



Ukraine, Venezuela & Japan – The Hidden Geopolitical Context | Prof. Peter Kuznick

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in. I'm your host Zain Raza. Before we begin this video, I would like to provide you with the third update to our crowdfunding campaign. To provide you some context first, in last year's campaign, we raised 62,000 euros thanks to 2,200 donors. And in this year's campaign, due to a difficult economic environment and increased cost, we are aiming for 80,000 euros. If we do not reach the target, we will be left with no choice but to scale back on our capacities or even contemplate shutting down our YouTube channel. To get to the update, as of December 25th, we have raised 33,000 euros thanks to 915 donors. As a comparison last year, at this stage we had reached 27,000 euros. With the funds raised so far, we will be able to continue operating until June or July of next year. However, if we reach our goal, we'll be able to make it through to next year's crowdfunding campaign.

We are thankful to each and everyone who has contributed to our crowdfunding campaign so far. However, to put the number 915 donors into perspective, that is fewer than the least watched videos on our channel. We have 165,000 subscribers, and in this month alone, over 200,000 people watched our channel. If you're watching our channel and have not contributed so far, please consider doing so, even if it's just 1 to 5 euros or simply sharing our crowdfunding campaign within your network. There are only 17 days left, and your actions in this moment will determine whether we can broadcast in the coming months. If just 5-10% of 165,000 subscribers donate a small amount today, we'll be able to reach a target with ease. On the screen now, you will see a PayPal QR code appear. If you click pause and scan it with your phone's camera, you will be able to donate immediately without any hassle. For more detailed information on our crowdfunding campaign, our past work, the challenges and costs we face this year, or how you can support us going forward, you will find in the description of this video below. I thank you for your love, support, and generosity.

Today I'll be talking to Peter Kuznick, who's a professor of history and the director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at American University in Washington DC. He also co-authored a book with Hollywood film director and producer Oliver Stone called The Untold History of the United States. Peter, it's a pleasure to have you back on the show.

Peter Kuznick (PK): Glad to be with you, Zain. But you know, each time I see you, the world gets worse, it gets more dangerous. We get closer to broader war, more craziness going on. And we never get closer to peace, but we do get closer to war.

ZR: Perhaps we should stop talking to each other and we are probably the cause of all of this.

PK: I don't think you're responsible for this, Zain.

ZR: Alright, let us begin with Latin America, in particular Venezuela and the Caribbean. Since the summer of 2025, the Trump administration has steadily escalated pressure on Venezuela, notably even though Venezuela was barely featured in the election campaign of 2024. These actions have been justified by the administration on the grounds of combating what it describes as "drug terrorism", allegedly emanating from Venezuela. According to Al Jazeera reporting, US forces have conducted around 29 strikes on alleged drug smuggling boats since September, resulting in more than 100 reported deaths. In December, the pressure escalated even further.

On December 10th, US authorities moved to interdict a tanker linked to Venezuela's sanctioned oil trade. In the days followed, President Trump publicly described the policy as a form of "blockade", targeting sanctioned Venezuelan oil exports. Then on December 20th, US officials confirmed the interception of another oil tanker in international waters near Venezuela, which Reuters reported was carrying around 1.8 million barrels of Venezuelan crude oil reportedly bound for China, a move Caracas condemned as piracy and said it would raise internationally. All of this coincides with the Trump administration's newly unveiled 2025 national security strategy, which states that the United States will, quote, "reassert and

enforce the Monroe Doctrine", unquote. With that in mind, could you place the Monroe Doctrine in its historical context for our viewers and then assess how these US actions towards Venezuela fit in the wider Caribbean and how they fit under this new strategy.

PK: Yeah. The Monroe Doctrine was issued in 1823. And President Monroe, John Quincy Adams and others, issued this as a warning to the Europeans not to try to come in and recolonize South America. So the original Monroe Doctrine had no teeth to it, because the United States did not have the ability to enforce it. The United States didn't really get the ability to enforce it till the 1890s. So it was a statement to the Europeans: Stay out of this hemisphere, don't try to recolonize, don't exploit the Latin Americans, at a time when the United States – despite slavery, despite genocide of the Native Americans – was a leading republic and stood for positive democratic values, not for women, not for Blacks, not for Native Americans, but at least for white men, and especially for white men of property. So it was a progressive statement when it was issued.

When Trump issues it or reissues it for this Trump 2.0 corollary, it's called the Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine – this is no longer a progressive statement. This is the idea that I've heard from a lot of the MAGA base. They say, "let's not get involved overseas in Europe and Asia and Eurasia. Let's focus more on what's closer to home and Latin America". This is a straight out assertion of US imperialism, of US domination, of the US having the right to dictate what happens, not even that close to the United States. You know, Latin America is vast and a lot of it is far away. But the United States has been doing this, as you know, for decades. In the early 20th century, the US was intervening time and again into every country in Latin America, or almost every country in Latin America, and sometimes the US troops would stay there for more than a decade. So we were running Latin America as if it was our own colony, effectively. Then in 1898, the United States intervened. The Spanish American War actually began in Manila Harbor – that's where the first shots were fired. But the focus was to take over, to push the Spanish out of Latin America and the US to take over Cuba and other areas. And so the United States effectively does that in terms of economic control and the right to intervene when it wants. And then we start intervening everywhere until really Roosevelt in the 30s with his good neighbor policy stops this kind of constant intervention.

But we see it again after World War II. Reagan's policies in Central America were brutal. Kissinger before that – Kissinger with the overthrow of Allende in Chile, very open, that that this is what the US was doing. So the US has resisted any kind of democratic movements in Latin America, certainly for 130 years. And the Latin Americans, they're often referred to as "banana republics" because the United Fruit Company and others would go in there, seize the land or buy it up, pennies on the dollar, and then get the US Marines to go in there and support their interests. This has been going on for more than a century in Latin America. And the result is that the people have suffered. The people have suffered terribly. And when the people rise up to try to change things, the US sends in the Marines in order to defeat them. It happened in Panama in 1989. So the Soviet bloc is effectively collapsing and having quasi democratic uprisings and revolutions and the United States under Bush praises Gorbachev for

not intervening. What does the United States do? It goes and intervenes itself in Panama and overthrows Noriega there.

So this is the policy the US has had. Trump is just more open, more blatant, more explicit, more direct than others have been for the past century plus. So now Trump is openly saying that all of Latin America the US is going to dominate and control. And we see what's happening with his intervention into the election in Honduras most recently. We see it with his alliance with Milei in Argentina. We're seeing it with his support for one right wing government after another in Latin America. For years Latin America was seeing progressive governments, left-wing governments. Now it's trying to impose right-wing governments again. And the effect is going to be that these people in Venezuela and Colombia and elsewhere – if the US succeeds in what it's trying to do, people are going to flee these countries. And where are they going to want to go to? Many are going to want to come to the United States. But Trump has cut off access and people being allowed to come into the United States with his strict border policies, anti-immigration policies. So what we're going to see is an exodus from countries like Venezuela – millions of people going into the neighboring countries, and it's just going to create chaos in those areas.

So what Trump's strategy is not necessarily to invade Venezuela – although the US has got enormous strength there, not only the biggest aircraft carrier, the Gerald R. Ford, but a lot of other support boats, gunboats, other vessels and other troops who've been down there. Some of them have been down there for six months now. So the US is threatening to invade Venezuela and overthrow the government but it can't get his story straight. So in the beginning it was saying that we have to stop the narco-terrorism, all the drug runners who are sending their fentanyl into the United States and so many Americans are dying of drug overdoses on fentanyl. Then somebody informed them that fentanyl does not come from Venezuela, that Venezuela is not a producer of fentanyl, that the most that you can say about Venezuela is that it works as a transit site for cocaine. Then they realize that the drugs coming to the United States are coming from the Pacific, not from the Atlantic, that the drugs that the US said were coming to the United States were mostly going to Europe.

However, the United States starts destroying these small boats there and killing people which it's against all international law. It's against US law. It's against US policy, which has always been to interdict these boats, not to kill people. We don't have a mandate for killing people for selling drugs. And the drugs were not coming to the United States anyway. Then the United States shifts his story and acknowledges what everybody knew all along, that the real purpose was to overthrow Maduro. The man in charge of US policy, even though the face of the policy is the neo-Nazi Hegseth, the man behind the policy is Marco Rubio. Rubio is obsessed with what's going on in Latin America. Rubio's family came to the United States from Cuba. Rubio says in his biography that his family fled from the Castro dictatorship. However, the reality is that Rubio's family came here in 1956, three years before Castro took over. So that's not what they were fleeing from. And Rubio supports the anti-immigration policies. Rubio is the brains behind the attempt to overthrow Maduro, partly because if the US overthrows

Maduro and seizes the vast reserves of Venezuelan oil, then the US can cut off the cheap oil that goes to Cuba that maintains the government that Rubio hates so much in Cuba.

But this is part of the US trying to run the table there. If the US can flood the market with cheap Venezuelan oil, that will also have a devastating impact on Russia, especially. So there's a lot of things going on here that are going to hurt the people of Latin America, hurt the people of Venezuela who are going to suffer and are going to starve. They've already put up with two decades of US embargo and US sanctions against them that have been an attempt to destroy their economy. And now they're going to make it even worse for them. So this is part of the Trump policy to impose cruelty on people and to make people suffer. So they can do that by sanctions, by the embargo, and quarantine. Venezuela's economy depends largely on the sale of oil and gas. And now with that being cut off, it's going to have a devastating impact on Venezuelans. They're not going to be able to get the food, the medicine, the clothing, the other things that they desperately need after two decades of the US trying to destroy their economy.

ZR: Let us now turn to another region, namely Europe, where the dominant trend is accelerating in the direction of militarization and continued support for Ukraine, while at the same time the United States is actively pushing diplomatic efforts to end the war. Germany, for example, has recently approved plans within its 2026 federal budget to allocate around 13 billion euros in military and financial support for Ukraine, a level of funding described by Berlin as a record commitment. At the European level, the EU has also agreed to finance Ukraine through the EU's own budget, providing long-term interest-free credit reported at up to €90 billion after plans to rely directly on frozen Russian sovereign assets failed to gain consensus. Together, these steps underlie how Europe continues to mobilize large-scale resources for Ukraine, while many European leaders also argue that Europe must significantly strengthen its own military capabilities to deter a future Russian attack, which they state will not stop with Ukraine.

At the same time, December has seen unusually intense rounds of diplomatic activity. Throughout the month, the United States, Ukraine, and key European powers have engaged in sustained negotiations, including high-level meetings between President Zelensky and European leaders, direct US-Ukraine discussions on a revised peace framework, and German-hosted talks focused on a possible ceasefire. The efforts have culminated in Ukraine presenting a 20-point peace proposal to Washington, while Moscow today has confirmed receiving US proposals through diplomatic channels, indicating that active back channel negotiations are underway. There appears to be a growing tension here, Peter. While Washington is explicitly calling for diplomacy and a negotiated end to the war, many European NATO governments continue to expand their support for Ukraine and accelerate their own militarization. How do you interpret this apparent contradiction based on the new unveiled National Security Strategy? Where does this all fit in?

PK: Wow. Yeah. We can spend hours on this. The National Security Strategy was very, very dismissive of Europe. It said that Europeans are delusional effectively with their efforts to

keep Ukraine in the war. It said that Europe is facing civilizational erasure. And that's because they've allowed too many Pakistanis into Europe. This is a line that we saw from Vance at the Munich security meetings, this idea that Europe is on the wrong track, that Europe is self-destructing by having too many Muslims, especially, some of whom are in positions of influence, and not supporting enough of the right-wing neo-fascist forces that are accelerating in certain parts of Europe. This is Trump's and Vance's version of racism, ethnocentrism, their hatred of immigrants, especially immigrants of color. They don't mind all the immigrants. They're letting the people in from South Africa where they say that the white South Africans are being killed by the Blacks and Browns of South Africa. But the reality is very different.

What's going on, as you're saying, is quite ominous. It's clear that the European strategy reflects the fact that Ukraine is winning on the battlefield and that Zelensky's popularity is skyrocketing. Why else would Zelensky be making these demands, if he wasn't winning on the battlefield? There's something so delusionally bizarre about what's going on. Russia is gaining every day on the battlefield, and Zelensky's popularity is plummeting. There's this huge corruption scandal that's taken down Zelensky's closest allies. Andriy Yermak, who many considered the most powerful man in Ukraine, has been forced to resign because he's been implicated in this corruption. So that's going on at the same time that Ukraine is doing very poorly on the battlefield. Russia's taken Pokrovsk and they're moving further east.

And so rather than recognizing that, Europe is trying to convince the United States and Zelensky to keep fighting. So the Europeans are willing to let Ukraine fight and die, based on several illusions. Number one, they talk about this being an unprovoked attack by Russia. As you and I've discussed a lot, it was heavily provoked. Number two, the idea that the Ukrainians can claw back on the battlefield the territory they've lost. Everybody knows that's not going to happen. And number three, the clincher, is that if Putin wins in Ukraine, then Europe is next. And that's what I've been writing about lately. This illusion, this fear mongering, scaremongering, trying to convince the European public to swallow austerity, cuts in the social programs to rebuild their militaries, as Trump has been demanding, in order to stop Russia. That's craziness.

So Rutte says that if Putin wins in Ukraine, then Europe is the next target. This is just unbelievable. He says that we have to prepare for a war reminiscent of World Wars I and II. He says we have to, quote, "be prepared for the scale of war our grandparents or great grandparents endured, a conflict reaching every home, every workplace, destruction, mass mobilization, millions displaced, widespread suffering and extreme losses". He said "Putin is in the empire building business again".

You mentioned Germany. Well, we can start there, we can start anywhere pretty much. Pistorius has been leading the charge for German rearmament at unprecedented rates. I mean, to me, we're just two weeks out from Pearl Harbor. And when I see what's going on with the German remilitarization and with Japanese remilitarization – Japan just passed a new defense budget yesterday, calling for almost a 10 % increase in military spending in this coming

year's defense budget. So we see this going on being led by Germany and Japan. I don't know what happened, what came of World War II, and the lessons that we supposedly learned – well, we've forgotten them. We've reversed it. Germany and Japan are two of the leading hawkish forces on the planet today.

So what Pistorius and what Rutte and others were saying was that in five years Russia's going to be ready to attack Europe. How they know that, I don't know. But now Pistorius is saying the attack might come in three years. He said we could expect it as early as 2018 [2028]. Some of the other European leaders are even moving it up faster than that. The scaremongering: the Russian hordes are at the door, and they'll soon be in Europe's capitals, raping our women and eating our children.

Then you look at what Merz says, your lovely peaceful chancellor, he compared Putin's war in Ukraine to Adolf Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland in 1938. He says this war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine is a war against Europe. And if Ukraine falls, it won't stop, just as the Sudetenland was not enough in 1938, Putin won't stop. Macron's been saying the same thing. Starmer's been saying the same thing, that Putin will not stop because he's got this voracious appetite and he wants to reconstitute the Russian Empire, or at least the Soviet Empire. But I'm seeing this – and we can go through it systematically. We saw recently the head of Britain's MI6, Blaise Metreweli in her first public speech talking about Russian aggression and the Russian plans to attack Europe. The same thing from Air Chief Marshal Richard Knighton, the chief of Britain's Defense Staff – he said "the situation is more dangerous than I've known during my career". And he goes on with the war in Ukraine and Russia's appetites. We saw that from Admiral Lord Alan West, the former First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy. We saw that from former Defense Secretary Lord Robertson, the head of MI5, Sir Ken McCallum – or the French!

In some ways, the French are almost more rabid than the Brits and the Germans. The French conducted a new National Strategic Review, which was published on July 14th, singling out Russia as the main threat to France and Europe. France's highest military official, General Fabien Mandon – if you've been following what he's been saying lately, among the things he's said in a speech to French mayors, he said that –and let me read this: "If our country falters, because it is not ready to accept losing its children, because we must say things as they are, or to suffer economically, that we need to build up our defense priorities and be willing to accept that France is going to lose its children again". The French know what that means because during World War I, France lost 50% of its young men between the ages of 18 and I think 30. So they know what this kind of thing means. And it's coming out of Mandon, it's coming out of other French leaders.

So what we see going on now is the most sick kind of scaremongering. Russia, it has taken them four years to – you know, they can't even completely take the Donbass, right? After four years of fighting. They've taken 20% of Ukraine in four years of fighting. Russia is going to want to go to war with NATO? Does any sane, reasonable person really believe that? No, but they're trying to scare the crap out of the European public to support this crazy military

buildup. Now they're saying they're committed to 3.5% of spending of the GDP on their militaries, and another 1.5% on infrastructure related to the militaries. So 5% really. That is the worst thing to happen to the Europeans. What people admired about Europe was the social programs, the housing programs, the education, the health care. This is what made Europe great. And now Europe is going to lead their publics down the primrose path to self destruction and austerity in the name of a fantasy, a delusion that Europeans have got to stand up and resist.

ZR: You mentioned Japan – let us turn to that region, the Indo-Pacific region, and highlight a few key developments for our viewers. On December 18th, Reuters reported that the United States approved an 11.1 billion dollar arms package for Taiwan, described as the largest ever, including systems such as HIMARS, howitzers, Javelin missiles, and drones — explicitly framed by Washington as strengthening Taiwan's defense and deterrence. Today, December 26th, Reuters reports that China announced sanctions on 20 US defense companies and ten individuals in direct response to those arms sales. Also, as you mentioned, Japan's cabinet approved a record defense budget of over 9 trillion yen, roughly in the mid 50 billion euro range, as part of Japan's multi-year path towards higher military spending and expanded capabilities amid rising tensions with China. Peter, how do you interpret these developments in the Indo-Pacific and what is their broader significance when viewed through the lens of the Trump administration's newly unveiled National Security Strategy?

PK: Yeah, the National Security Strategy was a little bit sane in some ways in terms of Russia, but not in terms of Europe, not in terms of Latin America, and definitely not in terms of China and Taiwan. The US has not backed off at all on its Air-Sea Battle plan. The Air-Sea Battle plan, which the US adopted in 2009, has now gone through nine revisions. One of the things you didn't mention is Trump's crazy idea of new battleships. And the battleships he's talking about are nuclear armed battleships. So nuclear weapons, which we haven't had on surface vessels since the end of the Cold War. Now Trump wants to bring back what he calls the "Trump class battleship".

You have to remember that this man is losing his mind. And he gave a Christmas speech the other day, in the middle of which he went into a six and a half minute harangue about venomous snakes in Peru. And he said that snake bites killed 28,000 people in Peru last year. So some people had the good sense to look it up, and they found out that poisonous snake bites have actually killed 10 people in Peru over the last 15 years. But Trump says 28,000 a year. You know, you can't make this stuff up. He's got no attention span, and he's delusional. He wants to put his name on the Kennedy Center now and he's put his name on these battleships. The presidency is a vanity project for Trump, as well as a way to loot and steal around the planet. But also now he's bombing Nigeria. So the man is definitely out of his mind and dangerous. The fact that a man this crazy has got access to the nuclear codes and nobody standing between him and starting a nuclear war is really frightening.

The US policy toward Taiwan is to use nuclear weapons. So on November 7th, the new prime minister in Japan, Takaichi – who is an extreme right-winger, a history denier, she wants to

get rid of Article IX of the peace constitution – she said effectively that if China tries to take Taiwan by force, that's a security threatening crisis for Japan. Which means, as people recognized, that Japan would intervene militarily to support Taiwan. Japan's policy was supposed to be strategic ambiguity. They're also supposed to have the One China policy. The One China policy acknowledges that Taiwan is part of China, which means that Japan is going to intervene in an internal dispute inside China, which goes against all international law. So that's what Takaichi has said. She's an extreme right-wing hawk. China took great offense to this, and there's been tremendous tension between the two. China's boycotting Japanese seafood products. China warned people not to visit Japan. 25% of Japan's tourist industry are Chinese. So this has a lot of very, very negative effects.

So the US policy – Biden said four times that the US would intervene militarily, and then they had to walk it back all four times. Now Japan is saying the same thing. But what's crucial is that Admiral Davidson pointed out that the US Fleet is 5,000 or 7,000 miles away. It would take the US Navy three weeks to get to the Taiwan Strait. The US policy is to have Japan and South Korea intervene immediately. If there's fighting in China, the US gets operational control over the South Korean military, which is very, very large, in addition to 28,500 US troops in South Korea. The US effectively will also get control over Japan's military. We're working on interoperability into closer coordination between the US and Japanese military. So there's about 53,000 US troops in Japan, plus Japan's self-defense forces. So if we look at Japan's new defense budget, Japan was supposed to get to 2 % of GDP by 2027. They've now moved it up, and in two years, they're going to reach that, two years ahead of schedule. And then they want to get up to 3.5 %. Japan is doubling its military spending already and selling arms overseas and working very closely with the United States on this.

So what's happening in the Pacific is we're getting closer to war. Chinese planes locked their radar on two Japanese aircraft recently, which caused a lot of tension. The heating up in the Taiwan Strait, military spending, arming Taiwan to the teeth, using the porcupine strategy to make it indigestible – it's all moving us closer and closer toward a war in the Pacific. So even the sanity in the National Security Strategy toward Russia, that's because as Hegseth said a while back, we have to end the war in Ukraine so we can focus on the real enemy: China. And so that's the strategy. That's what's behind it.

RAND issued a report a couple of years ago titled Avoiding a Long War, saying the US can't deliver the arms that it wants to give to Taiwan as long as we're giving these arms to Ukraine and then to Israel. And so we need to end some wars so we can go after the real enemy and that's China. And that's why the nuclear-armed battleships are so important, because Elbridge Colby, who's the brains behind the US-China policy, he's been advocating a seamless use of conventional weapons and nuclear weapons if we go to war against China. And so the fact that we're talking about these nuclear-armed battleships is a step in that direction, even though it's a delusional step because the chances of the US actually developing them is very, very minimal. The US has not shown any ability to develop the new weapon systems and new ships that it said were coming in the Pacific. The US shipbuilding capacity is vastly

overstretched already. And these are very, very vulnerable, these battleships. They're very costly and they'll be sitting on the bottom of the ocean because it's easier to target them with Chinese and Russian defense capabilities.

ZR: Peter Kuznick, we'll have to leave it here. Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute and Professor of History. Thank you so much for your time today.

PK: Thank you, Zain. Talk to you soon.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. If you watched this video to the very end and like the journalism that we undertook, then make sure to click on the subscribe button below. And also don't forget to support our independent nonprofit journalism by taking part in our crowdfunding campaign, which ends in 17 days. If we don't reach our target, we will unfortunately have no choice but to scale back on our capacities or in the worst case, shut down our YouTube channel. I thank you for your support and for tuning in. I'm your host Zain Raza. See you next time.

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