or ERAM, missiles to Ukraine. At around the same time, the Trump Administration imposed 50% tariffs on India, one of the biggest buyers of Russian oil, as punishment for buying that oil. So what does all of this mean for the future trajectory of this war? Now here to discuss all of this with us is John Helmer, a frequent guest on Reason2Resist. John is the longest continuously serving foreign correspondent in Russia and the only Western journalist to direct his own bureau, independent of national or commercial ties. Born and educated in Australia, then at Harvard University, John has also been a professor of political science, sociology and journalism, and

an advisor to governments, including those of Greece and Australia. He's also published several books on military and political topics, including *Long Live Novichok: The British Poison Which Fooled the World*. Great pleasure to have you back on the program, John. Thank you.

John Helmer (JH): Thank you for having me, Dimitri. As for arguing until we're blue in the face, my face isn't blue, but the audience can see my shirt is.

DL: Hopefully your face won't join your shirt. Let's get into a very interesting and quite revealing op-ed which you sent to me in the last day or two. In an interview you gave on Reason2Resist several months ago, John, you introduced our audience to a character by the name of A. Wess Mitchell. Mitchell, for those of you who haven't heard this name, is an American strategist, historian and former diplomat. Who served as the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs from 2017 to 2019 under the first Trump administration. In 2019 he co-founded the Marathon Initiative, a grand strategy think tank, along with another character by the name of Elbridge Colby. John has also introduced us to that particular individual. And you've previously described Mitchell, and I think also Colby, John, as the brains behind Trump's foreign policy. Mitchell has just authored an op-ed, the one you shared with me, that was published in the Conservative National Interest on September 2nd. It was titled: *How to Understand Trump's Russia Strategy*. And after I read it, John, I frankly found nothing in it which seemed to me to reflect a genuine desire for a true peace between Russia and the United States. The article seemed to be all about pressuring Russia, weakening Russia, buying time for the US and Europe to rearm. And toward the end of his piece, Mitchell predicted that the Ukraine war would become a, quote unquote, frozen conflict, which, as I understand it, is precisely what the Russian government wants to avoid. What it wants, rather, is for its core security concerns to be addressed in a way that brings lasting peace to the region. So with all of that as background, John, please give us your take on this article. What does this piece tell us about the reality of Trump's policies towards Russia in the context of what has happened in the past few weeks?

JH: That's a tall order. Let's try without going blue in the shirt and blue in the face at the same time. Wess Mitchell, just to be clear, is a business partner of Elbridge Colby, who's now Deputy Secretary of Defense, soon to be Deputy Secretary of War. It's to be renamed the Department of War any time soon, possibly today, Friday, with an executive order from President Trump. Colby and Mitchell make money together. They did that before the election and after the election, Colby went into the Pentagon. He works under and reports to Steven Feinberg, a particularly characteristic type of speculative business investor close to Trump and a source of funding for Trump's elections. Now, these chaps have several interests together. It's not true to say they're not interested in money. They're interested in a future with money and power. So to understand this particular op-ed, it's to defend Trump from the charge that he gave concessions to Putin simply by being there in Alaska or by not being aggressive against Putin as if the fly-over of the B-2 accompanied by other aircraft wasn't enough aggressive for some of the hotter members of the MAGA constituency. So Mitchell is defending Trump's strategy and spells it out as a case of sequencing US war making so that it

doesn't face a war loss that will be politically damaging and therefore financially damaging and in their power after the midterms in 2026 and the succession to Trump in 2028. So these are relatively young men who have an investment in the future, monetarily, politically and therefore militarily, which is the area of policy they focus on. So sequencing war means defending Trump against the criticism that he might be about to lose the Ukraine war.

And so on the one hand, the worst nightmare for them would be a Kabul exit – unilateral capitulation of the Ukrainian army in Kiev, which would force all the US military officers, advisors, CIA men and so forth to climb on helicopters and fly away and rush to the Polish border. They don't want a Saigon 75 or a Kabul exit. Why? Remember these people are politicians, they think in terms of White House electioneering. None of these peacemaking initiatives that Trump celebrates, not one and certainly not the combination over the last few months, has added to the approval rating that he currently measurably has. Disapproval of his performance in the Ukraine has increased by percentage points, according to the last Gallup poll I saw that measured disapproval of handling of Ukraine, which is a majority, between nine between February 2025 and July 2025. So disapproval of Trump in the electorate threatens these fellows power, money, reelection power and money. Therefore you can deduce the kinds of policies that they are pursuing in general – sequencing the wars, going against enemies that they can demonstrate to be easy to hit because they can't get back.

The Iran nuclear bombing obliteration was Trump's initiative to demonstrate that, but he tried another obliteration operation during this past week. Everybody has seen the video – a speed boat is flying going along the water and there seem to be people in this and all of a sudden everything's obliterated. The Trump word. Subsequently, we're told there was a huge amount of drugs in this vessel. I mean, it's just a speedboat. So how much drug cargo it could carry is doubtful. But in any event, it represents the kind of win militarily, maximum use of force, escalation dominance. But this is against an enemy. That's a speedboat somewhere off the shore of South America, somewhere in the Caribbean, allegedly in the opening of an attack on Venezuela backed up with a bunch of US Navy ships in dock in Panama. The encouraging thing about this – not encouraging for the Maduro government in Venezuela, but it tells you that when the Trump group, including Mitchell in the op-ed and his business pal Colby at the Pentagon, Ministry of War, face an enemy that can conceivably inflict serious damage on them, they go somewhere else. Now they can't be seen to retreat. They can claim some success, although it's often not claimed a success that they have encouraged, persuaded, forced the European states to seriously distort their own domestic budgets in order to pay for these multi-billion dollar and multi- billion euro remilitarizations.

So I'm trying to go from the general back to the particular. If you have Germany investing 50 billion or more euros in remilitarization of Germany, it has to have a serious enemy for an official narrative, and it has to have a particular set of requirements for its military industries to respond, and it has to pay for much of this from the United States. That's the profit seeking of the Trump regime and Trump claims credit for achieving that in Germany. If the same will happen in Great Britain, the same will happen in Poland. Yesterday, President Trump hosted Karol Nawrocki, the new president of Poland, and assured him, in response to press

questions, that the United States is going to either keep its troops allegedly on exercise – allegedly for temporary rotation – and maybe increase its troop commitment to Poland.

Now, increasing troop commitment to Poland, add that to the points you've made about the delivery of long range ordinance to Ukraine and look at Mr Zelensky's program for a billion a euro month or billion dollars a month of fresh military supplies to Ukraine to remilitarize Ukraine, and you've got a group of European regimes, politically weak, but committed to making money for Trump and for themselves and transforming their own domestic budgets to do so. How do you convince people to accept that the hospital down the street is closed down? And this happened all over France. The scandals of the collapse of the NHS in England are very well known. I can't speak for Italy or Germany, but I assume you could speak for Greece – these governments committed to these escalation of expenditures whose money value goes to the United States to bring military equipment back to Europe. First, to remilitarize them, allow US bases to expand there and then to continue the war against Russia so that there are no lost wars anywhere. That's the general strategy. It's politically working. It's successful as a political formula for little Chancellor Merz. I call him little Freddie Merz, why? Because he's got the smallest vote mandate that a Führer committed to attacking Russia – remember in the last few days, Merz called President Putin the worst war criminal in the world. I mean, that's discerned Nuremberg kind of on its head by the German Chancellor who has very low vote support and yet he's getting away with it.

Now, how do you get away with things like that? In Germany, in Great Britain, in France, you get away with it increasingly by repressing resistance. If the resistance takes the form of anti-immigration, if the resistance takes the form of pro-Palestine, you repress it with combinations of laws against public displays of antisemitism. There are a million ways in which repression is working in the US and working in Germany and so forth. So you've got a dynamic, which I hope is obvious to our audience, a dynamic for more war. We've had 100 years of war against Russia, 100 years back to the revolution in 1917. But if you're British, you happen to know that in the 19th century, the British were equally committed to destroying Russia and they went to war in Crimea for that. So we're going to have another 100 years.

And let me say that from my understanding of the Russian decision-makers, the general staff on the one hand, the intelligence services on the other, the Kremlin political calculators and all the other factions, there's a general belief that's not articulated, that the war will continue. But it will be slow. No one believes – only retired US soldiers who are selling themselves on podcasts believe that the war is about to happen instantly. That's click bait. That's an exaggeration to draw an audience. It's not what's happening. It is not the general staff strategy as it moves westward operationally from the contact line. There's no collapse imminent in the Zaporozhye direction, which is a current priority. There has been no collapse around Pokrovsk – collapse, I mean, of the Ukrainian army. So the move westward is going to be slow. It's not going to trigger a collapse and capitulation on the Ukrainian side in Kiev. So it's best to understand that in that slow evolution, what we can see over the last few days, the days you've been describing, President Trump's understanding with President Putin that he

would delay offensive action against Russia, that there'd be delay on the imposition of punishment sanctions against India and the Russia; that delay lasted about seven days. It's not even clear to me from the Trump record that he knew when the punishment sanctions were inflicted on India on August 27th, 12 days after Anchorage. It took him another week before he issued a tweet giving the reason for hitting India.

So Trump is very carefully manipulated by a group of Russian warfighters on the first floor, the ground floor of the White House, and across the street in what was once the US Ministry of War, now called the old executive office building. And these people are committed, career committed – they are Russia haters – to continuing the war. People like Stephen Miller, the deputy chief of staff, have the same Jewish-Russian empire background that has created two, three generations of hatred for Russia that is exactly the same. They're not related to Antony Blinken and Victoria Nuland from a family in Ukraine. There is no difference in their race hatred and their commitment to continuing the war. So you've got ideology, you've got political calculation. You've got a campaign for the folks in Washington to make sure that the Europeans start generating the returns that Trump wants to publish. And they show it. Steve Witkoff was sitting at the table with the Europeans in Paris yesterday. And when they got Trump on the line to talk, Trump wanted to sound – and this was leaked in Axios and the other places – like he warned the Europeans, you've got to stop accepting Russian oil, you've got to stop accepting Russian gas. Who's he talking about? Well, he's not just talking about – I don't know that he knows that Russian oil finds its way into the European petroleum products markets through the refineries of Greece and Turkey. The Russian crude goes in and it comes – and, I'm sorry, also the refineries of India. So these are major petroleum imports that originate as Russian crude.

Look, I could go on and on. I hope I'm making the case that in general strategy, in military movement, at the operational and tactical level, the field level, and in the political calculations of the men around, mostly men around Trump, everything says "on with the war". And the Russian side responds and says we need to have the assurance that President Trump knows what our basic terms are and where we can adjust. And then we'll see what opportunity he presents either to agree to terms. He shows no comprehension of terms after Anchorage. And what? Readiness Witkoff can generate through bribes and massive business investment promises. ExxonMobil in Sakhalin, maybe Boeing spare parts and resumption of airplane supplies and that sort – those are the obvious things they're talking about. And there's no sign that a bribed bagman like Mr. Witkooff has managed to achieve anything like a breakthrough on the inducements. And there's no sign whatsoever that Trump has offered or is ready to lift certain sorts of sanctions against Russia's economy, Russia's trade and so on.

DL: And I might add that Witkoff has accomplished precisely nothing from the perspective of peace in West Asia either. In any event, I want to just focus on one thing, the final paragraph of Mitchell's article. It's quite an eye popper. And he wrote: "For too long, the US foreign policy establishment has rolled out the tired old Munich analogy any time a US president talks to an adversary. But diplomacy is not surrender, and talking is not a reward for good behavior." Now up until there I couldn't agree more. Then he goes on and he says: "The

point of diplomacy in strategy is not to transform an opponent from within but to shape his incentives in ways that make him more likely to do what you want for reasons of his own interest. That's what Trump is attempting to do with Putin, and there's a good chance he will succeed." What's interesting to me, John, is that he's writing this in the national interest, just kind of like the magazine of record for American conservatives. So it's undoubtedly going to come to the attention of the Russian government. Do you think that this is realistic? Do you think that this is likely to succeed?

JH: The short answer is no. It's more interesting – and this is not a criticism to make – to ask oneself, how come these guys keep repeating it as if they believe it? When all the evidence is that they've tried, the Clinton administration tried after destroying the Soviet Union and destroying the Ruble system and destroying the Soviet planning system and budget system, to create a class of Russian businesses whom they would control, who would serve their needs like Mikhail Khodorkovsky did and went to jail for. They failed there. They keep trying to do the same. They create so-called secessionist movements or terrorist movements to drain resources away from Moscow. They tried that in the Chechen Wars. They failed at that. They're now trying again in the southern Caucasus in Armenia. They keep trying the same things. Why do they think they will succeed this time around? Well, I've been in that White House. You have a very short time, four years, in which to secure your future forever, and you've got to accommodate yourself through certain conventions of what people believe will ensure reelection or reappointment to even more powerful and financially lucrative posts. And within the convention that this is always a success, they come up with new lines of initiative. And that's what this is. It's a new line of cosmetics pasted on an old beaten up face.

DL: Let me turn to the press conference you mentioned, or the meeting between the Polish president and Donald Trump, and the Q&A portion. Again, thank you for bringing this to my attention, John. But at one point, a Polish reporter told Trump that he had taken no action, he said, despite his frustration and disappointment with Putin. Trump bristled at this and stated, and at one point, I think he even questioned how this guy became a journalist. But anyways, he stated, "How do you know there's no action? Would you say that putting secondary sanctions on India, the largest purchaser outside of China, they're almost equal, would you say there was no action? That cost Russia hundreds of billions of dollars. You call that no action? And I haven't done phase two yet or phase three." My question to you, John, I think I know the answer to this. But do you have any idea what he's talking about when he says phase two or phase three?

JH: Well, the short answer is no. It's a very good question. So I'll get out of it by saying I don't know. It's the right question to ask, because it's a threat. Okay? It hasn't cost Russia hundreds of billions of dollars. What we do know, and this is interesting, although it's not published, is that the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Modi, meeting with Mr. Putin in Tianjin, and then later in Beijing, negotiated a discount on Russian crude.

DL: I understand it was already discounted. Are you saying they negotiated a further discount?

JH: They have to. No doubt about it. Yes. How much of a discount that is would depend on the trade and on the nature of the mediation and the nature of the payment system. It would be dumb for me to say I know exactly how much is coming off the price of oil multiplied by the number of barrels. And maybe you'll get a couple of hundred million, maybe you'll get 200 million, but you don't get billions, hundreds of billions of dollars like Trump told President Nawrocki in the Oval Office. Those numbers are sort of the equivalent of feathers on a bird puffing up. But phase two yet, or phase three, is an indication that he's been briefed to think we will hit India first, and then we will increase the pressure on all the other Russian oil trades. And we know that because they leaked it, that Trump said Europe, we might hit you next if you go on buying Russian oil, either in the form of crude, that means Slovakia, that means Hungary, it means the Eastern European states, or we might begin to hit punishment for taking Russian-based petroleum product imports from Turkey, Greece, and India. That's what phase two might be, but phase three might be even more. It's cumulative threat, cumulative intimidation.

Does Trump actually know what's in each stage? Trump, Rubio, the National Security Advisors, the State Department head, Witkoff, Howard Lutnick, the Commerce Secretary, Scott Bessent, the Treasury Secretary, Colby and Feinberg in the Pentagon – do they know what the sequence would be? Is there a piece of paper – there should be – in which it sets out a schedule. If Putin doesn't do this, we hit him with that. And if he doesn't do that, then we hit in with more. That's phase two, phase three. But we know that Trump doesn't read pieces of paper. He likes pictures. He doesn't have a very good memory. He can remember dead ducks in an English pond allegedly killed by Novichok back in 2018. That was fake, but the CIA chief who posted the pictures got promoted. We know that he keeps talking about the spires and turrets of the Ukraine that he sees lying on the ground, although turrets and spires really are not part of church architecture of a country like Ukraine. And so on and on and on. He gets his pictures muddled. But the theme that drives all of this has to be paper, which is circulated among a small group of people who want to continue the war. So he's got Mr. Nawrocki, the new Polish president, to understand that he's going to put more troops in there. The Polish journalist, he misunderstood. And that's funny. "You want to get a new job", he told the Polish radio journalists. I mean, you don't get more anti-Russian than Polish state radio. He picked on the wrong guy. And it's funny, it truly is funny. But it's not so funny if you're on the receiving end.

And the good part is that the countries on the receiving end are fighting back. Not only Prime Minister Modi, not only President Xi, not only the North Korean president, but even the Prime Minister of Slovakia. Let's remember that President Putin met with Robert Fico after the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation]. And at their meeting Fico told him, look, the Ukrainians are attacking the Druzhba pipeline that delivers oil and gas for us. And Putin gave him a regular piece of advice. He said, fine, if that's what they're going to do to you, then why don't you cut off your supply of electricity to Ukraine? Why don't you retaliate? That's a terrific piece of advice. It wasn't said by Mr. Fico – why don't you take your own advice? Why don't you knock the lights out of Ukraine? Why have you, President Putin, promised

President Trump since February 12th that you won't hit that level of energy infrastructure that was associated with the electric war targeting the year before. If Putin can advise Slovakia to do that, how come he can't tell the general staff in Moscow, go do that? Well, the answer is there is flexibility on the Russian side. In handling Trump isn't it cheaper to humor the man, flatter the man? Press him to the extent to which he might go to your advantage. Isn't that cheaper than fighting? It's usually cheaper. Bribes and fraud. Money is usually cheaper than guns and force.

DL: Let's dig down into this. I'm wondering what it is that Russia gains from Trump by doing that, realistically what it can gain. In your opinion, based on everything you've seen of Trump, what realistically can it gain from Trump, by adopting that strategy? By, for example, saying we're not going to completely obliterate Ukraine's energy grid.

JH: What does it get? A very good question. I would say that there are profound differences of opinion. There were more profound differences in opinion back a few months or a few weeks ago than there are today. With time, Trump is proving to be less of an opportunity and more unpredictably an adversary or enemy than those who favored being patient, being appeasing. Now the president Mr. Putin must seem to reflect the soft line. There's also a Russian business community interest and you can see it the way that Russian stock exchange goes up and down, but it's represented to the Americans by Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russia Direct Investment Fund, the Russian Sovereign Fund, and his job as a presidential emissary with the Americans. He was educated in the United States from high school on. And he thinks – well, let me not characterize what he thinks. His job is to induce American business to do things that are in Russian interest. We talked about Boeing. We talked about Sakhalin-1 and so forth. There are many. There's an enormous number of these possible lures. They're only possible in the theory that the Russian side is using money to persuade American money. They can make more money in their interest if they delay this phase one, phase two, phase three that Trump is talking about. So delay always makes money. I mean, that's other people's job. It's not your job or mine, but if there's a delay that keeps any commodity that the US is hitting with tariffs and keeps the price from moving upward, somebody will find a way of arbitraging the difference in time and the difference in cost and the difference in value and make profit. Now, that's what the sons of Witkoff, the sons of Lutnick, the sons of Trump, are experts at doing while they advance the crypto financing methods of skimming many of these major financial transfers and investments. So delay is not nothing. It makes advantage, political advantage rather minor, money advantage possibly rather greater.

But with time, to come back to your question, Dimitri, I think we could say that the level of optimism that was held towards the Trump opportunity in February – not just by President Putin, not by the Russians, but by the Indians who didn't want to see what could be achieved on the positive side – that confidence is evaporated. I've got somewhere here on my desk President Putin in his Beijing press conference yesterday, again running the line. Shall I read it to you? He says first of all about Witkoff: "I'm absolutely convinced that Mr. Witkoff conveys in his contacts with me and other members of the Russian team the position of the

US president and not of anyone else." I don't believe that. It's not true. Nobody believes that. It's the other way around. But President Putin's saying it that way so we can all understand, or at least in Moscow, everybody understands it's the other way around. "Our talks in Anchorage have shown, it was clear from the context of our talks" says Putin, "that he conveys to President Trump the position of the Russian side quite correctly". Maybe it's true. But I think I'm having trouble finding where Putin said yesterday – ah, yes, here we are. This was yesterday in Beijing with the most beautiful backdrop of the forbidden city. Illuminated in gold and in red, and there's the president of Russia saying this: "We see the commitment and sincere desire of the current administration led by President Trump to find a solution, not just to issue appeals. I think there is light at the end of the tunnel. We will see how it goes from here. If not, we will have to achieve the task set before us by military means." Trump said the same thing. "We'll see how it goes, I'm disappointed in the guy". I've not got any more messages. I'm reading from the Nawrocki transcript yesterday, but there's some other interviews that Trump gave. I'm just very disappointed. I am disappointed, but I have no more messages, we understand each other. They may have to keep fighting. Basically, the balloon of optimism that we began with in February is slowly losing all its air. But why say otherwise, just as you said, if the US is pumping in new long-range missiles and making more and more profit from Polish and English and French and German procurements, which in turn go back into the Ukraine, why not just keep this going for as long as they can?

DL: We often, those of us who pay a lot of attention to these negotiations and who are convinced that neither the Europeans nor the Americans, and certainly not Zelensky, have any appetite for making the kinds of concessions to Russia that would be necessary to bring a war to an end. When we try to understand why Russia is nonetheless engaging in these negotiations, we talk about what they can gain, as I just did. I just asked you this very question. What can they gain from Trump, realistically?

JH: Did I answer it?

DL: You did. You did. And oftentimes we'll also say that President Putin is trying to accommodate the desires of people in the Global South to see the war brought to an end. He wants to be seen by other governments to be at least willing to engage with President Trump. We don't often talk about domestic considerations, and I want to ask you about a poll, and I don't think that this is an outlier. I think that this poll is pretty reflective of Russian people's sentiment over the past more than a year, I think, and maybe even going all the way back to 2022. But this was a poll done by the Levada-Center, which I understand is a reputable polling station, a polling firm, that has a rather critical perspective on Vladimir Putin, that's my understanding, and it did a poll in...

JH: It's credible polling. It's independent of the state, it's not contracted to any state operation I can think of, and it has been sanctioned to some minor extent in Moscow, but the Levada-Center does credible polls, credible from a sociological, professional and sociological standard. Yes, so...

DL: I'm not going to ask you about these polls, but these polls consistently show, the Levada polls, by western standards, very high approval ratings for Vladimir Putin.

JH: Yes.

DL: I mean, really epic approval ratings when you compare them to the approval ratings of the leaders of major western countries. But the poll that I want to focus on, from April of this year, found that 61 % of Russians believe that peace negotiations should now proceed. So this would have been, you know, three months into the second Trump administration, and one in three, only 30 %, said it is necessary to continue hostilities. Now, I just want to say at the outset that I don't think somebody believing that peace negotiations should proceed is equivalent to somebody believing that a deal should be done at any cost. This is the question in many people's minds, the Russian people, I think, this leaves open the question, this poll, what do you think Russia should give up in order to have peace?

JH: Yeah.

DL: But nonetheless, this poll suggests to me that there are domestic considerations here as well, and that when Vladimir Putin is engaging in what many of us regard as theater because we don't see any willingness on the side of the Americans and the Europeans to make concessions, he's doing this because this is what the Russian people, by and large, want him to do. They want him to engage in negotiations. Do you think that's a major factor influencing the Putin government's approach to the Trump administration?

DL: Yes, I think so, and I'm very glad you've said it. I think that the point you're making is a very valuable one. In the Dances with Bears website, you can see that from time to time, as often as they produce a poll, I try to show in English what the audience in the United States and in Europe and elsewhere should make of this. Let me give you two points. First of all, Russian women have a stronger commitment or belief that one should negotiate if one can, not fight. My wife simply... We used to have breakfast discussions over the overnight news, and at some point, Tanya felt, look, I want to stop talking about the war. I can't bear it anymore. I can't bear it anymore. This is a woman who's lived with me for almost 30 years. And I know from my family and all that the Russian women have strongly endorsed peacemaking, if it's possible. It's not because Russian men are gung-ho or foolish, but Russian women are being more – I don't know what the poll is, if you can see it, if there's a breakdown between the sexes. Second, it changes with time. It changes with time. Some of the polls have...

DL: I just want to share that data. It's a good question. It said the share of supporters of peace talks is higher among women, 68 %. So it's 61 % overall, and 68 % among women. So it's clearly much higher amongst women than it is among men.

DL: Yes, if it's overall 61 %, it means there's a much bigger split between men and women. There'll also be a split in age group. There'll also be a split by social class, which means the

young Muscovites want negotiation because they want to go back to – I don't know what they like to do in Italy or on the beach in Mykonos or wherever. So there are these factors. But that doesn't, as you pointed out correctly, Dimetri, and it's an important point, it doesn't influence the high level, over 80 %, stable and high, four times Macron, four times Merz, four times Starmer, of support and approval for Putin. Approval for Putin – you put the words in my mouth – approval depends on confidence that he's not going to do something so adventurous people we know will die. Therefore, a lot of President Putin's appeasement of Trump is directed, and that's your point isn't it, at the domestic Russian constituencies. First, Second, it changes with time. Between December last year and February, you've got a spurt in Russian apparent confidence in the potential friendliness in the United States. And some podcasters I respect suddenly said, look, the United States isn't the chief enemy anymore. Germany is, or the British are. No, Russians are simply reflecting the same view. We don't know what Trump's going to do, but he can't be worse than Biden and the Blinken gang. We know about them, they're Russia haters, they are racist, they're as bad as Adolf Hitler was. So they were willing to give the benefit of the doubt, and that benefit of the doubt is evaporating. It evaporates on the battlefield, it evaporates in Trump's behavior.

So over time, the poll of April will, I think, have a different result than a poll in September. Children have gone back to school. What do people think about President Putin's performance? Answer: he's done the best he could from a Russian point of view. Everybody heard Vladimir Vladimirovich say, I'm happy to meet with Trump in Istanbul, and I prefer to meet him last month, not in Alaska, that was Trump's idea. "I want to go to Dubai", he said. Or the UAE, Abu Dhabi. He said it. But he conceded to the Americans. They wanted an armed base in Alaska. Okay, President Putin doesn't have a problem, but what's the display? The display to a Russian, and one's got to respect the sense of this, he's not wasting our lives. And just remember, we're not talking about the numbers. Russia has endured significant casualties. Nothing like the garbage that General Kellogg, or Zelensky, or the British media, or the American media say. But Russian life is valued, whatever the New York Times, or Kellogg or any of these people say. And one thing no politician can dare – not Americans in '68 in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. No politician can survive the popular perception he's wasting our children's lives. That's death for the politician. President Putin is stable, has stable confidence. And by the way, if you look at those polls, women and men, Russians, of all ages, have equally high confidence in the Russian army. That's something.

DL: Now, I would be remiss if I didn't ask you for your thoughts in the relatively short time remaining to us. I'm sorry to put a time constraint on you, but I have only about 10 minutes. I want to ask you to comment on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's two-day summit in Tianjin. And my question is complex – well, the answer is complex but the question is pretty simple. Sorry go ahead, you were going to say...

JH: No, no, no. You continue.

DL: We've all seen the images of, you know, Modi and Putin and Xi warmly embracing and laughing and essentially, I think, giving in a diplomatic way, a rather sizable middle finger to

the Trump administration's efforts to drive a wedge between them. And in particular to drive a wedge between India and Russia. And a lot of people in the alternative media are characterizing this summit as a pivotal moment in history. One might say that this is simply continuity, that things continue to head in the direction in which they've been heading for quite some time now. Do you see this two-day summit as having been a pivotal moment in the shift of global power, remaking of the world, of the global order? Or is this simply more of the same?

DL: It's neither. Look, I'm an old guy. And so I've seen a lot of pivotal moments turn out to be molehills, not pivots. But let's look at the positives and let's look at the negatives. And let's see what lies in between. One can't fault the display of the troika. And that's particularly important to confirm the closeness of the Russians with both India and China. Second, it's very important that India and China are under common pressure from Trump and the war fighters that you quoted, Mitchell, Colby, and the rest. It's very important that India and China find a new way of resolving their trade deficit problem, their reciprocal investment problem. And especially their border problem where there's been incidental fighting. It's very important. And Xi and Modi produced the appearance of concrete proposals. And there are concrete proposals which were taken by the Chinese to Delhi a few days before the SCO summit, the Tianjin summit. This is very important. It's pivotal between China and India. And it's a huge backfire on Trump. It is a serious blow to the effort with the mentality that if the White House punished India but left China alone, that would induce the Chinese to be less connected to the Russians.

The second big huge backfire and really a positive achievement of the SCO summit was the bilateral agreement finally reached between China and Russia to build the Siberia-2 pipeline, the gas pipeline. This has been under negotiation, President Putin said it at the press conference, for years. And it has been delayed because there have been fundamental arguments between the Chinese side and the Russian side of how to price the gas. I won't go into the differences that Russians have. It's not just oil. I've seen it in metals and other forms of trade. The Chinese side, I'd say. President Putin has indicated that the pricing disagreement has been settled on market principles without the dollar, without the link to the oil, and without the linked to Brent or other Western oil markers, which is how gas has been priced until recently. He also said that the argument over the routing of the pipeline depends on which countries, through Mongolia, around Mongolia – that's been settled, too, and it's going through Mongolia. This is a major reorientation, a major source of expansion of Russian gas exports to China. And that was settled under US pressure during the SCO summit. These are important things.

I mean, a couple of days ago, the Chinese had slipped up. They hadn't produced the Tianjin Declaration. I've now found it. Here it is. I don't know if you can see it properly. It's 20 pages, 25 pages. It has got a lot of, you might say, all hat and no cattle, to use a Texas expression. What it shows is that there have been significant achievements on the part of the Indians in getting the consensus of the summit to condemn in name the terrorist attack on Pahalgam on April 22 that triggered the Pakistan-India War. Then there's a condemnation of further named

terrorist attacks in India in March of this year and in May of this year. The Indians weren't able to get that agreement three months ago at a foreign minister's level. They got it at the senior level. That's a big achievement of the Indians. It signals a very interesting point, it signals that China has had it up to here with the Pakistanis. China showed at that SCO meeting that Pakistan has reoriented militarily and politically and financially away from China to the United States. That was reflected in General Asim Munir, the real leader of Pakistan, the military leader of Pakistan's visits to the United States, and his lunch with Trump. But the Chinese are doing it pretty subtly. They're letting the Indians show there's been a reorientation. I wouldn't call that a pivot. It's a re-orientation of Pakistan back to the United States. And China is showing it by the way in which the Prime Minister of Pakistan was ignored by almost everybody. And there is a viral video showing the Prime Minister of Pakistan racing after President Putin as he walked by trying to get him to shake his hand. This is symbolic visual stuff but these are rather important strategic gains against the United States.

On the other hand, the Ukraine Foreign Ministry has pointed out there's no mention of Ukraine in the Tianjin declaration. The Ukrainians want to say, the western media want to say, Russia didn't win its priorities and to some extent that has to be understood to be correct. On the other hand, Yuri Ushakov said that there was lots of bilateral discussion of the Ukraine war outside the plenum of the summit. What he didn't explain is that the Russian side and I'm having to look down at my copy of the declaration because it simply isn't analyzed in the Russian press and it's not analyzed in the Chinese press and it's not analyzed the European press but what you can see are fingerprints around the barrel of a gun. You can see what people did, what they aimed at, what they fired at, and what they chose not to shoot at. Now, Russia achieved soft endorsement of its principal special military operation objectives. Denazification is one of the objectives of the current special military operation for Russia on the Ukraine battlefield. What we get here in this is member states welcome the annual adoption of the UN General Assembly of the resolution on combating glorification of Nazism. I know we're running out of time so I've got to speed this up a bit. That's a soft Chinese way of saying we endorse the Russian war and denazification in the Ukraine. It's not a brilliant pro-Russian statement. Then Russia repeatedly said that Ukraine attacked the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant and has attempted to trigger nuclear radiation releases. It went after Korchatov in Kursk, but failed. Attacking nuclear plants and releasing dirty radiation is a war aim of the Ukrainians. What did Russia have to say about that? In the Tianjin Declaration, member states note that nuclear safety and protection of nuclear facilities must be ensured at all times, including during military conflicts, to protect people and the environment from harm. I'm sorry, I'm not cynical about it, but it's a very, very soft way of reiterating the Russian concern that attacking its nuclear plants has been a Ukrainian-American NATO objective.

I can go through more of this. What I can simply say is there is particular criticism of Israel for attacking Iran. Not quite the criticism of Israel for committing genocide in Gaza and against the Palestinian people. Genocide's a no-no word in China this time around. So, summing up, we could go into some other stuff. There are pluses and minuses as there must

be in a politically sophisticated complex negotiation. It's not pivotal. It is not a decisive war ending. How can it be? Anyone who thinks the US empire is going to crash soon is out of their minds. They want to believe they can watch this on TV or they want to enjoy podcasts that tell them it's coming soon, that the war in the Ukraine is over very soon, and that the war against Russia will be won by Russia very soon. Well, nothing's very soon! So, major summits like this are slow contributions to the slow ending of long wars.

DL: Well said, John. Thank you so much. It's always a pleasure and very insightful to canvas your views about these subjects, and I look forward to our next conversation.

JH: Me too, Dimitry. Let's wear blue shirts next time, both of us.

DL: Just so you know, this is my Reason2Resist shirt. It's not... It's not a sports shirt.

JH: A white dove on a black shirt, okay. That's a different symbolism.

DL: We're working to improve these t-shirts, let me tell you. Great talking to you, and we're signing off today from Greece on September 5th, 2025. Bye.

JH: Thank you very much. Bye-bye.

END

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