



Jeffrey Epstein's Amateur Attempts To Meet Vladimir Putin w/ John Helmer

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Montreal, Canada, for Reason2Resist on February 12th, 2026. We're very pleased to be joined again by friend of Reason2Resist, John Helmer. 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. Thank you very much for joining us again today, John.

John Helmer (JH): Thanks for having me, Dimitri. Good to be back.

DL: So, John, as evidence has mounted during the past year of paedophile Jeffrey Epstein's extensive ties to the state of Israel and also to US intelligence, I think it's fair to say the Western media and political elites have become increasingly anxious. It seems that this is a subject they want to avoid, like the plague. And all of a sudden, a couple of weeks ago, they began to make a claim almost in unison across the Western corporate media – whether it be in Canada, the United States, Western Europe – that Epstein was in some way, shape or form an asset of the Kremlin.

And so here's an example. This is an article published just a couple of days ago by Le Monde, the paper of record in France. As you can see, it alleges that the "Epstein files unveiled the sex offenders ties with Kremlin insiders". That's the way they put it. And they go on to say that "emails released by the Department of Justice show that the financier acted as a facilitator for members of the Russian elite, helping with real estate transactions and offshore financial arrangements". Now, my question to you here, John is, let's be careful about distinguishing between ties that Epstein may have had to Russian oligarchs, which is one thing, and ties he had to the Russian government. Have you seen substantial evidence to support any suggestion that Epstein was in some way an agent of the Russian government?

JH: The categorical answer to that's no. And the evidence which I went through and doubt is watching this broadcast can go to the *Dances with Bears* website and see the story that I did

last week on Epstein's Russia connections. The story proves, the emails prove the man-made half-hearted amateur, ill-informed, ignoramus approaches because he thought he wanted to meet President Putin. We can go through exactly what they were, but they weren't Kremlin insiders. In fact, the record shows, as I went through the Epstein library and checked the significant Russian oligarchs who had property in Manhattan or in the United States or in Miami. If you go through the list of Russian oligarchs connected to the United States, you see the evidence that Epstein tried to make approaches and was ignored. He was ignored and rebuffed by Len Blavatnik, for example, who's no Kremlin insider. He's an expatriated US and UK citizen. The only significant Russian contact he made was with Vitaly Churkin, the now-dead former Russian ambassador to the United Nations.

In the piece, I describe and provide the emails. He courted Churkin. Churkin agreed to meet with him for lunch, for dinner, here and there, and there's no evidence whatsoever that Churkin was engaged in any of the sexual performances or entertainments that others, for example the Norwegians, the Israelis, the Czechs, and others went in for, not to mention the Americans and the British. No. But Churkin asked for a favor, and his favor was that Epstein should find employment for Vitaly Churkin's son Maxim Churkin in New York. We'll leave the audience to judge the propriety of asking such a favor. The point that Churkin was establishing was whatever intelligence an ambassador normally must pick up in the company of individuals who were financing Trump's first race. That's what Churkin was doing. Churkin died in February 2017, might have the year wrong there. But Churkin asked for a favor and Epstein delivered it – a job for Maxim Churkin. That's it.

Now we can go into the broader issue, which is the important one, of what an amateur, what an ignoramus Epstein was in politics. He was fed, and this is what absorbs most of the entries in the Epstein library, he was fed daily or weekly all sorts of press materials about Russia, about Crimea, but this stuff came from others. It was essentially taken not from the serious analytical work that's available, but from mainstream newspapers like The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and the like. And it was ill-informed rubbish, which Epstein used to take in his in-mail box, and therefore it appears in the library. But the notion portrayed in the British and London and Paris press that he had insider connections to the Kremlin are false.

He saw particular efforts to meet Putin from Ehud Barak, the Israeli, who had met as Prime Minister of Israel Putin on a couple of occasions. He saw even more effort from a Norwegian former Prime Minister than a head of Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland. And Jagland was making himself very available in return for entertainments in the Paris house. Jagland has got a case to answer in Norway, and let's see if the Norwegians do it, but Jagland met, I believe, four times with Putin, always in a delegation from the Council of Europe, always to have an agenda on whether the Europeans would stop the escalating sanctions war against Russia, and always in vain. Putin received the delegation. They never had a meeting of minds. Jagland was never in a position to deliver what Epstein wanted.

But let's be very clear what the evidence shows Epstein was after. Epstein was after connections to make money, connections to launder his reputation. And fundamentally, Epstein was a second-rate money launderer and tax evader. An individual who provided tax advice, so-called estate planning on some of Wexner's invoices, tax evasion advice, tax schemes, tax limitation schemes, tax optimization schemes, and money laundering. And that's what he did. That's how he acquired money. But unlike most financial advisors who simply break the local law, US law or other jurisdictions, Epstein stole principle from his clients. He stole the money. And that enrichment was very rarely caught, but it was caught by Leslie Wexner. And the record shows. Epstein had to repay Wexner \$100 million.

Now, all of this is still invisible. Why? And this has surfaced in the Senate. The details of this sort of operation are in the US Treasury files on Epstein, and they add up to – and I'm quoting from a Senator Wyden's remarks – 4,725 wire transfers, adding up to nearly \$1.1 billion, flowing in and out of one of Epstein's bank accounts. When you look into that – and the Treasury, Trump's Treasury is blocking us from looking into it – what you see is individuals giving Epstein money to launder. And when you get into that line of business during the time he was doing it, you obviously go towards the Russian oligarchs who are experts on it. And that's the irony. It's not a very pleasant joke with respect to Epstein, but what it proves is the Russian oligarchs were far more expert in hiding money, transferring money, and operating tax evasion schemes and money laundering schemes, far more expert than Epstein. Epstein had nothing to offer the oligarchs, the Russians, that they didn't already have and they recognized that.

There's one particularly amusing lie Epstein told that highlights the sort of money laundering business he was running. That's the email where a real estate hustler in Manhattan writes an email to Epstein and says, "I'd like to bring a couple of Russian clients around to your house and see if we could sell them your house". At the time, bear in mind, Epstein had stolen the property of the house in Manhattan from Wexner and subsequently they adjusted who was the true owner, and at what cost, between the trusts that were fronting for each of them. Leave that aside. The real value of the Upper 60th, I think, East Side Manhattan townhouse was somewhere between 50 and 80 million. In order to conceal that he didn't really own the property and couldn't sell it, he told the real estate hustler in the email that Roman Abramovich had been to see the house, had been in contact with Epstein, and had offered him \$250 million for the house and Epstein says he turned him down. This was a preposterous lie. But what Epstein was doing was hiding the fact that he and Wexner controlled the house, that Wexner controlled whether he could sell it. And that the value was tiny. What Epstein was doing was promoting himself, big-noting himself, while Abramovich never made that approach. Abramovich bought townhouses further up the street in Manhattan.

And I could go on with all of the tales of Epstein's attempts, you see absurd attempts by Epstein in the email where he says to his tiny New York City star, and I'm just reading, "Please prepare a flight time plan: New York, Paris, Qatar, Dubai, Dubai, Kenya, Dubai, Almaty, Maldives, Minsk, Crimea, Kiev, Paris". He sends an email to his secretary in New York to do that. This is back in May 2013. He wants to fly to Crimea. He wants to fly to

Yalta. He did it twice in May of 2012, 2013. He never gets there. He never got to Russia. He was offered, as a so-called US businessman, opportunities to shake Putin's hand at crowd events in Vladivostok, in St. Petersburg and elsewhere, but he never got there.

DL: Now, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt, John, that Epstein had extensive connections and direct interactions with former US President Bill Clinton. Clinton stayed at his island. Clinton visited him at his New York mansion. We know that Epstein had extensive direct interactions with former Israeli Prime Minister and former head of Israeli military intelligence Ehud Barak. Barak stayed at his residence repeatedly and visited him on the island. Barak's wife also stayed at Epstein's residence. We know that at a time when Israeli intelligence officer Yoni Koren was serving in Israeli intelligence, he stayed on three occasions for extended periods of time at Epstein's house. Are you aware of any evidence that Epstein himself ever met with a senior Russian official such as Vladimir Putin, such as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, such as the head of the Russian Central Bank, or a senior official in Russian intelligence? Are you aware of any evidence that there was ever any such direct meeting between Epstein and a Russian official of that stature?

JH: There is no evidence of that. Epstein boasted of all his connections. He tried to make money off them. There's no evidence that Epstein ever boasted that he had met senior Russian government officials other than Vitaly Churkin, who was the Russian ambassador in Manhattan, and therefore easy access. But Churkin did not apparently introduce him to any other Russians. Now, Epstein's only ties, links, connections for face-to-face meetings were with Russian women. And he trafficked Russian women whom he bought and sold. No, no, there's no indication apart from that. And the suggestions that are appearing in the press reports are simply attempts to divert from the real political connections that Epstein had with Norway, the Czech Republic, Israel, and of course the United States.

But there's no sign that he even boasted of US intelligence connections. No, no, he went after Americans with money, including Noam Chomsky. He did tax evasion and money laundering financial advice for Chomsky, husband and wife. He tried it with Steve Bannon. He tried it on all sorts of people. But there's no evidence whatsoever. And as I've suggested, the evidence is ironic. The Russians, when it comes to tax evasion, money laundering, converting cash from one jurisdiction into palaces and motor boats and islands and that sort of stuff, toys in other jurisdictions, the Russians got to that game long before Epstein arrived. And if you look at exactly how Epstein describes what he offers – crypto schemes for Putin – it's laughable. And the Russians dismissed him as yet another American hustler, and on that point, they were right.

DL: So, since we're on the subject of American hustlers and Epstein, I just wanted to show you this, John, and ask you about it. While Kirill Dmitriev has been apparently tasked with negotiating, if possible, some kind of resolution of the Ukraine war and improving ties between Russia and the United States, negotiating on behalf of the Russian Federation, Dmitriev has been making a lot of commentary on social media that strikes me frankly as highly sycophantic towards Donald Trump. So I'm going to show you one example. Here is a

post on X that Dmitriev put out on February 10th, and he claims that "Trump has been fighting the satanic wing of the liberal West". And he is quoting here a post from Representative Anna Paulina Luna, that Trump "didn't play their game. He helped expose it. And when they couldn't blackmail him, they tried to smear him".

I could show you plenty of examples like this. One other one I'll mention is that Melania Trump recently came out with a book, which was widely mocked by literary critics, but apparently people who read the book, ordinary people who read the book thought of it very highly. And so Dmitriev was defending Melania's Trump's book and saying, "look how the public, the people, have fallen in love with her book". It strikes me that this is really an absurd sort of line of commentary we're getting from Dmitriev, because as he surely knows Trump's name is all over the Epstein files. I mean, thousands upon thousands – I think the number is in excess of 30,000 mentions of Donald Trump and some very serious allegations being made against Donald Trump. And we know for a fact that the department of justice is doing everything possible to downplay or minimize Trump's involvement with Epstein. I don't know how this can't be known to Kirill Dmitriev. And so he's talking about "satanic aspects of the liberal West". What could be more satanic than pedophilia?

So my question to you, John, is this: do you think this is just Kirill Dmitriev adopting a certain posture towards Trump in order to ingratiate himself with Trump and perhaps extract in a clever way concessions from Trump that he might not otherwise be able to gain? Is this just a strategy, a tactic? Or is this the way Dmitriev actually thinks? And if it is the way he actually thinks, if he is a great admirer of Donald Trump, why would the Russian Federation assign this man to negotiate on its behalf with the Trump administration?

JH: Dmitriev is representing the business constituencies in the Central Bank of Russia in negotiations, principally with Steve Witkoff and then subsequently with Jared Kushner and Joshua Gruenbaum. The three of them have presented themselves most recently in the Krem. In the last few days, it's been very clear, but it's been clear since the Trump presidency began, that Dmitriev's constituency and Dmitriev's line in attempting to restore business as usual for Russia is extremely strongly opposed, criticized, and condemned by other senior Russian officials. At the beginning – and that was the Riyadh meeting of Foreign Minister Lavrov, the Secretary of State Rubio, the then National Security Advisor on the US side and the National Security Advisor on the Russian side – Lavrov attempted to sideline and remove Dmitriev, even physically removing him from the negotiating room. That was back last year, more than a year ago now.

In the last few days, Lavrov has launched a very unusual set of attacks on the role that Dmitriev has been playing without exactly saying so. In an interview with a press organ of the BRICS a couple of days back, Lavrov basically said the anchorage understandings are dead. Something his deputy foreign minister has been saying for months, something the Kremlin criticizes and repudiates. When Lavrov said that in the interview, Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for the president, repudiated and said, "no, no no, the anchorage understandings are still on the tape". I'll come back to Dmitriev's role in this in a minute.

After that back and forth, which is unprecedented, the foreign minister saying one thing, the president's spokesman saying another, Lavrov appeared and testified to the State Duma, the parliament, on February 11th and spelled out that there is no improvement and no practical visibility of any readiness on the US side to develop either economic cooperation or military cooperation. In fact, he went on the offense, and this meant, in Russian political terms, against Dmitriev's line. Lavrov launched a very clear warning that the US has been escalating, that Trump has been escalating especially in the war at sea and in the sanctions aimed not only at Russia for selling oil but aiming at India and China for buying it. When Lavrov said that in parliament, Russia Today, the Kremlin propaganda organ, came out today with an editorial saying, "no, no, Lavrov was not attacking Dmitriev. Dmitriev is on the second track of a dual-track Russian strategy". This is an unusual editorial from a state propaganda organ to try to minimize the degree to which Lavrov, the Security Council, and the General Staff are totally opposed to the kinds of concessions and bribes that Dmitriev has been offering Witkoff and Kushner.

Now, let's just go into what those bribes are and then finally answer your question. My sources say the following from being very clearly aware of how Witkoff and Kushner behaved when they're with the president and when they behaved in the so-called negotiations in Abu Dhabi in the last two rounds. Witkoff is understood on the Russian side to be crude in talk, arrogant, and determined to project US military power, US political power, US economic power. He's also on the take, also open to a variety of business deals which Kushner's presence establishes as Trump family related.

The most significant of these is the one Dmitriev has been negotiating but is not yet in the Russian press. That's a privatization of Russia's Central Bank reserves in the United States and Europe. Depending on which calculation you come up with, those bank reserves are somewhere north of \$230 billion. The Dmitriev line has been to suggest that they can be privatized into a joint US-Russian development fund. Guess who would supervise the development fund? It's the same formula as the BoP [Board of Peace] for Gaza. Kushner, Wikoff, Wikoffs sons, Trump's sons and others would join Russians on the board of this development fund, which would then take over the \$230 billion worth of Central Bank reserves frozen and now used to finance the war since 2022. There's no discussion of that kind of project.

On the other hand, a few of the elements have popped up. President Putin said that a billion dollars for the equity stake in Kushner's, Gruenbaum's, and Trump's Gaza redevelopment fund, a billion dollars worth of equity state might be available from Russia, but only if it was unfrozen from Russian assets in the United States. One billion. There's also been some suggestions that Russia might contribute to the battlefield restoration or some form of Ukraine restoration after a settlement, but only if the funds came out of the frozen assets. These are hints that, indeed, have been pushing this. And it's with great ferocity, it's being opposed behind the scenes. And what Lavrov has done in the last few hours is to surface it. What the Kremlin has done has been to squelch the talk by saying, "no, no, no, the

Anchorage formula of understandings with Trump are still on the table as Lavrov agreed to say in front of parliament".

"Anchorage understanding", "Anchorage formula" is code for what Dmitriev's offering. What Dmitriev is offering can be described, exactly as my Russian sources describe it, as forms of bribery to the Trump family, the Witkoff family, the Lutnicnk family, and others, to encourage them to look the other way while Russia accelerates on the battlefield, and so forth. Underneath all of this is a fundamental Russian understanding that nothing you offer the Americans, including bribes, will ever be honored. That was Putin's bitter experience with Hillary Clinton, it's their experience today. So Dmitriev is running a line out on a limb of bribery which he can't discuss in public in which indeed he is offering to the Trump family and the Trump administration, let's say, comforting noises that he's still sticking to the deal he thinks they discussed. The last time was his discussion in Miami with Bessent, Witkoff and Kushner.

Now, my Russian sources say what happens in the room when Witkoff and Kushner are there. Answer: Witkoff does all the talk. Kushner says nothing. Why then is Kushner there? Kushner is there to represent Trump himself. Kushner has a kind of father figure relationship with Witkoff. They aren't separate in any way, but Kushner's there to symbolize that when that so-called economic cooperation deal Dmitriev has been authorized to put on the table is discussed – if Kushner blinks, if Kushner nods, if Kushner says yes, then that's the signal that the Trump family will abide by the terms of the prime. That's how the negotiations have been going. When Lavrov says, "no, they're not really going, they're escalating against us at sea" – that's the statement of the factions in the Russian policy-making establishment against Dmitriev.

DL: So going back to my question, it's not clear to me whether these sort of sycophantic expressions were seen from Dmitriev towards Trump and his inner circle – I guess in a sense, John, my question isn't particularly important. What you've said is important. But I'm curious, is this genuine? Is this Kirill Dmitriev actually expressing the views that he holds towards Trump and the American leadership, or is this just a means of ingratiating himself with Trump for the purpose of getting a deal? What's your sense about that?

JH: Let me try and answer this way, Dimitri. I'm also American. I've also been educated at Harvard. I've also been in Russian politics along with Dmitriev, because I started in 1989 with the collapse of the Gorbachev regime and the rise of the Yeltsin regime. What I experienced for that decade, like all Russians, was an outpouring of Russian desire to be loved by Americans, including me. Dmitriev was sent for his high school education in the United States. He got an undergraduate degree from Stanford. He got a business certificate from the Harvard Business School. He thinks he understands the United States. He wants to be loved by the Americans in exactly the same fashion that brought Russia to near destruction during the 1990s Yeltsin period.

What Dmitriev represents is a combination of psychological factors of wanting to be loved by the United States, which Russia went through during the 1990s. You won't hear Dmitriev say a bad word about the Yeltsin administration. You won't hear him say anything like the lessons learned by Americans and Russians together after President Putin took over. What this combination of ingratiating towards the Trump family means is a combination of tactic, which I've just explained, and psychology, which the Russian people endured for more than a decade and have rejected. But Dmitriev is still back in that period because his constituents came to multi-billion dollar power in Russia during that period. And his political allies, you might say, included Chubais, the privatization chief, now in exile in Israel, being prosecuted slowly in Moscow, Alexei Kudrin, President Putin's most trusted economic advisor, finance minister, deputy prime minister, candidate to be president one of these days, but no chance now and he's also out of power. But Elvira Nabiullina, the governor of the Central Bank, is not out of power yet. And these are the forces representing the underlying period of oligarch power that nearly destroyed Russia in the 1990s. So they have a psychology of wanting to be loved by Americans. They have a psychology of convincing other Russians they understand Americans better than other Russians do. Some people would call that psychology "fifth column".

DL: I wasn't aware that Anatoly Chubais, the former privatization chief who presided over the scandalous and ruinous privatization program, was also an Israeli. That's an interesting piece of news. Which brings me to my next subject, and that is, John, that according to media reports, Vladimir Putin has been attempting to mediate a de-escalation between Iran and Israel. And, in fact, he's reported to have spoken, I think this came directly from the Kremlin to both Netanyahu and the Iranian President Pezeshkian in mid-January in an attempt to come to some sort of an understanding.

We also have reports coming from Rear Admiral Shahram Irani of the commander of the regular Iranian Navy that later this month, Iran will hold naval exercises in the Indian Ocean with the Russian Navy and the Chinese Navy. I understand that this is an annual event and has been for some time. I'd like you to talk to us a bit about the stakes for Russia in Iran. Why is Iran of strategic importance to the Russian Federation and how is the Russian Federation likely to respond to another resumption of the Israeli-American war of aggression on Iran?

JH: It's a big question, and we don't have a lot of time to try to answer it. We have talked about this in the past. Where to begin? There are more than 200 years of history between Russia and Iran that have built up both common understandings of the strategic geography that they share and common distrust of each other's motives towards each other. One has to understand that there's both trust and mistrust going back more than 200 years, and in the current political lineup in Iran and the current lineup in Moscow, there continue to be points of misunderstanding, points of distrust, points of less than hearty consensus. That's first.

Second, there is a special Putin relationship with Israel that's unique and concentrated on the president. We've touched on it in the past. It's understood in Iran. It is understood in Israel. It is understood everywhere that President Putin has a special relationship he deems to be

necessary to protect the Russian population, the Russian-speaking population of Israel. When the Israelis and the United States launched the June war of last year, Putin revealed that he had telephoned Prime Minister Netanyahu and arranged that among the targets in Iran, the Russian nuclear reactor and the Russian technicians in Bushehr in southern Iran would not be hit by the Israelis or Americans. In other words, while on the one hand announcing Russia's opposition to the attack on Iran, President Putin was negotiating with the Israelis for special favor for targeting.

Since then, there's been a heightened, let's say, relationship between the military and intelligence services of Iran and Russia to raise the level of Iranian defense to deter an Israeli-US attack. That's secret. It's not discussed. The question of mutual assured deterrence between Iran and the current US armada in the Sea of Oman and the US and Israeli preparations to attack Iran from land, from Arab bases, from Israel, from Jordan, and elsewhere. That balance is stable on the brink. And both the Russian side and the Iranian side understand very clearly what the stakes are if we go over the brink. That was explained clearly to President Putin when the equivalent of the national security advisor of Iran, Mr. Larijani, went to the Kremlin and presented Iran's war plan, its defense against war and its threat that if the US attacks, if the Israelis attack, Iran will launch a regional war that will be aimed at US bases in the Arab states, against Emirati and Saudi and Qatari economic installations and against Israel itself.

The Russian pledge to support and defend Iranian sovereignty is embodied in a strategic partnership treaty which Masoud Pezeshkian signed with Vladimir Putin, if I'm not mistaken, back in January, a year ago. And folks who want to read the treaty, compare it to the Russian treaty with North Korea and other treaties of that kind, go back to "The Pistachio Pact", as I called it then, a year ago on *Dances with Bears*. It does not commit Russia to defend Iran against an attack on Iran. There's nothing like the explicit mutual defense arrangement Russia has with North Korea.

But, to go back to the bigger premise of your question, Dimitri, what are the stakes for Russia? The stakes for Russia are that if the Iranian regime is toppled by a combination of Israeli-American destruction, internal chaos of the kind the the Iranians have just defeated in January and replaced by a regime that's pro-Israel and pro-United States, Iran will have followed the path that Syria was subject to. It will be broken up into ethnic communities and ethnic territories. And the northern borders of Iran, including the Caspian Sea, will become the new platform for the so-called Western Allied attack to do the same to Russia. And that's not a new strategy. A strategic dismemberment, first of Iran, then of Russia, that's not new in President Putin's term. It's not. It goes back to Stalin's period, to World War II. The Russian and then before Soviet Russian imperial concern was that some combination of Iran and outside forces, the Ottomans perhaps, the British definitely, the Americans since World War II, all aim to use Iran as a platform to attack the Russian Caucasus and begin the process of breaking up first the Russian Empire in Empire days, then the Soviet Union in Communist Party days, and now the Russian Federation in Putin's days. The strategy is the same. The strategy is the same.

So the stakes for Russia remain that Iran is strategically more important to Russia's term security than Israel. That's never said clearly, but it's understood to be the case, and there are several hundred years of history to demonstrate it. Were Iran to fall to Israeli-US attack, we would be facing another round of Chechen war type breakup, and not only in the Caucasus, but across the Caspian Sea and what have you. So the stakes are those, and I think that answers all the parts of your question, but if I've left something out, tell me.

DL: Well, the part that – and this obviously involves some prognostication – but what do you think Russia is going to do if they launch that war? Will Russia limit itself to providing some sort of assistance on the intelligence front, some limited military capabilities, like electronic warfare equipment, perhaps air defense systems? Or do you think that Russia will seriously consider going beyond that?

JH: The audience that would like to hear prognostications which indicate that Russia is fully committed to Iran and that Iran is winning the war against the United States and Israel will be a little disappointed at how much more cautious I am about the reality. The fact of the matter is that we have reached a stable assured mutual deterrence. Let's call it a mutually assured deterrence that is stable at the current brink. The current brink is stable in a temporary way, as indicated by the negotiations which started in Oman last week between the Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi and the US delegation, which included for the first time a US military chief, Admiral Cooper of CENTCOM who commands the armada.

The Russians are doing everything possible in secret to make Iranian defense as deterrent as that stability, the non-attack, the non-war position requires. What the Russian side would then do if the attack is launched in the terms that you mentioned – electronic intelligence, targeting intelligence, satellite intelligence, jamming intelligence, and and the hardware that's required to both defend and attack – what Russia will do won't be tested until it happens. But it won't be soft, it won't be passive as it was during the June war. Let's not be unfair to both sides. There was deep dislocation on the Iranian side in the readiness to use Russian air defense systems at the time. I believe, but I may be wrong, that the differences between the IRGC and the Russian side and the differences between the Iranian regular military and the Russian regular military have been ironed out and negotiated in detail since the June war, and that's quite a long time. And I believe that we have, let's say, mutual assured deterrence at the brink. On the other hand, your question was, what happens if the US and Israeli side go over the brink? I don't know.

DL: But it sounds though, as though you think there is at least a prospect, a possibility, that Russia will become more embroiled in this war than simply providing electronic warfare capability and air defense capability and military intelligence. That's not a prospect it sounds like you would exclude?

JH: That's the old KGB term when refusing to answer: "I don't exclude the possibility that..."

DL: Alright.

JH: Let's be frank, there is a faction in Moscow which is hostile to Iran. It's not necessarily pro-Israel either, but it is hostile to Iran, deeply suspicious of Iran, deeply uncertain and unwilling to commit to the preservation of the clerical regime. There is such a faction. I negotiate with it. I talk to it from time to time. It's important to understand it's there.

DL: Is there not also a faction that is hostile to Israel?

JH: Yes, of course there is, especially in the Defense Ministry, which manifested its hostility when the Israelis spoofed Syrian missile teams and shot down and killed 15 Russian crew members of a surveillance aircraft as it came into land at Khmeimim. That produced the most obvious and explicit opposition and hostility to President Putin's pro-Israel line from the defense ministry and the general staff at the time. So, yes, that's there. And it's not anti-Semitic, it's simply a reflection of Russian military calculation, military strategy.

But let's be clear where we are from a Russian point of view. From a public opinion point of view, Russia is already at war with the Western world on the Ukraine battlefield. It's a reasonable strategic and tactical and operational calculation that Russia cannot fight more than one war against the rest of the world at a time. And President Putin has a reasonably balanced view about how to make commitments when your military is fully occupied with that serious damaging and costly war on the Ukrainian battlefield. So there's a reluctance on the part of Russian voters – I can come back to the polls that show this in the last few days – and therefore reluctance in the part of Russians politicians to beat their chests and say Russia can fight more than one war against the United States on more than front at a time.

It's all very well for people a long way away to say Russia should be defending Iran in a more aggressive way. Russia should be defending Cuba from the current US attempt to squeeze Cuba to death on oil. Russia should have done more to protect – this is the way the argument is put – Venezuela. And we go back to the argument about what Russia should have done and didn't do with respect to preserving President Assad's government in Syria from the Turkish-Israeli and American attack back more than a year ago. It's all very well for folks to say, sitting in their armchairs, that Russia can fight more than one war at a time. It can't fight more than one war at a time, because in fact it's having to deal with at least the war on the Ukraine battlefield and the war at sea which is escalating. These were the points Foreign Minister Lavrov made the other day as I began.

So how much Russia can do has got to be tempered with what it's capable of doing and what its strategic priorities for Russia's interests are at the present time, and this is a problem so serious that it triggered the display last week that Russia wants it clear that there's a point or points of disagreement between President Putin and President Xi. It was made clear in the readout for President Putin's National Security Adviser Yuri Ushakov that there is something short of total agreement between Russia and China, and yet the point of disagreement has not

been revealed on the Russian side. Instead, the Russian side said last week, and it was very unusual that this should be said, "there's a problem there".

It was a problem when Secretary of the Security Council Sergei Shoigu went to Beijing just before the Xi-Putin conversation. It couldn't be resolved then. It was resurfaced by Lavrov back last December when the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in Moscow meeting Shoigu of the Security Council and then the Foreign Minister across town in Moscow with Lavrov. There is a serious point of disagreement between Russia and China over what's to be done to deal with US escalation of seaborne trade, of the squeezing to death of Venezuela and Cuba, where China is also actively involved, and so on and so forth. There are differences. And when you have differences of that size strategically and politically, when they can't be debated publicly but are hinted at, you've got to understand that in politics, it's distinct from podcasting, one's responsible for lives, blood, and the country's survival. And it's easy to say, and it's especially attractive to podcast audiences to see that Russia, sort of a lone ranger, is about to ride against the enemies and triumph successfully and so forth and so on. These are fantasies for which there is always a large fan audience. The reality is dangerous, the reality is serious, and you've got to expect that Russia can't promise what it cannot deliver. It does acknowledge that the problem of deterring Trump from military adventure is growing. The problem that Kirill Dmitriev's bribe approach doesn't resolve. And so on and so forth. I think I've said quite clearly, we are not trumpeting triumphalism here, we're trumpeting something more cautious in which the US side must understand an uncertainty. What exactly will Russia do if they move on one of these fronts or another? It's that uncertainty that's a strategic asset as valuable as the hardware that could be launched.

DL: So, we've only got a couple of minutes left, John. Unfortunately, I have another interview that I need to begin, but I did want to conclude by commenting on the constraints you've quite properly pointed out in Russian capability to fight more than one major war at a time. And I think when you said, by the way, that Russia is fighting the whole world, I imagine you meant the whole Western world, not the whole world.

JH: Yes, I did.

DL: So this being the reality that Russia confronts – and this goes back to a conversation you and I have been having for quite some time about whether the Trump regime really has an interest in ending the Ukraine war – if the Ukraine war is limiting Russia's ability to aid countries like Venezuela and Cuba and Iran, which are obviously prime targets of the neocons in Washington, then it sounds to me like the Trump regime has a powerful incentive to keep the Ukraine war going for as long as possible, even if it understands that ultimately, Ukraine will be destroyed and will lose that war. Because for the time that the war is going on, Russia is pinned down and the United States will have a freer hand in these parts of the world than it otherwise would have. Is that a fair assessment of the situation?

JH: Yes, it is. But my response to that is, and we've said this before, the Trump administration cannot afford to lose a war politically. It cannot afford to trigger a capitulation

in Ukraine which would destroy NATO's position there. What the presence of General Grynkewich, the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, and General Adamski, the J-2, the military intelligence chief, what they were doing in Abu Dhabi is trying to achieve an outcome on the Ukrainian battlefield that preserves Ukraine as a fighting platform for the future, that preserves US capability to expand its war against Russia in Poland, in the Baltic States, in the seas of Europe, and going upwards, northwards to Finland, the Scandinavian countries, and across into the Arctic from a Greenland base and from a Canadian base.

Grynkewich is there to produce an orderly withdrawal from a losing war in order to avoid a political disaster before the midterms of a Kabul-type route, a Saigon 1975 route. That's what would be death for Trump politically, just as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz in a US attack on Iran would kick up oil prices just as summer driving season starts in the United States and the midterm election campaign starts. The US needs to order sequential war fighting so that it doesn't appear to be lost or defeated on any one battlefield at a time. That's its approach. And the Russian side needs time to sequence its military capabilities one at a time. I think it's fair to say that for the time being, each side is testing the other at not losing. And the US side will not attack unless it has overwhelming superiority of firepower. If there's a significant uncertainty both in terms of firepower and in terms of post-attack inflation, body bags and casualty rates, if the US is convinced Russia can inflict that level of uncertainty, or the Iranians can, or Russia and China can combine to support Cuba, for example, then the US will stay in its armada and find a way to, as it were, preserve mutual assured deterrence without losing a Trump victory on the brink.

So we are in what Lavrov rightly called a completely new set of global wars that we didn't expect to be in. That's where we are now. That's what Lavrov said yesterday in Parliament. But Lavrov also said, and I'm just looking down at my paper to read it: "We stand in solidarity with the peoples of Venezuela and Cuba who are, as mentioned earlier, under severe external pressure. We intend to provide our friends with all necessary support together with other like-minded partners". What does that mean now for Cuba? Does it mean that the Russian side will run oil tankers, Russian flagged oil tankers defended by the Russian Navy to deliver the oil that's been cut off from Venezuela, been cut off from Mexico? We haven't the time to go into the problems that Russia faces of defending a civilian fleet of tankers, the so-called "shadow fleet", with the Russian Navy. We have a major faction fight in Moscow right now, in which the head of the Russian Navy has gone public. Admiral Moiseyev has gone public with the argument that the Russian Navy must defend the Russian fleets at sea.

On the other hand, if folks want to look back, I wrote a book about the Sovcomflot, the state tanker fleet that spent years in the British courts defending a level of corruption that nearly ruined that company. It's not easy. It is not clear. It's not clear for President Putin how well he can organize re-flagging of the fleet carrying Russian oil all over the world and how effectively the Russian Navy can do so. The US Navy is just trying to demonstrate that it can intercept tankers like the *Marinera*, which was a Russian flag off the coast of Scotland and Iceland. But it took 18 days and more than 6,000 kilometers of chasing that vessel before the US Navy was in a position to act. It has just taken nearly a month and 10,000 kilometers for

the US Navy to seize the Aquila II, which was not a Russian flag, but was carrying Iranian oil across from Iran probably towards China. It's not clear exactly when the interception took place. The US Navy wants to look as if it can dominate the seas. Russia has a strategic necessity now to reflag the fleet and mobilize Sovcomflot and other resources with the Russian Navy. That in domestic Russian politics is not easy. It's highly controversial, I might say, without getting into the individuals.

So we are on the brink that I call stable mutual assured deterrence, serious unresolved problems right now of what Russia can do, what the US can't do, and the uncertainty linking both sides into stably, not killing each other for the time being. And that's, to go back to the final point, Dmitriev's faction in Moscow is determined to prevent any clash between US and Russian military on any battlefield that they think would destroy all possibility that the bribe would work for the future of the settlement of one battle. That's their line.

DL: Thank you very much, John. It was always a fascinating and stimulating discussion. I look forward to our next one.

JH: Thank you, Dimitri. There will be a next one, I hope.

DL: As do we all. Take care of my friend. And we're signing off today for Reason2Resist.

END

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