



## US Provokes Iran – Where Do Russia and China Stand?

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**Iranian Navy:** This is Iranian sepan calling on channel 16. The Strait of Hormuz is still closed. We will open it by the order of our leader Imam Khamenei, not by the tweets of some idiot. If you want to pass through the Strait, you must ask permission from the Iranian sepan navy. All vessels that have a connection with our enemies will be targeted if they try to pass the Strait of Hormuz. Out.

**Dimitri Lascaris (DL):** Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Kalamata, Greece on April 20th, 2026 for Reason2Resist. What you just heard was a recording published yesterday by the Iranian military. The recording seems to be authentic and, if so, confirms that Iran's military has closed the Strait of Hormuz again after a series of highly provocative Truth Social posts by Donald Trump, including a post in which the presumptive idiot announced that the US blockade on Iranian ports would remain in place. He also said, hours before Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz again, that Iran had agreed to never again close the Strait of Hormuz. Now Trump made this announcement about the continuation of the blockade despite a statement on X by Iran's foreign minister that Iran would reopen the Strait of Hormuz. After Iran closed the Strait in response to Trump's Truth Social post, Trump announced even more that the US Navy had attacked and seized an Iranian cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman. This unprovoked attack on a civilian Iranian vessel in international waters was a clear violation of international law, an act of war, and a flagrant breach of the ceasefire between the US and Iran. According to Iranian media, the Iranian military reacted to the US Navy's attack by firing drones at US warships in the Gulf of Oman. This is a breaking report issued by Al Jazeera a few hours ago stating: "Iranian forces launched drones toward US warships following an attack on an Iranian commercial vessel in the Sea of Oman, Iranian media reports." Now during the latest war of aggression on Iran, events in Russia have receded into the background. But what is happening there and in Ukraine is a key part of a much larger picture, the picture I would suggest of a dying US empire, but a very stubborn and powerful one nonetheless. And here to discuss those events and the most recent events in the Strait of Hormuz, the reaction of Russia and China to the events of the past 24 hours is our good friend John Helmer. John Helmer is the longest-serving foreign correspondent in

Russia. And the only Western journalist to direct his own bureau, independent of national and commercial ties. He was born and educated in Australia, then at Harvard. He's also been a professor of political science, sociology and journalism, and an advisor to governments, including the hapless governments of Greece and Australia. Although back in those days, they weren't so hapless, John, thank you very much for joining us again today.

**John Helmer (JH):** Thanks for having me, Dimitri. In terms of haplessness, you left out the fact that I served in the Carter administration, Jimmy Carter's single term administration. And then also with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister before the civil war began against the Tamils. So yeah, I've had a whole career of working for hapless political losers.

**DL:** I'm glad that you feel free to express your views about these subjects today.

**JH:** Let me assure you, you'll learn a great deal more about politics from losing than from winning.

**DL:** Well said. So before we begin today, John, I just want to remind our viewers to like and share this video if they find it to be informative. And if you're not already a subscriber to Reason2Resist, please become one. We just soared past the threshold of 170,000 subscribers, which we reached in about 18 months time. We're very gratified by all of the support, but you can help us to expand the reach of our unapologetic resistance journalism by becoming a subscriber if you're not already one. So John, I'd like to start with the Chinese government's reaction to the events of the past 24 hours. I have not had the benefit of listening to or even reading statements coming from representatives of the Chinese Government, but you have. Could you tell us what they said and how you interpret their statements?

**JH:** I was waiting for us to go on, so it turned out that the business week daily briefing at the Chinese Foreign Ministry by Guo Jiakun went live about one hour ago. I haven't got a text yet, the Chinese government hasn't published a text, so I've listened. Let me come to Guo Jiakun's answers. He was asked four questions about China's response to the closing of the Hormuz Strait and to the attack on the *Touska*, the Iranian boxship which was attacked, seized by the United States Navy in the Gulf of Oman. Let me come back to what he said, but if you don't mind, let's get to the very particular geographical situation of that attack because it's very significant. I've published the map as best I can based on what Central Command has said was the location of the interception, the warning, the firing on the *Touska*, and then the boarding of the vessel. According to Central Command, it was 40 nautical miles, that's about 75 kilometres from Chabahar, the Iranian port in the Gulf of Oman. So without having a map on the screen, let me just say that we are now talking about an area outside, east of the Strait of Hormuz, and it is unclear what unclear by intention on the part of the US Navy and Central Command to identify whether the vessel was heading westward towards the Strait in order to reach Bandar Abbas inside the Strait or whether it was making towards Chabahar which is outside the Strait. If it was only 40 nautical miles out, there's the map I put up on a tweet, it shows in the box on your right Chabahar, it shows my crude way of showing you what a 75 kilometre radius looks like out of Chabahar and what you can't see way up on the left corner of the map, that's more than a hundred kilometres to the West is the Strait of Hormuz. So,

summing up, what's happened here is an interception and an attack on an Iranian vessel apparently at least a hundred kilometres east of the Strait of Hormuz, heading for Chabahar, which is an Iranian port, as you can see, way outside the Strait. What does that mean and why did it happen?

On the surface, what it shows is the United States Navy and as you indicated, Dimitri, the President of the United States, intends to apply naval force against Iranian vessels on any sea, anywhere, anywhere, not simply at the Strait. This is no longer an attempt to enforce a US regime on the Hormuz versus an Iranian regime on the Hormuz, with which you open and about which Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi made some statements which have been misinterpreted. So what I see here, what the map shows you, what the geography shows you and the distances involved, is an attempt to attack a boxship. So it's a container vessel. I'm not clear whether the containers were empty or full. And I think we have to assume it was making its way not westward into the Strait but northeastward to Chabahar. In other words, the US is attempting to attack an Iranian vessel outside the Strait. Now if that's what happened, and I think we can show from the map that that's where it was, and CENTCOM doesn't deny that the attack took place in the Gulf of Oman, I've seen some US Navy reports referring to the location in the North Arabian Sea, you'll understand the US Navy no longer refers to the Persian Gulf as the Persian Gulf, it's now the Arabian Gulf. What we have here is an expansion of a Trump regime against all Iranian vessels. Now that's occurring within a ceasefire period, right? So arguably, and CENTCOM has published the firing on the vessel, and Trump's note, a tweet, says that the firing penetrated the engine room of the vessel, you don't see that in the footage, you don't see a strike, you see firing, but you don't see striking, what Trump is doing is expanding, expanding the attack on Iran during the ceasefire away from the Hormuz. Now, that is not only, if you look at it, a violation of the ceasefire terms, it's essentially not connected to the Strait of Hormuz either breaking one side's version of the blockade of passage or the others. Now, why was it done now? In my view, and we'll come back to this a bit later, you may interpret it differently, what the US is now doing, what Trump is doing is on the one hand by tweeting, being provocative to the Iranians in order to destroy the possibility of a second round of negotiations in Islamabad, which are due just to start today. Trump is provoking the Iranians rhetorically, first. Second, as I understand it, but it's unclear at the moment, Trump has refused to authorise Vice President Vance to lead the delegation to Islamabad for the second round, alleging, according to the Financial Times report of a few hours back, security reasons. But he's sending his own son-in-law Jared Kushner and Steven Witkoff to head the delegation. That's another form of provocation to the Iranians because those two are unacceptably unreliable. They do not negotiate in good faith. The Iranian side was more than ready to accept on surface that Vance negotiated in good faith. Now we add to a couple of extras, the naval operations. Remember that when the first round of Islamabad negotiations began, the US attempted with two vessels, naval vessels, I believe they were destroyers, to move into and through the Strait of Hormuz and were intercepted and warned to go out, that event or those circumstances occurred as the Islamabad talks began. They might have been regarded as an attempt to provoke the Iranians as the negotiations were taking place and maybe to trigger a walk out. It didn't work. The vessels were deterred by the possibility of a shore attack, they reversed and went back eastwards.

This is another, in my view, attempt by the US using force to provoke the Iranians into acting in such a way that the negotiations will not take place.

**DL:** John, if I may just intervene there for a moment. I, first of all, completely agree with your assessment. In fact, on this programme, as you may know, John I've been arguing vociferously for over a week that another attack on Iran was coming and that it was just a question of when and how this was going to unfold, but that there was no genuine desire on the part of the Trump regime to reach a peace deal. I think that was absolutely clear from the very moment that JD Vance walked into the room in Islamabad and put forward a set of maximalist demands after Trump had said, in order to induce the Iranians to come to the table, that he accepted the ten-point Iran peace plan as a base. It was a complete 100% about-face. It was done shamelessly. And even though they had put aside two weeks to negotiate, Vance pulled out after 21 hours, saying, after just less than a day, that he had put on the table the Trump regime's best and final offer. So the whole thing reeks of bad faith and all the signs up until now have pointed towards a resumption of the war by the US and Israel; and I completely concur with your assessment. But the other thing I want to point out here John is that if your reconstruction of where this occurred is more or less accurate this means that – and if the vessels that attacked the Iranian ship were more or less in the immediate vicinity and not at some great distance away, this would mean that there are US naval vessels within less than 100 kilometres of the Iranian coastline near Chabahar; easily within range of a whole array of Iranian weapons. And I would imagine that those vessels, if they're there, are going to hightail it out of there might right quick or else they're going to incur serious fire, from which they will not be able to fully defend themselves. In any case, what are your thoughts about all that?

**JH:** Well, we'll just go to the particulars one more time. There's no doubt that the vessel which attacked the *Touska* was within, you can see from the footage, if that footage is genuine, as the Central Command says, then you can say that the vessel was less than 500 metres away, or between 500 metres and a thousand metres away when the initial firing that is documented in the film shows. So yes, you're right, the US vessel was somewhere along that red line on the map. Therefore, it was within range of drone and missile installations along the coast from Chabahar and the Iranians did not fire at the time. They, you could say, were not incapacitated, they simply were adhering to the ceasefire. The US vessel opened fire first. There was no return of fire from the coastline and the vessel was taken. The subsequent reports you've referred to, the retaliatory fire by drones and missiles after the event, and they appear not to have struck anything. So, yes. it would appear the US Navy vessels attacking have reversed southwards and eastwards to get out of Iranian range. So I think that's what's happened. But we began with your request to look at what the Chinese reaction is. I'll come to that right now. Then, if you don't mind, we'll reserve the question of factional politics playing a very key role, not only in the United States between, let's call it the Vance faction, and the Trump Kushner-Witkoff faction, there is a serious factional disagreement there. So if Trump pulls Vance out, that has political significance we should be discussing. Second, there are factional differences in Beijing between, it appears, President Xi and Foreign Minister Politburo member Wang Li and others who appear to be including the military who were

represented by Dong Jun, the Defence Minister, in a statement he made last week. There are factional differences in Moscow, and they're very visible in some of the, let's say, the documentation I just published. But if you compare ex-President Dmitry Medvedev's statements on the Strait of Hormuz and the behaviour of President Putin's negotiator with the United States, Kirill Dmitriev, you see a profound factional split there. But let's come to each one separately, because it's too much to talk about at the same time. And we'll take it step by step.

Let's go to the Chinese, because something rather important happened. What was that? So the spokesman at the daily briefing, this is Guo Jiakun, was asked four times – I couldn't hear, Reuters identified itself, but I could not hear the text of the question – the text of question asked in English was turned into a voiceover Chinese, and then when Guo answered, his Chinese was turned into English. He had clearly prepared and had a statement which he read four times. He didn't improvise. He didn't make any attempt to improvise or even look up from his script. Each time he asked about the standoff, let's say, the confrontation, the conflict at the Strait of Hormuz, they didn't mention the Gulf of Oman, nobody had caught up with that in Beijing this afternoon, Guo said the situation is, quote, "complex and sensitive." We express our concerns at the complexity and the sensitivity. And I couldn't write it all down. We call on the relevant parties to quote "abide by the ceasefire", and then he quoted President Xi's four points. I don't think I'll need to recite what President Xi's four points are, except to say they're extremely vague. And what China was being asked to comment on was an attack violating the ceasefire in effect by the United States Navy on an Iranian vessel in international waters east of the Strait of Hormuz. Now, he repeated this statement by reading it, looking down and reading his script each of four times. Now, if our audience wants to fault me for showing a lack of respect for 2,000, 5,000 years of Chinese diplomatic custom and speaking vaguely but carrying a big stick in the background, this is not the case with Mr. Guo's briefing. Why can I say that with such confidence? Because he was also asked to respond to US, Japanese, and Philippine exercises in the South China Sea and the expansion of Japanese military operations in that area off China's coast. Here's what he said. He was very explicit. He warned that Japan should take note of its historical responsibility for the attacks and genocidal order of Chinese during World War II. And second, he said he warned Japan, quote, "against flexing its muscles in the South China Sea". Now, pardon me, I do know the difference between the Gulf of Oman and the South Chinese Sea. I know that China does not have a coastline on the Gulf of Oman. But why in these circumstances, when given four opportunities in 40 minutes to respond to what had exactly happened, and there's no doubt Chinese satellite and other intelligence has identified exactly what happened, China did not warn the United States or Iran from flexing their muscles in the Gulf of Oman. In other words, what China took as its position a few minutes ago was to be vague, ambiguous, and soft on Trump in the Gulf of Oman, but tough on Trump and Japan in the South China Sea. Now that tells you, it tells me, and it tells our audience China is adopting a very narrow sense; narrow in this sense that the four points of President Xi imply a very narrow interpretation of the application of international law and national sovereignty so that it gets to be very clear about warning hostile powers off its own coastline but not at all clear when it comes to the Iranian coastline at a gateway, a transport corridor, through which a great deal of

very valuable Chinese oil passes. So China has just demonstrated the kind of softness towards the United States which has been in evidence for some time now.

**DL:** Can I just intervene there? I want to present a somewhat different perspective on this, and this is something that you and I have, you know, in a very friendly way been debating behind the scenes. From my perspective, John, it would be an absolute catastrophe for China if Iran fell. What would then happen is that the United States would have effective control over the whole of West Asia with all of its rich resources, and the trade routes there are extremely important. Geostrategically, allowing this area to fall into the hands of the denizens of power in Washington, who are intensely hostile to China, as we all know, would be an unmitigated disaster for China. Furthermore, it would be a real blow, not only because the United States now would have effective control over all of the resources and the trade routes of this region, and would undoubtedly use that power to strangle the Chinese economy, they wouldn't hesitate to do that, but in addition, it will be quite a blow to the prestige of the Chinese government because Iran is a fellow BRICS member and is a strategic partner of China. They have a very important agreement which designates Iran as a strategic partner of China. And already, China has done little, at least on the surface, to defend Venezuelan sovereignty. Venezuela is a different case from Iran, of course, but I think, and I've said this to you several times in our private communications, that I think China has an extremely powerful incentive in ensuring that Iran does not fall. But the problem that China has is it has a lot of competing interests in the region. It gets far more oil and gas, I understand, from the Arab autocracies of the region than it does from Iran. And it does a whole range of business, extremely important, valuable business with these autocracies. And so it can't be seen to be siding decisively on the side of Iran. From its perspective, it has, I think a powerful incentive to support Iran behind the scenes, and an equally powerful incentive to conceal the extended nature of its support and to try to seem publicly as a neutral arbiter. In the case of the South China Sea, there are no such competing interests. It's not as though they have to be worried about offending some countries that are providing massive amounts of oil and gas to China by taking a more muscular approach to what is happening off the coast of China. So that's how I would interpret it. Now, I could be completely wrong, John. Let me tell you, I have no insight. I'm basing my judgement entirely upon the evidentiary record and what is publicly available information. I have no insight into the thinking of the Chinese government. And I would imagine that there are certainly factional differences that are at play here. I think there are probably factional differences in Iran and in the United States. Every one of the countries that is a party to this existentially dangerous war is probably experiencing significant factional differences, so that I'm sure too is a factor. But in any case, I'm interested in your response to this. Don't you think that it would be extraordinarily damaging to China if they did nothing or very little to support the Iranian cause in this time of a war of aggression by Israel and the United States on Iran.

**JH:** Well, we don't disagree, Dimitri. You've put the strategic case for China to act in more than one way, using more than one track. And I don't just agree with that. And let's make the qualifier for everybody that we're not China experts. We're not in a position to argue out the evidence of the purging that President Xi has been doing, quite visibly, for months now, of

China's military command and the Central Military Commission and the role that the Central Military Commission plays in Politburo decision making. So the very least viewed as I do from the Moscow point of view, and we'll come to the factional fighting in Moscow in a minute, both of us can agree on what sensitive and complicated, complex and sensitive words a few minutes ago about the situation at the Hormuz and in the Gulf of Oman. My own view is, and I invite everyone listening to imagine not what China's about to do or China with Iran with Russia are about to do, let's consider given what you say, and I accept all of your points, strategic objectives, interests of China, why hasn't China acted in such a way already in the past to deter the US from acting in the way that it's been acting? For example, I mean it gets very personal and Trump has been provoking President Xi by tweet. First he has been pointing out, he looks forward to the summit meeting less than four weeks away scheduled in Beijing. The Chinese side hasn't confirmed the schedule of the visit yet. Trump has been showing, tweeting that he's looking forward to giving President Xi a very big hug. He has repeated this line and I haven't got the tweet in front of me, it was issued less than twelve hours ago in which he says he's looking forward to arriving in China and meeting with President Xi. In other words he is hanging out the incentive of that faction in President Xi's administration, which wants to see that China's principal interest, priority interest, is avoiding war with the United States and deterring the United States from increasing the economic warfare that it's been using against China. It's prepared to act in such a way as to deter Trump from more adventures against China at China's coastline. It has not been prepared to act in such a way as to deter the United States from its adventures in the Middle East. And that means that each of us can have a different view about whether that represents ingratiation, appeasement, softness on the Chinese side – and I only mention the terms because they're visibly, audibly argued in Moscow. Now that's another problem we have; with there is the capability you and I have and all of our audience has to assess the factional differences in Moscow because they're made clear, not entirely, not fully, not comprehensively, but one can see the sides of the argument, the strategic argument, the operational argument, the tactical argument, and the questions you just raised, you can see that in Moscow. In the last few days, you can see it in Iran in the way in which there have been IRGC attacks on the foreign minister Abbas Araghchi for a statement in a tweet that opened the Strait of Hormuz, subject Araghchi said to coordination with the Iranian authorities. The ambiguity wasn't enough for some of Araghchi's critics in Tehran to explicitly attack him. So you can see factional differences aired publicly in Iran and the same thing, not clearly made and certainly American journalism has totally failed to make any of this clear, of faction fighting in the Trump White House. So all of these things are clearer in Iran, Moscow, and Washington, but covered up, suppressed, not voiced at all in China. And that's in turn, that silence is an encouragement to the US to escalate, even though China says it's complex and sensitive and you shouldn't be doing it.

**DL:** Again, I'm not sure if we're pushing back, but I think one can view the blockade that was imposed on Venezuela as the beginning of a blockade on China. And one can view what is now happening as an expansion of the blockade on China, and it's moving ever closer to China's coastline. Still a fair bit away, you know, in the Gulf of Oman, but it's getting closer. And it's a matter of public record that the US military has dreamt of one day imposing a naval

blockade on China and effectively starving its economy of the benefits of imports and exports. And if in fact, I think this is an entirely fair interpretation of what's going on based on the public statements of the US military over the years, and the Chinese surely understand this. They surely understand that ultimately, this blockade will become all-encompassing if they allow it to proceed, and do not deter the United States in any way, shape, or form from behaving in this manner. So I agree with you that the rhetoric being employed by China's government, and I fully accept your characterisation of what was said today, does seem like a rather tepid response to this extraordinary aggression. But at the same time, it may be that China has elected to deter by its actions rather than by its words, by, for example, assisting the Iranian military to be much more precise in its attacks on US military assets in the Persian Gulf, which is something that we've seen. The level of precision of these attacks during this round of war is quite impressive. We don't know for sure if that's as a result of Chinese assistance, but it may well be. And so, again, I'm wondering whether we're paying too much attention to the rhetoric and shouldn't be more focused upon the actions of the Chinese government.

**JH:** We aren't disagreeing, but may I make one little correction? The economic blockade against China didn't begin with the Trump blockade against Venezuela. Venezuela's been providing, I think, less than ten percent of the so-called China teapot refinery trade. The blockade began with last year's sanction on China buying Rosneft and Lukoil oil from Russia.

**DL:** I completely agree with your correction. Thank you for that. 100%, I think that's correct.

**JH:** Well, let me make the next point. China was at that time exercising its muscle with the United States, withholding rare earth metals, minerals from the United States trade, for example, in such a way that when that blockade of Russian oil was imposed on China and India, Trump went to the trouble of announcing that he was relieving China of that sanction. He said it when Xi and he met in South Korea because China, he said, needed the Russian oil. I mean, it doesn't matter what Trump agreed publicly to be the reason, the fact was that the display of Chinese retaliation on trade that was sensitive to the United States, helped deter Trump from imposing the force of that sanction on China as Trump was imposing that force on Prime Minister Modi in India. So my own view is that we read the evidence to understand, let's say, the strategic options. And you and I are both discussing and putting on the table what we think the Chinese strategic options would be. And I'm saying they have demonstrated the capability to deter the United States with respect to Russia and Russian oil. They have not not done so with respect to the war against Iran. So I think I can't add any more to that situation.

**DL:** Okay, can we move on then because I definitely want to cover Russia.

**JH:** And that is a good contrast because immediately we move when we move on to Russia I need to emphasise how open the Russian side is being for example but at the same time divided fractionally on the question of whether making a deal with the United States is a higher priority than supporting Iran in this war.

**DL:** John, before you proceed, I just want to put up on the screen this article published by TASS last week, which you've written about. I don't know if you wanted to start there, but I do want to highlight this for our audience, and I've talked about it on our programme several times. This extraordinary article, which says that the "Russian Security Council warns negotiations could mask planning for Iran's strike". This was April 14th. And you pointed out to me, after I talked about this on my programme, that there is no statement to this effect on the website of the Russian Security Council.

**JH:** Let me direct that, but please continue with your thought and let's clarify.

**DL:** Please do clarify that, but the main point I wanted to make here is that this was quite unusual in my experience. You follow the statements coming from the various organs of the Russian government more closely than I do, but I'd never seen anything like this; the Russian Security Council issuing some kind of a statement about a conflict that didn't directly involve Russia, for example, the Ukraine War. And was quite pointedly suggesting that the United States was engaged in another act of treachery by pretending to negotiate while it was engaging in a massive military build-up in the region. In my experience, that's quite unusual that it would do such a thing. In any case, with that, why don't you tell us what your read about this statement is and clarify, please, what we know about the Russian Security Council's relationship to this TASS article.

**JH:** Okay, first of all, I've got to correct what you and I were talking about because I corrected it in an article that folks can read that went up late Sunday on Dances with Bears. Let's just create some context here. First of all the Security Council is the senior principal foreign policy national security decision-making group of Russia and it has – I'm just looking down to get the numbers right – ex officio the head of the council is president Putin and roughly every week or every two weeks he has a virtual meeting – he rarely meets physically these days – with the Security Council on an agenda which is sometimes spelled out on the Kremlin website. The Secretary or executive stand-in for Putin is former Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. He was defence minister between 2012-2024. He was removed. And he was removed in circumstances which subsequently have led to the prosecution for corruption and jailing of a great number of Shoigu's deputy defence ministers, mostly corruption in the procurement of the necessary material and other elements of the support of the special military operation in Ukraine. There are 13 permanent members, most representing the military, the foreign intelligence service, and the senior security-related ministers, including the Speaker of the State Duma, the Speaker of the Federation Council, the two chambers of parliament. There are another 18 members representing regional political constituencies around the country, and the presidential guard, that's the Rosgvardiya, let's call it the elite security force protecting the presidency and the administration in Moscow, there's a staff of about 200 people organised around special topics. There is a website, scrf.ru. And after some difficulty, I found the statement that the Security Council had issued on April 14th. It didn't issue it after a meeting of the Security Council. The Council met, I believe, on April 3 with the President and then April 17 last Friday. This was put in in the middle. It is termed a commentary, commentary on events. TASS picked it up and headlined it a warning. My

argument based on the language, based on where it was issued and based primarily on exactly what it says, this was no commentary, it was no warning. What in fact it does is recite from public press reporting mostly, mostly I need to emphasise, what Central Command, the United States has issued. It simply summarises everything already known from those US press releases and what are termed international experts, right? It doesn't make a warning. It simply recites and comes to the end of its commentary, which is not a commentary, no reference to Russian intelligence sources, no reference to anything that hadn't been published by the United States, and it draws no conclusion except the intimation, which is so obvious, it doesn't constitute a Russian warning. What's obvious? That the United States does not negotiate in good faith and is using or may use, may use negotiations as a smoke screen for preparations of attack.

**DL:** I want to ask you one quick question about this, John.

**JH:** But if you don't mind, let me finish.

**DL:** Well, it's right down the alley of what you're talking about. So they put the spin on it, at TASS that it was a warning. In your experience, is that something, is this just journalists being journalists and [crosstalk]... Okay, please go ahead. What do you think actually happened there?

**JH:** Well, I think it is a warning in one sense only. It's a warning internally, internally, it's a warning from the consensus represented by Vice Chairman of the Council, Medvedev, the Foreign Minister, the Defence Minister, the military intelligence, the civilian or foreign intelligence, it's a warning against Kirill Dmitriev. It's factional. It's to be understood as a warning from the consensus of President Putin's advisors that it is pointless, pointless, pointless to send Dmitriev to negotiate with Witkoff and Kushner on terms for ending the, how to say, settlement of the Ukraine War on a basis that induces the Trump administration to look forward to economic cooperation and investment with Russia.

**DL:** Can you just take a minute for the benefit of our audience and tell us about this character, Kirill Dmitriev. My understanding is he's the head of the Sovereign Wealth Fund, has about \$10 billion in assets. He's been appointed as the special presidential envoy on, I believe foreign investment and economic development. Please tell us a little bit about the background of this character and then we can get into more about this role that Dmitriev is playing with Witkoff and Kushner.

**JH:** Dmitriev was born in Soviet Ukraine and has had an unusual exposure to the United States. He was sent as a high school student to be educated on an exchange basis in the United States and he subsequently took university degrees, graduate degrees and diplomas in the United States. He speaks good English. He thinks that he is an expert on the United States. He has been designated by President Putin to negotiate foreign economic relations principally with the United States. He has been participating in all the high-level meetings which began with the Trump administration's first round of meetings in Riyadh, when Waltz/Rubio met with Foreign Minister Lavrov, Presidential Advisor Ushakov in Riyadh to

begin the process back in February 2025 of resetting relations between the United States and Russia. Dmitriev was there, it's obvious you can even see it physically, that the foreign ministry and Lavrov in particular have attempted to prevent him taking over either the military or the diplomatic negotiations with the United States on the Ukraine War. And they've roughly succeeded. On the other hand, and this is an issue of sharp, of behind closed doors conflict with President Putin himself. On the other hand, the underlying rationale for Dmitriev's negotiations is that the United States and the Trump personal pocket and his family, represented by Kushner and Witkoff, should be bribed, induced, encouraged to develop with Russia for the future a kind of board of peace arrangement, rather like the Gaza board of peace, in which Kushner and Witkoff and their relatives, friends, and Trump nominees would sit jointly on a common fund to invest in Russia and in Ukraine. That proposal has been explained to me by my sources, would be funded, and listen to this, from the allocation of the \$300 billion central bank reserves frozen, but to be released under joint US-Russian control, not returned to Russia. But now look, we've only got a limited amount of time, and our audience has a limited number of patients if I go through the factional fighting here...

**DL:** I have a question for you. I'm sorry, I have to ask you this question, okay? So, Dmitriev, I've been watching with some interest his public commentary. He's not shy about public commentary, he's very active, for example, on X. And the overall tenor of his commentary towards Trump, I find is one of utter sicko-fancy.

**JH:** Correct.

**DL:** To give you an example, when Melania Trump put out her vacuous book a few months ago, you know, Kirill Dmitriev was lavishing praise upon this piece of toilet paper as though it was some kind of literary accomplishment of the highest order. You pointed out, I believe, in an article you wrote in the last couple of days that Dmitriev has not said anything critical about this insane war of aggression on Iran. He's basically given the Trump regime a complete free pass on that. I don't see that he's accomplished anything for Russia, John. I mean, we were told that the Ukraine War was gonna be ended in 24 hours when Trump returned to the White House. It's now what, 14 months in? It doesn't even look like there's any serious negotiation going on at this stage. If anything, Trump has escalated the war by imposing new sanctions on Russia since he returned to the White House. And we're seeing these drone attacks going deeper and deeper into Russian territory; hard to imagine that isn't being done with the assistance of the US military, at least the provision of intelligence.

**JH:** There's no doubt about that.

**DL:** So what the hell has this clown Dmitriev actually accomplished for Russia, and why would Vladimir Putin continue to give him such a central role in his dealings with the United States government, if I'm correct, that he's accomplished effectively nothing?

**JH:** Let's leave aside exactly what President Putin has on his mind just for the moment. Let me just answer your question by pointing out that the timing of the Security Council

statement was April 14, and this reinforces and corroborates what you've just said. What happened was this, and in the Dancing with Bears piece you can see that Dmitriev has been meeting every month, at least once a month, for at least a day or two, with Witkoff and Kushner and another one called Josh Gruenbaum and Scott Bessent, the Treasury Secretary, in places like Miami and Washington. Every month, January, February, March and April. On April the 9th, Dmitriev went back to Washington to negotiate with them. The object of that mission was to persuade the Trump administration to extend the waiver on the sale of Russian oil, which had been sanctioned against China, against India and against sales to any other country, to extend the one month's waiver for another month. That was Dmitriev's explicit mission on April 9. He failed, just like you said. He failed because Bessent announced on the 15th of April what Dmitriev took back when he went home on around the 11th, that the United States did not intend to extend the waiver for Russia. So Dmitriev had failed. This warning came from the Security Council. When he knew what, before Bessent announced it, that Dmitriev had failed at one of the few things he had claimed credit for, a special relationship with Bessent, Witkoff and Kushner that promised much bigger sanctions relief for Russia in future as part of the quid pro quo exchanges on the Ukraine war settlement, that's what has been fundamental to Dmitriev's, let's call it, strategic purpose. That's the reason President Putin has trusted him, it's the reason my source tells me Dmitriev is Putin's whisperer. That's not to treat Putin like a horse, it is not to treat Dmitriev like a veterinary surgeon, it's to point out that they've been close, but they're close on something which the Security Council issued as a commentary that wasn't a commentary on timing that reflected the judgement of every other one of the Kremlin officials that Dmitriev has no value negotiating these things if he couldn't get four weeks extension of the Russian oil sanctions waiver. If he couldn't get that, he could hardly be trusted to develop a joint investment plan covering the \$300 billion worth of Central Bank reserves. So it was a warning, yes, as TASS headlined it, but it was internal and it was subtle. And if it was aimed at Dmitriev, its purpose was to persuade President Putin, that line of strategy is failing. And one of the reasons it's failing is demonstrably obvious in the so-called war and ceasefire negotiations with Iran. Now, the one extra footnote before everybody packs up with impatience is that Bessent was overruled and on Friday, two days after Bessent said no Russian waiver extension, the Treasury announced that there will be an extension of the Russian waiver. And I've documented this sudden change of US policy, but neither the New York Times, the Hill, the Politico, non of the so-called Washington political experts reporting this can explain why this sudden reversal of Trump administration policy. But Dmitriev can't claim any credit for it at all. And as you said, Dmitriev puts out two, three, or four tweets every day. The man spends more time putting out tweets than Donald Trump does. It's just as well he manages a relatively small national sovereign fund, only \$10 billion, because his preoccupation appears to be advertising himself. But that's probably enough said about what I understand to be the faction fighting in Moscow with one last point. Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister said last week in a speech, the objective of the Russian, Iran and China allies is to foil. Foil, he used the word foil, meaning defeat, beat US plans to dictate how the trade on the World Sea should be organised. He was very clear, and without any appeasement, ingratiation, or soft-soaping the Trump administration, Russia's objective, strategically, is to defeat, foil the attempts to choke off Russia's trade. Because, as you said, the Strait of Hormuz is, how to say, a lifeline

for Iran and China and the rest of the world, but the Danish Straits, the Strait of the Bosphorus, these are strategic choke points for Russia. So when the world is changed by the use of force at sea on the part of the US administration, it's Russian strategy to say aloud, we will fight this. That's not the behaviour of the Chinese side. And for factional reasons, I think we can explain what they think. I think we can explain what the Russians say and think. I think, we can explain what the Iranians think, because under the pressures of war and the deaths of thousands of people and possibly millions of people, if the US tolerates Israel to use nuclear weapons against Iran, which is an option, you can very well understand that faction fighting when so many lives are at stake. And as you said, Dimitri and I entirely agree, the whole world is now being held hostage, we now all go into recession. Russia is facing recession in GDP terms, in measurable terms and that's causing internal troubles, nothing as bad as the recessionary impacts in Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and the problem of economic pressure in the United States too. So I think I better shut up.

**DL:** Well, I'm going to close it off with just the thought that, to me, what I'll be watching, I think many people will be watching to see in the next few days, is whether Chinese naval vessels appear anywhere close to the Gulf of Oman. Because I know that that would be a dangerous development in many ways, but I don't see any other way to deter the United States from expanding its effective blockade on China and basically exercising piracy on a global scale, which is what it is now doing.

**JH:** There was a Chinese vessel. There was a destroyer escort, the Tang Shan, which was reported by the Chinese military as exercising in the Gulf of Aden, no exact location, at the beginning of April.

**DL:** Right. I think this is going to require a considerable Chinese force. And they reportedly have the largest surface fleet of any navy in the world. Even though the United States has more tonnage, the number of naval vessels available to them is absolutely enormous. One would think that they would be prepared at this stage to send more than a single destroyer into the region, and the Gulf of Aden isn't exactly where those ships need to be at this particular moment.

**JH:** The Chinese have another big deterrent right now. President Xi can say, I'm very sorry, President Trump, but we'll have to postpone our hugging and kissing for strategic reasons or because I've suddenly caught a very serious cold. We are putting off, postponing for the second time the summit meeting. Were the Chinese to say that covered by any kind of smokescreen they prefer, that will speak volumes to the United States, because it not only strikes at Trump's vanity, which is a very sensitive part of his lower body, it strikes at the possibility of there being a Chinese-US trade agreement in which rare earths trade and all the other forms of exchange that affect US logistics, that affect the future of the US economy, as well as the Chinese, all of that would be postponed. So short of sending a real escort group and no longer calling it an exercise, as far as I know, the Tang Shan, I call on all the other China experts out there to tell us where the Tang Shan went after the exercise, but as I understand it, it sailed back east, back to China. It did not stay on station. It did go to the Djibouti base. It did make port calls in the region to reserve its capacity to come back or to

intercept the USS Bush force that's coming up. I think it's the Bush, isn't it? The aircraft carrier coming up from the East African coast. So the Chinese have got lots of options, but silence, as Guo Jiakun offered today, isn't one of them. That's not an option. That looks like a retreat. And if I can say that, as a Russia expert, I'm saying it because Russia's been rather clear, and you can see the results in the way in which the so-called Security Council warning was not directed at the United States, it was directed at the Russian negotiator. And that means that the next set of tests are what we can all watch. What happens today in Islamabad? If Vance doesn't show up and Witkoff and Kushner arrive and there's no Iranian delegation, then Iran is saying: We know you don't negotiate in good faith, something the Russian side has said, but the Chinese side has so far been reluctant to say. And if that happens, if there's no second round, then we're on the very edge of the resumption of the military operations.

**DL:** Well, we'll see if in the days ahead, President Xi comes down with a nasty case of the Hormuz flu. In any case, it's always a great pleasure talking to you, John. Thank you for the most enlightening conversation we've had today. We're signing off today from Kalamatha, Greece on April 20th, 2026.

**END**

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