

Western Colonialism EXPOSED At WEF, Global South Listens | Chandran Nair

Is the transatlantic partnership simply an abusive marriage disguised as diplomacy? We examine if the recent spectacle at Davos signals the collapse of Western cohesion and ask whether Europe possesses the resolve to finally decouple from a volatile American leadership or remain trapped in a fading colonial dynamic. Today I sit down again with Chandran Nair, founder of the Global Institute for Tomorrow. As a Malaysian scholar and author of "Understanding China", Chandran offers an unvarnished perspective from the Global Majority, cutting through the self-congratulatory noise of the Western elite to reveal the geopolitical shifts they refuse to see. Links: The USA Today: a Derangement Threatening the World: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/01/08/the-usa-today-a-derangement-threatening-the-world/> China has a worthy blueprint to improve the UN system. Why is the West ignoring it?: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3340205/china-has-worthy-blueprint-improve-un-system-why-west-ignoring-it> [Book] Understanding China - Governance, Socio-Economics, Global Influence: <https://global-inst.com/understanding-china-governance-socio-economicse-global-influence/> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascalottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascalottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch & Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 The Western World's Economic Forum Implodes 00:07:07 The Global Majority's View on Western Decline 00:13:07 The Crisis of European Leadership 00:19:10 The End of "Tag Team" Imperialism 00:30:20 Understanding Chinese Governance vs. Western Politics 00:35:37 China-Japan Relations and the Weight of Words 00:40:40 Reclaiming Asian Diplomacy and Shared Culture

#Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies. Today we're joined again by Chandran Nair, a Malaysian scholar and founder of the Global Institute for Tomorrow. Chandran recently published the book *Understanding China: Governance, Socioeconomics, Global Influence.* Chandran, welcome back.

#Chandran Nair

Thank you, Pascal, for having me back. I'm deeply honored. Thank you.

#Pascal

Thanks for coming back online again. Very happy to have you. We'll talk about your book in a moment, but we have to start with Davos. I mean, it's not just because it's in my home country, but because it's so ridiculous—all the pronouncements coming from there. On the one hand, you have people like the Prime Minister of Canada saying, you know, this is over, this whole show isn't in our

interest anymore, we should give up the charade. He used the word "charade," I think. And then we have Macron basically giving a talk, and now there's his text message in which he says, "Look, we're fine with subduing the world outside of Europe, but please don't do it to us." And then we have Donald Trump speaking in a really, really bizarre way. What do you make of all this?

#Chandran Nair

Well, I think, you know, at one level, it's highly amusing. On another level, sitting in this part of the world, it feels like we live in parallel universes. There's the Western world, made up of the United States and Europe. And dare I say, though it might sound a bit churlish, that people are watching this growing tension between the USA and Europe with great interest, because I think few of us imagined in our lifetimes that we would actually see this sort of thing happen. But perhaps the most important thing—one of the things that struck me yesterday—and I never want to watch any of this stuff, but I had friends from around the world text me saying, "You've got to turn the TV on and watch the..." I mean, they used cruder words to describe it.

So after about ten messages, I turned it on to see what was going on. And I saw the regime leader of the United States, if I can put it that way, speaking in his usual rambling way. That's to be expected—I didn't expect anything else. But what was really interesting, what I caught at the end, was a sentiment he expressed. It's on record that he was essentially saying that we, the Western world, need to protect ourselves from the rest. And I was wondering who else was in the audience. You know, I mean, of course, typically in Davos, the power lies with the Western world membership.

But he was very clear. I'd go as far as to say he made a kind of white-supremacist declaration—that Western civilization is the best in the world, that we need to return it to its pinnacle, that we are the people who created all the great wealth of the nation—while ignoring the history of plundering that produced much of that wealth. And we have to protect ourselves. So one was left—people like me, and I'm sure there are hundreds of thousands, even millions, around the world who are not from the West, but also people in the West—thinking that maybe the Western world needs to be protected from itself.

At the moment, it seems to need protection from itself. And essentially, it's a blood brother, if you want to call it that, and it needs protection from that. I was almost going to say today that the WEF should be called the WWEF—the Western World's Economic Forum—because that's what it turned out to be. And then, when he finished speaking, I think the chairman of the WEF sat down with him in a very awkward manner, almost treating him as though he were his guru, his teacher, his leader, and asking the most simplistic questions. As usual, the leader of the United States went off on a tangent and gave very obtuse, strange answers. But it was that relationship that you could see was so subservient.

So the other message to the world was that this sort of event—given that it was really the first global gathering where the Europeans and the Americans came together and it was broadcast

around the world since, you know, the statement by the United States about taking Greenland—showed how subservient the Europeans have become. And that's really damning for the rest of the world to see. So I think these are all really important signals. If I might say one more thing, I thought the Canadian prime minister's statement was a good one, but it was slightly rich coming from a country of only 40 million people that has had a disproportionate place at the table he talked about.

Because he said something quite interesting—he said, "If you're not at the main table, you're on the menu." Well, for most of us in the rest of the world—the 80%—Canada is part of the G7, for people who don't know, a country with just 40 or 42 million people, simply because it's part of the white settler community. Forty-two million people at the G7. And finally, the Canadians have woken up to the fact that now they actually need to look to the rest of the world. You know, they went to Beijing and made peace, which is very sensible. But I wondered if he reflected on the history when he said, "If you're not at the main table, you're on the menu."

Well, most of us have been on your menu—including Canada's menu. Canada's been in the G7. We've all been excluded. The G20 represents the majority of the world. So I hope this kind of reflection will take place in the corridors of power in places like Canada and Australia, and of course in Europe. It was good to see, in a sort of perverse way, the tensions building within the Western alliance, but at the same time sad to see how weak Europe has become—and why Europe wasn't prepared to stand up, say no, and actually be quite diplomatic but also quite tough with the Americans when they turned up on your soil.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this could happen again at any time. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack—that's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link's in the description below. And now, back to the video. You know, there's this mix of feelings, right? On the one hand, the Europeans—and Canada too—kind of deserve this moment. They deserve feeling subdued and powerless and caught off guard, because that's what they did for 500 years to everybody else: being talked down to, top-down. That's the way Donald Trump is doing it. On the other hand, we all understand that this is not healthy, right?

What we'd want is a properly functioning globe, not one where the former colonizer is now being colonized. That doesn't help much overall. How do you think the formerly colonized world is looking at this? People who—and we talked about this last time, right?—see Europe's inability to understand that colonialism isn't over, and that the rest of the world isn't just forgetting about that experience. Plus, it's still ongoing, right? A good part of the world is still, to this day, heavily exploited. And France—the queen of not letting go—is still directly involved in Africa and very heavy-handed around

the world wherever it can be. And now, on the other end, they've reached a place where they can't, and where they're starting to be on the shorter end of the stick. How do you think the rest of the world is interpreting this?

#Chandran Nair

Well, on one level, it's surprise, because no one expected this to come to fruition so soon. I've said for many years—even speaking in Europe, going back ten years—that Europe should decouple from the United States. That doesn't mean be the enemy of the United States, though recently some U.S. politicians and European commentators have said, "We have an enemy—it's called the United States." But I said decouple so that your options are much wider, both in foreign policy and trade, and so you look at the world very differently. But Europe refused to. So for most of the world, it's a bit of a surprise. To be honest, I think a lot of people are slightly glad, because they see that the relationship is beginning to devour itself.

At some level, the analogy one might use is an abusive marriage or a partnership where one partner has been abusing the other for so long. The weaker partner has been dependent because there are some riches to be gained—you know, membership in the club, the big house, whatever—the expenses are all paid for, etc., but they take the abuse. And we all know how that typically works out: it often ends in tragedy, with a lot of pain. So the European–U.S. relationship is now being seen in many parts of the world—and I can't speak for everyone—as, "Wow, this is really an abusive relationship." But the other partner, the Europeans, the weaker partner in this, seems to be a sucker for pain and abuse and is willing to take it.

And I think one of the other things that's going on—and we've seen this in the last few years—is that as the incessant criticism of China from Europe and the U.S. has grown, American behavior has actually put China in a much better light. We've seen that in the last two years, especially in Asia. That's not to say China doesn't have things it needs to do, but what it has also done, in my view, is make people understand: which is the one country that did stand up to the Americans over the last ten years? When it came to the tariffs, which country stood up and said no, didn't blink? China.

It took the pain. But then you have India, which also didn't do what China did—perhaps because it doesn't have the muscle or the clout—but it also didn't give in. So people around the world are watching, and smaller countries like South Africa are saying, "No, we're not going to be bullied." And then people look at Europe and say, "Well, your economy collectively is almost the size of the United States. Why don't you call their bluff?" I think that's the biggest discussion I've been having in the last 24 hours with people from this part of the world, wondering, how come the Europeans won't just say, "Go for it—let's call your bluff and see what happens."

I think there's much more respect now for what China did. But it's quiet diplomacy—no shouting, no name-calling. And then the Canadians—when the Canadians came back that week—that also sent a very strong message across the world: wow, China stayed calm and just said, "We'll hunker down,

but we'll have open arms to anyone who wants to respect us." And no matter how small they are—Canada is small, let's face it, compared to China—they said, "We'll treat them with respect," which is what you'd expect any state that's a superpower to do and to understand. That's their role in the broader global geopolitics.

#Pascal

And I maybe need to add one thing when I say that the Europeans deserve this. What I actually mean is that the European elites deserve this, because, as with a lot of these power structures—also within the states—it's usually the poorer population that's just as exploited as the ones abroad. But what we're seeing now is that these elite circles are actually starting to be pretty much beaten by the US, right? And put in their place. And maybe this connects to something you said you'd like to discuss, which I think is important.

And that's this political rot we're seeing—there are no leaders in Europe. I mean, none. The best we have at the moment are, I'd say, Spain and Ireland, where people are at least, on the political level, willing to say no to Israel and actually call out a genocide. I mean, for Christ's sake, it's a genocide. And they're not able to get their marbles together and say, "No, we all agreed we're not going to do this anymore." How do you connect these dots?

#Chandran Nair

Yeah, I mean, I just want to pick up on the point you mentioned about the European elites, because, you know, at times when I refer to the Western world—when writing or speaking like that—you can't qualify everything you say. And I get rightly corrected, and I accept that feedback. It's not all the same, I understand. But I also say that I didn't coin the phrase "the Western world." If you look at the European and Western elites—and I wrote a piece for CounterPunch last week about the derangement of the United States—I said American society as a whole has become deranged. I mean, where are the massive protests? Where's the ability to take down someone as destructive as the current president?

But if you look at Europe—yesterday there was a report that surfaced this morning everywhere—saying that the central bank chief, Ms. Lagarde, walked out of a dinner where the U.S. Commerce Secretary was being absolutely rude about Europeans, insulting them, so she walked out. In a short interview, she said something to the effect of, "Now, what we are seeing—and this is in line with what the Canadian prime minister said—is the curtain rising on the new world order." And I want to say that, you know, what people like us think—and I don't speak for everyone—but those of us who watch these matters in Asia, and I think in the Middle East and Africa, that curtain was raised a while back. You were just looking.

You refused to look, and you didn't like what you saw, so you tried to pull the curtain down. You threw rubbish at it, you insulted it, you tried to burn it down. And now you've found out that you

actually can't burn it down, and you're only recognizing it when one of your own has essentially become what you think is the New World Order—because they're behaving in a way that you associate with it. But the New World Order isn't the behavior of the Americans. The New World Order was the transformation—mostly positive—taking place in the global majority, regaining their sovereignty against all the other impediments in their way, with all their problems, you know, bad governance, etc. But that new world order has been shaping, or should have been shaping, for at least ten years. But you never looked.

And in fact, you tried to take it down. So, you know, people like the elites in Europe who said, "Now we have a new world order." No, no—it's been around. You just didn't want to look at it. You tried to tear it down, and now you're confronted with what you think is the new order because your big brother is behaving so badly. You never thought that would happen. Until your big brother behaved really badly, you thought there was no new world order because you wanted to retain the old one. And you didn't want to look at the positive side of change, because that change was coming from people you never wanted to see as your equals. And now you're being forced to, by your big brother, because your big brother is behaving like a rogue. And I think this is also something that, you know, we'll all talk about—where have these people been?

To your point about the European elites and the liberal elites in the United States who are talking about these things—coming back to, I think, the governor of California, who said something to the effect that when he came to Davos, he was surprised at how spineless the Europeans are in terms of not standing up. Well, that's also very rich coming from an American, given that the person he called the big bully is one of yours. Where were all of you Americans? And if anyone should have a spine in taking him down or reining him in, surely it should start with the Americans. So, you know, at that point, I'm with the Europeans—you should stand up. But it's rich for any American to say that the Europeans have no spine when the Congress and Senate have become spineless, unable to control, and in fact just bow to one person and his mob.

#Pascal

And, you know, if we frame colonialism as this long period starting somewhere in the 1400s or so, what we actually see is this tag-team approach to managing the globe, right? Of course, handing over the reins—voluntarily or involuntarily—to the other: the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, the British. They compete at the same time, but differently, the Dutch. And then, you know, tag-team to the United States, which then has a little colonial war with the Spaniards, takes away the Philippines and Cuba and the possessions, but continues, of course, the repression—kills half a million Filipinos in the process in order to... I think it's close to a million, actually. Sorry, I don't have the numbers. No, no, I'm not correcting you. It's absolutely that.

And, you know, raiding in Africa and West Asia—it's happening even today—and then the tag team hands it over to Israel and the United States to rain down bombs and destruction and whatnot. So if we look at it like that, and, you know, from my own research, I know Switzerland was always part of

that. It did secondhand colonialism. It was present everywhere the others were. Wherever you had colonial jurisdiction, they would go and do the trade that the big ones didn't want, but, you know, pick up the pieces. It's always been a very European enterprise. And in a way, I feel that this one is coming to an end because the tactical approach doesn't work anymore. There's nobody who can take over like the U.S. did in the early 20th century and still keep imposing the structure. Do you see it like that as well?

#Chandran Nair

Well, you know, you've articulated that very well, because that's not well understood by many in this part of the world. Many in the global majority don't want to look back—we want to look forward. But you have to look back to understand. And I think the last few years have rekindled, in the minds of those of us who studied a bit of history and understand what you just said, this feeling of, "My God, is this really a replay of the same thing? And how does it get replayed? Is there some manual that these guys look at and replicate the business model?" It's somehow in that perverse nature of how power continues to perpetuate itself from one generation to the next.

As I was discussing with a friend, I mean, why is there so much fear in the Western world—epitomized by the American fear? Americans are driven by fear, fear of the whole world. Why is there so much fear among Americans and Europeans? At one level, one can't help but think, in line with what you're talking about, that they fear a world in which they no longer have vastly superior economic and military power over the rest. A world where others are equal to them, or even replace them in terms of power. That's the catch—they fear others will do to them what they did to others. And I think that's ingrained from centuries of what you just described.

But they don't understand that. And I think this is not wishful thinking. I think human societies around the world have changed—we've advanced. Otherwise, we're in deep trouble. That doesn't mean there aren't bad actors around. But the idea that we'll revert to a 17th- or 18th-century kind of colonization, where some country like China would go and exterminate large numbers of people somewhere, take over the United States or take over other countries—I mean, that's over. But it's still ingrained in the psyche of the establishment, of elites in the West. And I think, you know, some of us talk about this—is this the fear that drives them to continuously see the world, those others, as a threat?

And is it what has kept the bond between the Europeans, which you described, and the Americans? You know, the Americans became the most powerful power, the European powers sort of receded, and then they had this contract—this abusive contract, like an abusive partner—and now that is breaking. Now, if it does break, then truly it will, in my view, be a good thing. It'll be a good thing for everyone. It won't just be a good thing for the rest of the world; I believe it'll be good for the Europeans. And I've always told the Europeans that they are an old civilization, diverse, and they understand the world better than the Americans.

There's a lot of respect for Europeans in different parts of the world, despite the history. And all of that can be, you know, not buried, but sort of reckoned with in a new world where we work together as equals. I think Europeans need to come to terms with that. And if this breach that's happening continues, then it's very good for the world. The question is, will the Europeans be bold enough to make that break—to be a bloc that treats the rest of the world as equals and doesn't see their protection, their security, and their prosperity as linked purely to the military and economic might of what I can only call a rogue state, the United States?

#Pascal

Yeah, it's probably—I mean, it is hard. I guess it must be very hard for many, even if they're not conscious of it. But the shift from being part of the extended, let's say, British Empire on which the sun never sets—which, like 120 or 130 years ago, was still very much how the world was running—to becoming what Glenn Diesen, in one of his books, my colleague in Norway, called the “Western peninsula of the northwestern peninsula of the Eurasian continent,” I guess that must be a very tough shift for many people. Plus, there's the fear that others will do to you what you did to them. And so you double down. And that, to me, you know, what we see with Gaza and the idea of the “border of peace,” that's like, “Let's transform Gaza into a modern-day UN protectorate,” which is a hundred years back.

#Chandran Nair

Same old stuff.

#Pascal

But it's kind of the last, you know, “let's try again.”

#Chandran Nair

Yes, yes. And that's where this possibly is the breach. Let's see. I read something this morning saying that the British Prime Minister said he will not bow to the Americans' demands about Greenland. Various others have said the same thing. Let's see. Now, it would appear to me—and when I'm in discussions, you know, or just in the last few days talking to European friends—I said, call his bluff. Because you must know that it would be an almighty risk. And I gather, and I sense, and I may be wrong, that the American institutions are weak and broken, but not completely broken—that they will not allow the current president to essentially use military force. So call his bluff. But will the Europeans call the bluff and, that way, you know, stand tall?

There are indications that some of them are saying so. I don't know, but things are moving very fast. One thing that's been noticed—and some say it's probably driven by the markets—is that the one thing that guy understands, in the most simplistic way, is that he doesn't understand the

implications of what he says on markets. But when the markets start to react, his people say, "Hey, boss, something's going south. You've got to do something." So he sort of stepped back a bit yesterday, and that shows you the world we live in—it's so fickle that the markets rebounded within a few hours. You know, that's the silly world we live in. But I hope the Europeans will call his bluff and stand firm. I think that's the turning point for the world in terms of the U.S.–European relationship.

#Pascal

The Chinese called his bluff when it came to the tariffs, right? And he did stand down. So one thing he seems to do intuitively is constantly try to throw everybody off balance. Then he proposes the next ludicrous thing and doubles down until people take that one seriously. And then he moves on to the next, and the next. He constantly shatters the agenda for everybody. But yeah, I mean, the Indians also said, "No, we're not taking this." So we do have a case.

#Chandran Nair

That's what I mean—why can't the European leaders, and maybe this goes to your point, there's just no strong leadership, say, "Yeah, go for it. We're strong. We're Europeans. We have a long history of involvement with the world. We have relationships around the world. We'll do things differently." I'll give—he's not European, but I'll give the Canadian prime minister credit for standing up and saying, "No, we will not be bullied. We're small, and we'll go and trade with others."

And he, you know—he had the diplomatic skills and, fortunately, the grace of China to say, "Well, you were quite obnoxious to us with the Huawei kidnapping of the daughter. I mean, it was a kidnapping, but we'll be gracious and welcome you, give you all the state honors, and see what we can do." And I think more Europeans should do that—call the bluff of the U.S. president—because I don't think he can carry on this way. Every day he's going to change his mind about something. You have to treat this as theater. But your point is very clear: do European leaders have the stomach for this period of being bold and playing the game?

#Pascal

It's not a happy place to be in, but in a sense, it's something that a lot of other leaders try to avoid—to create this theater. I mean, I have this very strong feeling that most politicians in Europe these days, these elites, are policymakers. They think in policies, and that's not a good type of leadership. What you want are strategists who try to, you know, move in the right direction, not people who try to micromanage stuff like the EU does. But that brings us maybe to China and to the book you wrote, together with a couple of others, **Understanding China**. The Chinese way of leadership, to me, seems—let's say internally—one of setting goalposts and aspirations, and then trying to motivate the rest to follow that and achieve those goals. How would you explain the Chinese approach to politics in contrast to what the Europeans and the Americans are doing?

#Chandran Nair

Thank you. Thank you for mentioning the book. I'm glad it came out at this time because, as I said before, I think most people are looking and asking, how come the Chinese have not behaved so badly? In a way, they've behaved with great dignity. But what is it that allows that system to operate like this? The book, in a simple way, tries to explain that. You know, as you do, most books on China either criticize it or praise it in a way that's almost propaganda.

We wanted to write a book that allowed people to come to their own conclusions. But because the book is not critical of China, there are those who think it's therefore pro-China—and they completely miss the point. So, to your question about how China is able to behave that way: firstly, I think it's very important to understand that you can't understand China by looking at it through the narrative of Western political or governance systems. It's a completely different system, and you have to recognize that. One of the key things to grasp is that the Chinese system is extremely focused on meritocracy.

The Western narrative has simply been this simplistic propaganda—"Oh my God, there are a bunch of communists, they're oppressing everybody, they're taking everyone's rights away." Well, you can't be a bunch of autocrats, "commies with no understanding," and at the same time have the great capabilities to lift 800 million people out of poverty and create something unprecedented in human history. You can't get slaves to do that. So you had a population that supported a system. That system is not perfect, but what the Chinese understood, in terms of a social contract, is: we support you as the leadership through our system.

Legitimacy comes through performance, and the performance has been stellar by any measure. As long as you keep doing that—and that doesn't mean everyone should get rich—the Chinese concern is that standards of living have improved remarkably: access to education, technology, security, and freedoms that didn't exist before. But these aren't freedoms defined through the Western lens. The average Chinese person understands that in a highly densely populated country, especially in urban areas, you can't have the same kinds of freedoms you might have elsewhere.

But there's a lot of freedom in China too—to do many things, which the book looks at. The Chinese system has essentially evolved around a communitarian approach to building the nation with the most capable people. So you don't get a situation—well, I don't want to go back to the sort of mediocrity of leadership we've seen in the United States for at least 25 years. I think one of the reasons the United States and Europe have come to this stage, as we've discussed, is that the United States in particular has not been able to produce leaders of high caliber. They just haven't.

Because the system is not based on meritocracy. It's not based on capability. It's based on rhetoric and money. It's drenched in party politics. So that's the difference. And you're accountable every day of the week for results. That's why the Chinese president, premier, or any senior Chinese official doesn't go on TV and make pronouncements that haven't been studied in depth and can't be

delivered—because the moment you say it, it becomes part and parcel of policy, and it has to be delivered. And it has to be delivered on the basis that they are serving the societal, communitarian needs of the country.

#Pascal

Yeah. And, you know, there was this recent event that reminded me that some parts of the world, or politics itself, work differently. You know, what's going on between Japan and China—when the Japanese prime minister, the new prime minister, Mrs. Takahashi, foolishly said that a Chinese attack on Taiwan would be an existential threat to Japan. In my view, she said that without preparing it very much, and without understanding the consequences.

And it enraged the Chinese and caused a counterreaction, which I didn't expect. But it shows that over here in Asia, you know, words still matter. If the United States says—I mean, the US could say tomorrow, "We'll take the whole of Canada," and everybody would have a weird kind of laugh and then move on. But over here, this actually matters—the meanings of words and the history connected to them, the Second World War memory and whatnot. And if the Japanese don't realize it, the Chinese do. It's just a different form of interaction, isn't it?

#Chandran Nair

You're so right to point this out, right? Because you can see that the Chinese reaction has been a bit over the top. But you have to understand the Chinese political system and the body politics of the messaging, right? In China, when the leader of the country says something, it's extremely powerful. That's why you'll notice the Chinese president or premier never says anything outrageous when it comes to foreign policy. Never. Yeah. It's always vanilla, but it's also steeped in their belief in a kind of shared prosperity for humanity, and it's couched very carefully.

But when I say "vanilla," I mean it's not aggressive, but it's deeply thought through. And therefore, you know, it's very important to understand. I just wrote a piece last week about the complete, sort of, you know, dismissal of China's Global Governance Initiative, which you may have seen. It's actually a deeply thought-through process to improve, not replace, the UN system. But nobody knows about it. When I was doing some research, I found that hardly anyone in the Western media has covered it. It's a major initiative by the Chinese, but it's not getting any attention because it doesn't fit the narrative of geopolitics, aggression, and dominance.

It's a very different sort of approach to what China sees as structural problems—bringing everyone to the table—because the Western media just can't understand it. But that Global Governance Initiative is backed by thousands of pages of detail in the Chinese system. It's been thought through by layers and layers. It's not like the Politburo guys sat around and said, "Hey, you guys, why don't you write something like the new National Security Strategy?" Yeah, like the one by the U.S. government, which is all about dominance of the world and whatever.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah.

#Chandran Nair

This is the difference in culture. So when the Japanese prime minister, either being naive or wanting to make a splash, says something like that, for the Chinese it's, "Oh my God, they really believe that." But it might just be a flippant, silly statement for political mileage, as she said. And she's having to, you know, pay a price for it. But, you know, at the same time, I believe the Chinese should reach out. Still, it's not in the Chinese character to view something like that lightly. Because when you say that—especially something like that—a Chinese leader would say, "I would never say that. And if I did say that, it would mean we're going to do something about it."

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, I know. I mean, it was a foolish comment. And friends of mine—Japanese friends—said that when they heard it, they thought, "Oh, it slipped," because they know she thinks like this. But they also know she shouldn't be saying that, because it's obviously not good, right? And, you know, you see the expectations in a leader, right? A leader is different from just a personality, because a leader needs to have more things in common. And recently, about a week and a half ago, I was actually in China for the first time.

I had never visited before. I went to Shanghai, which you actually cover in your book, and I was just impressed. I mean, I was also impressed by how much Shanghai resembles Tokyo—you know, there are so many things you recognize again. So I just want to ask you: when we look at Asia as a geographical unit, we have all these divisions and problems between India and China, China and Japan, Korea, and so on. But there's obviously some form of shared cultural approach to things, isn't there?

#Chandran Nair

Oh, yes. I mean, this is the secret sauce we just need to put together, right? We need to bring this together. I was doing an interview this morning with someone else about the book, and I said that, in my view, the most consequential geopolitical relationship of the 21st century would be between China and India. Their influence throughout the region is everywhere. If you go to Indonesia, there's Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam—everything's there. So the relationship needs to change, but we also have to recognize that. And if you look at the Korean issue, for example, these are all tensions, remnants of a different era when the region was about 80 percent colonized or otherwise dominated by foreign forces.

And so that tension—those tensions—were the implications of all those things that have lingered until now. And now is the time it will change. I really do think, as other commentators in Asia, particularly my good friend Kishore Mahbubani and others have said, we haven't, since the Vietnam War, had a major war. And thankfully—thank God—no country has gone and dropped massive bombs on others. No country has. So in that, I think there's a lesson: we should observe that kind of diplomacy.

And in the same way I talked about this morning—or maybe it was yesterday in another interview—we need to reshape diplomacy. You know, for too long, even in this part of the world, if there's a problem somewhere, we need some Norwegian or Scandinavian diplomat sent by the UN who has no idea about this region. But apparently, as soon as a white man walks into the theater of conflict in Asia, we're all going to sit down and listen. I mean, this is the old colonial system. We have some of the best diplomats in the world right here in this region, and we haven't leveraged them.

So I think we also need—and diplomacy, you know, I think you'd agree—in Europe it's a farce. Diplomacy is supposed to be about all options on the table: you come to our side, otherwise we may actually sanction you first, we may cripple your economy, and if you still don't come to the table, we may even bomb you. That's European and Western diplomacy. The rest of the world is very different. So I think you're right in saying—and I've always said this—we need to find the ability to have diplomats from this region. I've been calling for a school of diplomacy to be built here. We send our diplomats to the Johns Hopkins School and the Kennedy School.

I mean, what are we doing? What do the Americans know about diplomacy? We need to create a whole new infrastructure of diplomatic relations—but more importantly, schools of thought that would, you know, as I said, build on the culture. And an important part of that culture is how not to lose face. It seems so simple, but you know, probably living in Japan, that's one of the most important things. I may not like you, and we're going to talk, but what I shouldn't do is go on the BBC and say, "You're a scumbag." Or go to his country and say, "Let's see if he's going to bow to me, let's see how I can get the better of him." That's not the way it's done.

And I remember—if I could give an example—when Malaysia had the new government, when Prime Minister Mahathir came in, there was a lot of debt in Malaysia from Chinese overinvestment, etc. The country needed to claw back some of that money. Mahathir decided he would go to Beijing to negotiate. And in the Asian diplomatic way of thinking, President Xi welcomed Mahathir. I mean, Malaysia is sort of a pebble on the beach as far as China is concerned, a small economy. I slightly exaggerate, but you know what I mean. But the Chinese leadership thought, "He's the elder statesman. We cannot be abusive to the older man. He's extremely well-learned, whether you like his politics or not."

I don't agree with a lot of what he's done in the last few years, but that was about respect. They went, they made a deal, and President Xi welcomed him personally. It's a small country—it's not like

the President of the United States turned up. I think this kind of understanding of the cultural context is something we should develop. I think China and India should embark on that, because both have much in common in many ways, and they could find that common ground and set an example for the rest of the world. And similarly, with Cambodia and Thailand now, where we're having a bit of a conflict, I don't think we need Americans or anybody else. We need good Singaporean diplomats—very good ones. There are many.

#Pascal

Malaysians. I mean, Donald Trump came in at the last moment to reap the benefits—but it was Malaysia.

#Chandran Nair

Why, Brian, to his credit, had helped. We don't need all of this. In fact, the influence of the Americans and the Europeans, in my view, is just an obstacle. We don't need them. We have to step up. I think there's something there, in a different way. And I'm sure it's the same in Africa. If you talk to Africans, they talk about their way of doing things—different ways. But the story of international diplomacy has been carved out as the preserve of democracy: Western elite diplomats traveling around the world making peace because the "natives" can't get together. You know, that's a kind of Tarzan-and-Jane story. The world has moved on, and we need to recapture our traditions in the modern world—the customs and ways of dealing with people—so that we can actually solve our own problems rather than rely on people from elsewhere.

#Pascal

And the good news here is that Asia already has a lot of good schools, actually. You find them in China, in Singapore, in Japan—a lot of very good institutes that also do South-to-South education, right? And actually, China is a champion of bringing Africans to study there, but also in Russia, and they try to do cultural diplomacy with students as well. Japan does so too. We see how, in Africa, there are institutes being created. One thing I always admire about my African colleagues is that they have much more of a culture—an appreciation of Africa as Africa—beyond the colonially drawn lines and even beyond the linguistic barriers. So there's a lot to build upon, actually.

#Chandran Nair

But we need to—these are all happening, as you say, but they're on the periphery. What I'm saying is we need to bring it to the center. We need to recapture that space. Unfortunately, it's dominated by Western diplomats who, with all due respect, need to butt out. And this view that others can't do it is, in my view, almost racist, and we need to reject it. But they won't butt out unless we take charge. And there, I think we need the best minds in Asia calling for the institutionalization of Asian diplomacy, of African diplomacy—writing the sort of narratives around what that looks like. I mean,

how ridiculous is it to have Norwegian and Swedish diplomats going to Myanmar to mediate? I mean, this is just old-world nonsense.

#Pascal

I know, but, you know, it's difficult, because there are parts of these old colonial structures that are still thriving on exploiting the differences that exist. Go to Chiang Mai in Thailand, and according to one of my friends from there, the American consulate is humongous. Oh yes, huge. I know, I know—hundreds of people. It's like, you don't need that many diplomats in Chiang Mai, but maybe, you know, you can do a lot of good work with a lot of CIA agents who then go over the Golden Triangle and into Myanmar and do, like, whatever CIA agents do over there. And you can't just unroot that. You can't just throw it out, unfortunately. So it's all part of this de-Westernization.

#Chandran Nair

No, it's very old. It's very old, and many of our current leaders are still steeped in that subservience—to the economic and also the political power of those colonial outposts. I was just talking to a friend two days ago about how all of this works. The number of scholarships being given by various European and American universities to young scholars in Asia—as though we're peasants—is astonishing. And of course, if you're 28, you've done a master's in political science, and you get a scholarship through USAID or the embassy to go to Harvard for two weeks to be brainwashed, you'll go.

And there are numerous, because this is how you capture minds—and I've spoken about this before. I'm not saying we should reject all of it, but we should have alternatives. If you had the best school for global governance and diplomacy based in Jakarta, or in Tokyo, or in Hong Kong, then the world would start to change. You'd get Americans and Europeans coming to this part of the world and benefiting from understanding it—or in Dubai, too. But the old world and the money still need to be given to it. We haven't thought that through, and that's our fault. We haven't thought about how to do this stuff.

#Pascal

The Japanese have a beautiful system. You know, they just rain scholarships on people who want to come and study in Japan. Right? And it's like they just rain it down there without all the, like, "Oh, and then assessment and impact and blah, blah, blah." It's just, "OK, money for students to survive." Not a lot—you'll never swim in money—but you'll survive in the city. And then you can do two, three years. I mean, they paid me a scholarship as a Swiss to come and study in Japan and do my PhD here. I mean, that's how you get this kind of exchange. So I hope other countries will—and they're already doing it. China does so, Jeff.

#Chandran Nair

Yeah, but don't underestimate—and that's the transition in how decolonization happens—don't underestimate the power, the capture of the mind. If you dangle a Japanese scholarship and a U.S. or U.K. scholarship in front of a student in Malaysia, they're going to pick, right? That's how the mind works: "It's Cambridge, I'm going there. I'm not going to Japan." And that's very powerful. We have to decolonize the mind, but we also have to build the institutions. I think that's my main point about it—peace, diplomacy. We can't linger and look at OECD reports and all of that, which are all skewed through the lens of the Western experience.

And I think, coming back to what my book talks about, it's essentially China. One of the things I discuss in the book is whether China is a force for good or not. There's a whole chapter on that—on providing a global good. And I don't try to say China is or isn't; I just try to give people the facts so they can decide for themselves. One area, of course, is cultural influence—how China leverages its soft power, which goes beyond, you know, selling a soft drink like Coca-Cola or something, the Chinese version. What is that soft power? These are very important things to understand when we talk about what the global good of a country is, and how it rises.

And the global good that the United States was granted was the exorbitant privilege of the dollar, which it had started to abuse. After the Second World War, it provided a security net in certain parts of the world, which was then abused. So what China would do is something I talk about in the book. I think the Chinese are very careful about how they embark on that, given that there are a lot of potholes along the journey—because the stronger you become, the more arrogant you can become. And you can create a lot of enemies, even unwittingly. That's one of the things the book talks about—how careful it has to be.

#Pascal

There is great danger in success. We're seeing it live at the moment with the West, right? Pascal Lottaz, this was a very interesting talk. Thank you very much for that. For people who want to read your book, it'll be linked in the description below. It's called **Understanding China: Governance, Socioeconomics, Global Influence.** Is there another place where people can find you?

#Chandran Nair

They can find me on our website, the Global Institute for Tomorrow, at www.gift.org.

#Pascal

I'll put that in the description box below as well. We'll talk again. Chandra Nair, thank you for your time today.

#Chandran Nair

Thank you very much for inviting me back. Thanks so much. Take care. Bye-bye.