

# Ray McGovern: Ukraine to Hit Russia from Latvia Territory

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## #Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Wednesday, May 20th, 2026, and our dear friend Ray McGovern is here with us. Welcome back, Ray.

## #Ray

Thanks, Nima.

## #Nima

Ray, let me start with what's going on with the case of Iran and the United States. There is a report on Axios. It says that Donald Trump had a phone call on Tuesday with Benjamin Netanyahu. It seems that Donald Trump wants to get something, wants to reach a deal with Iran, but Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't accept that. He wants the continuation of the war, at least to hit those important infrastructures in Iran before leaving the theater of war. He wants to hit Iran as much as possible before putting an end to the war, and it seems Donald Trump has some sort of disagreement with Benjamin Netanyahu. This is one part that Axios reported.

Put it aside. What we've learned from the Iranian side is that they're talking about everything, covertly and overtly. All information shows that the United States is preparing for a new round of war. That's why Iran is totally prepared for that. We've learned from Pakistanis, from Iranians as well, that today a Pakistani official went to Iran, and I don't know, his position was internal, sort of. I don't remember his... but he went to Iran to deliver the message of the United States to the Iranians. The negotiations are happening. We're going to have something in 48 hours, in my opinion. It's going to be a new round of war, or the announcement of negotiations, or maybe reaching some sort of deal. Your understanding of what's going on, Ray?

## #Ray

Well, Nima, I think that you point to what the new aspects are. There are negotiations going on, some of them pretty direct, if not really direct, between Iran and the United States. Trump really does seem to be looking for an off-ramp from this thing. Netanyahu, of course, not. So the question really is, does Netanyahu still have the same hold on Trump that he did before the Israelis started to attack Iran on February 28th? And as our Secretary of State explained, that's why we did it. I mean, it was extraordinary how frank he was. He said, well, the Israelis told us they were going to attack Iran, and we thought probably they would retaliate against us, retaliate against us.

And so we wanted to do a preemptive thing and attack Iran also, so that we wouldn't suffer so many casualties. And there were no newspaper people there, no wire service people. They said, well, oh, so, Marco, in other words, Bibi made you do it. Bibi said, we're attacking, and they did attack. And so you said, okay, well, we have to too. Is that what it is? Of course that's what it is. And the deputy head of the National Intelligence Directorate, Joe Deck—yeah, he kind of made sure that when he resigned, he not only said, look, there was no immediate threat to anybody, but it was all the doings of the Israelis and the Israel lobby here in the States.

So when you have that kind of direct evidence, you have to say, okay, well, that's what happened back then, okay? February 28th, and then Rubio, two days later, sort of admitting that the Israelis made us do it, right? Well, things have not turned out as well as the head of Mossad said when he briefed President Trump electronically in the White House sit room. And so, will Trump wise up to the fact that, whoa, they either didn't know how bad it was or they tricked us, okay? Is he smart enough? Is he man enough? And does he have enough political support that he could say, okay, not this time. You go ahead. You go ahead and try to take out some more infrastructure.

We're out of it this time. We've got all these contacts. We're going to get some resolution of this thing that will satisfy us and that we can distort into thinking we're persuading Americans that we prevented Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. And besides all that, you know, Trump is not likely to include this in what he tells Netanyahu. But the reality is that both the Russians and the Chinese have warned the U.S. and Israel. Look, as the Russians put it, this is thoroughly unacceptable, okay? Renewing this war is unacceptable. Even thinking about putting ground troops is совсем неприемлемо, okay? Совсем means thoroughly, completely. It doesn't mean like in particular.

## **#Nima**

It means as a whole, the whole nine yards, thoroughly unacceptable, okay?

## **#Ray**

Two days later, who says the same thing? Wang Yi, the foreign minister of China, who's no slouch and very, very rarely uses strong terms like that. So let me just add that with Putin in China today, with their joint communiqué advertising their very, very close collaboration, with the fact that there

was no communiqué after Trump because they didn't agree on much, okay? With 40 separate economic and other agreements signed in Beijing, and with Putin saying, you know, our relationship is unprecedentedly high. Well, he said that on the 4th of February, 2022, right? When he helped Xi launch the Winter Olympics, okay? And is he exaggerating this time?

Well, no, they have gotten—that was the precedent. They're even closer, okay? So now what will they do? Well, what they do, nobody—well, we might know more when more reporting comes out. But there was direct criticism of what the U.S. is doing, like the Iron Dome and all this kind of stuff. There were slurs about creating chaos in the world by whom everyone knows. And so would they be willing to encourage a resolution in Iran? Of course they would. And the Chinese have reached out, as well as the Pakistanis, and you've got other people reaching out. And the Chinese, look, we're ready, we can help. And the Russians say, yeah, we can help too.

So there are all kinds of off-ramps that Trump can take. Now, predicting what Trump will do is a fool's errand, and I'm not going to try it, okay? But he has off-ramps, and he has a way of persuading or coming up with language that will show that it wasn't a total loss, that they prevented Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, which, as you and I know, but a very small percentage of Americans know, they weren't working on a nuclear weapon. They stopped working on a nuclear weapon in 2003. Do the math, okay? So if he wants to advertise that, if the Iranians want to sign a little piece of paper, maybe they will get this thing over with.

### **#Speaker 03**

Yeah, we promised not to develop a nuclear weapon. That's a small concession.

### **#Ray**

If, as most people believe—that is, most people who know the intelligence on this—and most people believe that they never, they don't want, actually, they have a religious fatwa against developing a nuclear weapon. Enrichment, processing, that kind of thing, is different, and they can make concessions on that, as they did for the JCPOA back, well, 11 years now. So that was Obama's something good, okay? And Putin has praised Obama for that deal. He said, you can't take away the credit from Obama. And there are ways to work around. So I'm more hopeful. But as I say, I have to say again, the unpredictable—really, I shouldn't try to predict it.

### **#Nima**

The other positive sign, Ray, is that the navigation data shows 26 ships passed through the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours after coordinating with Iran, which is something. In a normal 24 hours, we're going to have a hundred per day, and it's something like 25% of the normal traffic of the Strait of Hormuz, which I think is a positive sign. It doesn't show that there could be some sort of war happening. I don't know.

## **#Ray**

Well, I agree it's a positive sign if you compare it to the days before. In other words, the days before, if memory serves, were about 10 at most, maybe five or four. And now, what did you say, 26 or something like that?

## **#Nima**

Yeah, 26 ships. Yeah.

## **#Ray**

So I agree. That's a good sign. The Iranians... I have to tell you, I've been really, really impressed by how clever they are. You know, they'll tighten the screw and then they'll release it a little bit, and they'll make exceptions for this or that country, and then they'll screw it again. So they're not going to be played with anymore. They're not going to be deceived. You know, deceive me once, deceive me twice. There are already two strikes against the U.S. So some kind of deal has got to be worked out. And Trump has to finally face into Netanyahu and say, look, you got us into this damn thing.

We'll try to help you get out of this, whether being obliterated by the missiles that we know Iran still has. You know, Trump's saying, oh, they only have about 17% of their missiles left. And the CIA comes in and says, well, actually, it's more like—maybe you didn't understand—it's not 17, it's 70, it's 75%. These things have been actually produced underground, and as you know, they have the capability of doing more severe damage to Israel than they have already, not to speak of the damage they can cause to the U.S. bases, what's left of them in and around the Persian Gulf. Yeah, really, I'm sure that...

## **#Nima**

We don't know if Donald Trump has talked or discussed the situation with Ukraine with Xi Jinping when he went to China. But I'm sure that one of the main objectives, or one of the main goals, in the summit between Putin and Xi was the case of Ukraine. And it seems that the war in Ukraine is just going on and on and on. And right now we're talking about the Europeans looking for some sort of escalation. They're talking about attacking Russia from Latvia. Latvia is asking the United States to put nuclear weapons in Latvia. What is that escalation? Ray, what is your understanding of this situation with Ukraine? And how can Donald Trump not negotiate or talk or find some sort of solution? Because so far, from what we've heard, it doesn't seem that there is a good discussion between the two parties, the United States and Russia. By putting nuclear weapons in Latvia, it's just amazing. If they do that, that's the end of Latvia. What is your understanding of that?

## **#Ray**

Well, I have to be very brief here. I have no understanding—it's crazy. In other words, what really amazes me is what we have in terms of Trump's influence over the Europeans now. The Russians still talk about the spirit of Alaska, right? The spirit of Alaska. What was that? Well, that was that we'd stop pushing for a ceasefire, okay? And the Russians would agree that we would rein in the Ukrainians. If we talk turkey to Zelensky, maybe to the point where there could be a three-way meeting—Zelensky, the Russians, and us. But we lean hard on Zelensky, okay? And, oh, what happens?

Well, three days after Alaska, the seven dwarfs, as I call them, from Europe appear at the Oval Office and sit down before the big desk and are, you know, talking about what's going on. And then Trump, as if to rub them even deeper, says, oh, by the way, I know we're not finished, but I have to call Vladimir Putin. I promised I—yeah. Could you wait, just, or you could have some coffee or something? Comes back in 20 minutes, trying to put them in their place. And I thought that they would get the message. Wrong, McGovern, wrong. They worked behind the scenes to give Zelensky the hope that he could continue to pursue this crazy policy. So, the European leaders are all in a very labile, a very delicate situation politically.

None of them—Scholz, Macron, Starmer—have more than 20% approval ratings. They're on their way out. And the way I look at Mr. Putin, perspicacious as he is, it will, in a way, you know, these guys will be gone. And if in the interim they boost defense spending so that it really hurts the common working person, that it really puts a dent in the social benefits that the Germans, for example, and the French, for example, enjoy, then new people are going to come in in the governments of Europe—new people that will look at Russia, and Russia will say, well, look, you know, we're willing to play ball with you, but we don't want this to happen again like what happened in Ukraine. We have to have a new architecture that will prevent it from happening again.

No Ukraine in NATO. And let's be sensible. Let's have a cordon sanitaire, some sort of a deflecting zone. And let's work and make sure that we do not destroy Ukraine, but give it enough so that they can be Ukraine, and then the part of Ukraine that used to be Ukraine, which we now have in our constitution as part of Russia. Yeah. Now, on the ground, the Russians are moving. They're moving slowly. It's attrition, attrition, attrition. But that's not a sign of weakness. My military colleagues persuade me that they're doing this to keep their own losses down. The Ukrainians do have drones, and those drones are pretty ferocious. So, keep the Russians' casualties down. And by the same token, just kind of these Ukrainians.

And I would say one should look at it as 80% completed. This is one of the main objectives that Putin said right at the outset: demilitarization. That means demilitarization—what's the word—obliterating the Ukrainian army. Now, what happens politically? How are we going to get denazification, the other twin aim? Well, that's a sticky wicket. But, you know, these Azov guys, these people that really like Bandera and the other people that cooperated with Hitler, if they don't

have an army—I mean, maybe I'm Pollyanna—but if the army falls and Zelensky is removed, as I think he will be eventually, given all these corruption things that prove him to be just as corrupt as any other Ukrainian, and it's pretty corrupt, okay?

So the Russians are actually looking back here and saying, oh my God, you know, they won't give up. But what do they got? Oh, well, they do have those long-range drones, right? And that's a pest, that's awful, and we really want to stop that. But these declarations about Riga, Latvia, they just don't make any sense. And even in a very unusual move—let's see, it was a couple of days ago—the CIA of Russia, the old KGB, the SVR, okay, had a public announcement. Now, I've been watching Russia and the Soviet Union for a long time. I don't remember the KGB having a public announcement. Where is it here? Oh, here it is. It's saying Ukraine is preparing strikes on Russia from the territory of Latvia.

Oh, and this is the press office. So they've got a press office, like the CIA has a press office. The press office of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation reports that the regime of Zelensky is aimed at demonstrating all this kind of stuff, and they're going to have drones launched from the territories of these cooperating states, including Latvia, okay? Now, the calculation is that these tactics will significantly reduce the time—the timeline—from launch to target. And somehow the Kyiv authorities have convinced the Latvians that it's really hard to find out where these missiles or where these drones were fired from. It's almost impossible to determine that.

And so, and this is a good—so there was a coincidence of Russophobia by the current rulers of Latvia, and that was stronger than their ability to think critically and to think about how they preserve their country. Because as we know, modern photography, modern satellite collection enables us to approach and to get the exact coordinates, the starting point of where the UAV was forced from. And this is the killer at the end. At the same time, it would be useful to recall that the coordinates of the decision-making centers on Latvian territory are well known. And the country's membership in NATO will not protect Latvia, the accomplices of terrorists, from retribution. I've checked the Russian on this, it's exactly right. So membership in NATO will not protect these people from retribution, suitable retribution that should be expected.

So what's going on here? I think these are warnings. They're certainly warnings. But would Putin authorize an attack on Riga or on some of the installations? This SVR notice names five airfields from which these things could be shot, yeah? So it's getting pretty particular. Look, you Latvians, are you crazy? How can the Ukrainians tell you that we can't tell where they were shot from, for God's sake? You're crazy. So will the Latvians do that? I doubt it. Let's say they do. Let's say they launch a couple of things. Then I think you have a situation where Putin is faced with, okay, I have my intelligence people warn them about that. Now, what do I do? And that, I think, is precisely what he was talking to Xi Jinping about yesterday. There's a long history of this.

Back in February, it was February 4th, 2022, Putin told Xi that he was forced, he had no other option than to invade Ukraine. And he waited for a demurrer. I mean, you know, Chinese foreign policy was

clear: you don't violate borders, you don't attack another country. And as I've said before on your program, Xi said, okay, but wait till the end of the Olympics. The Olympics ended, the Winter Olympics in Beijing, on the 20th of February. Donetsk and Lugansk declared independence. Russia recognized them. They got the Duma to approve the invasion. And so it went. Now, why do I say all that? Well, because I think things have come to a head now in what used to be Eastern Europe—the Baltics, Poland, and even Finland now.

Putin is understandably under considerable pressure from the real hawks in the Russian hierarchy, like Karaganov and Medvedev, and their public pronouncements, to not only obliterate these European bases, but European capitals and decision centers, and maybe even use nukes. Well, just to say that I disagree with those people who think that Putin would easily reach this kind of decision. I should rephrase that. It would not be easy, of course, but I think that having won the war, having had these pinpricks—you know, when they fired so many missiles at Moscow four days ago, it was awful—but the difference was that there were three people killed and 12 or 18 people wounded. Well, that's because the Russians have very, very good air defense systems.

Not so the Ukrainians. So there's a big difference there. And if I were Putin, or I put myself in his place, I'd say, against these people, oh no, you got to zap them. You got to show them you mean business. You look like a coward. You'd say, coward? My God, you know? We've got such big advantages here. And they can't even get most of their missiles or most of their drones through our defenses. It's not like the Ukrainians. They can't defend Ukraine. We're destroying their drone factories as well as their other installations. So, for God's sake, we're winning. You've been saying this for four years, for God's sake. Now we've almost won. Stay cool. In other words, I call him Cool Hand Luke. And I think I would say that we're lucky to have somebody who's so cool. What's the word?

So perspicacious, so calm, and so willing to act from a position of strength without being provoked. And the last thing I'll say is that people like the Finns or even, well, people—Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians—they would like nothing more than to provoke Russia in such a way that the U.S. would have to decide whether to honor Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which requires or says that each country has to consult its legislation and react in defense of another if it's attacked by an outside body. Now, I think NATO is kind of frittering away, but I'm not Putin, okay? And if my notion of Putin is correct... What's the cost-benefit here? I mean, for God's sake, you know, would I risk even a 10 percent chance that Trump, as he said, erratic as he is?

## **#Ray**

So the game is not worth the candle, in my view. Now, even so, I think Vladimir Putin was talking to Xi about that. And I imagine he said, if worst comes to worst, I may have to do this. Are you with me still? And I think that all the things that have come out of this so far, and we don't have an awful lot, indicate that the Chinese would not say, well, don't do that. But they'd say, look, last time we said, yeah, we love Westphalia, but we also recognize that each major country has core interests.

And sometimes those core interests require that they make an exception to Westphalia, like in February, March, April of 2022, when even the Chinese changed their rhetoric. It was all about core interests, like we have in Taiwan, like the Russians have in Ukraine. And Westphalia was downplayed for about three or four months. Now they're back to that, but that's normal. This consultation in Beijing, I think, was terribly important. If I haven't said this already, there was a joint communiqué and 20 agreements signed.

## **#Nima**

Yeah. Ray, we had Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov. He was asked whether it was time to drop the spirit of Anchorage and start talking about the spirit of Beijing instead. And he said, well, probably the spirit of Beijing exists. I don't know about the spirit of Anchorage, and I have never once used that phrase. So... what does it mean, Ray? Because we were talking about Anchorage and that summit in Alaska, which was supposed to be a significant sort of summit, but it didn't work so far, at least from what we've seen so far.

## **#Ray**

Yeah, the Russians feel like they were diddled. They were tricked, okay? Maybe, and to put the best face on it, maybe Trump had the best of intentions, right? In reining in the East Europeans and Zelensky. But even so, he couldn't do it. I mean, he couldn't do it. And so what does that speak? How does that affect what Putin thinks Trump can do vis-à-vis Zelensky and the Europeans? There's a counterindicator here. And that, of course, was on May Day and the 9th. The parade in Moscow was a big deal, and the Russians made very clear that these threats that were coming from Zelensky—forget about it, don't even think about attacking Moscow on May 9th.

And what did Zelensky do? Well, think about it. Maybe he wanted to make it clear that, no, those attacks, if they were planned, might happen. And so this is important. Putin called, and they talked about this very issue. And a couple of days later, Trump intervened with Zelensky and said, don't even think about it, okay? And they dressed it up as a four-day truce, okay? Now, that would cover the parade and everything else. What I'm trying to say is that Zelensky listened to Trump then, rather than listening to the hotheads in Britain or France or anywhere else, or Latvia.

So how is Putin going to look at all this? Well, we were tricked for the spirit of Alaska. They really helped us on that threat of missile attacking or drone attacking the parade. Let's keep that door open. And if you see even Medvedev, as well as Lavrov, they continue to say, well, the U.S. is sincerely trying to work things out on Ukraine. They can't seem to do it right now, but they're sincere about this. And if they want to help, well, there's a role for them, but not now. Now we have to finish with Iran, not detract attention from that. We'll do that when that's over. Then we'll deal on Ukraine.

And what people probably don't realize is that the sea change in relationships has been such that I, an analyst of Soviet and Russian history for six decades, would never have heard myself saying the Russians want the U.S. still involved in Europe. My God, yeah, absolutely. But they do. Why do they do that? Because the U.S. is the only possible way to rein in these other people and to exert what kind of influence they can. So that's not just the end of the fighting and some sort of border that they start fighting again, but they talk about an architecture.

It was the kind of draft treaty that the Russians offered to NATO and the U.S. back in December of 2021, before the war. They, I think—well, I know that they will keep pressing for that. And they think that the U.S. is being helpful. The U.S., meanwhile, is withdrawing tens of thousands of troops from Europe. I mean, that has more than symbolic significance. What's left are troops, in quotes, belonging to West Germany, France—I mean, Britain. Those troops don't amount to much. So, you know, it looks like things are in such a period of flux, and not only because of Donald Trump. There was one snide remark here about all the flux that's going on—the bizarre chaos is the word that was used by Putin and Xi.

Of course, that means Trump. But that's going to end, and maybe it could be ended before Trump leaves the scene, if things work out in November where the elections are held, number one, are fair, number two, and give the Republicans a loss that they can't recover from for the next two years. Now, those two conditions that I mentioned—this is not idly said. I am very concerned that there are preparations to use ICE and even the National Guard to prevent fair elections in November. And of course, we have all these redistricting things that, in most cases, give the Republicans an advantage. So I'm more afraid of internal disruption of that kind than I ever have been before.

And I think there's good reason to fear that. So what's going to happen in the interim? I think the Russians play a waiting game. If really provoked, then people like Karaganov or Medvedev, and the people that they say also support their hardline views—if they persuade Putin, okay, well, one Iskander into Riga or one of those airfields that the Russian intelligence people have already identified, five of them—maybe that would teach him a lesson. On balance, I don't think Putin would opt for that. The cost-benefit analysis that I draw is, why risk a volatile Trump reacting under Article 5, even though it makes no sense? A lot of stuff that Trump does makes no sense.

## **#Nima**

Ray, do you think what's going on in the Middle East is going to bring some sort of sanity to the whole concept of the security of the region? Because we've learned some—there are some rumors that Russia and China, together with Iran behind the scenes, are doing something of that sort, a new security architecture for the region. We've learned that from Saudi Arabia and Qatar—they're talking about a non-aggression pact, something like that. I haven't heard that from the Iranian side, by the way. But Iran is talking about a new security architecture for the region that would benefit each and every country that is using this radar for moves, that is in that region. They don't want, of course—Israel is not part of that, because they don't. What is your understanding of that?

## #Ray

Well, I think we have to recognize that there was a tectonic shift in the balance of power in the Persian Gulf area. And that is when the Gulf monarchies found out that all the promises of U.S. protection were worthless, that the Iranians not only could protect but did obliterate the U.S. bases in their areas—most of them, almost all of them, actually. And so where does that leave the head of Saudi Arabia or Qatar? Oh my God, we didn't bargain for this. We made a deal: we'll give them the oil, they'll pay us in dollars. Either they welched on the deal or they just couldn't protect us. So it makes good sense. And one key factor, of course, is that Saudi Arabia has made it clear that they're not going to let U.S. aircraft overfly Saudi Arabia if the U.S. decides to do another attack. Now, I... I don't know how much store you can put by that promise, but I think it's worked so far.

And there is that great big base there and in Qatar. So if the U.S. military can't depend on what's left of these bases, well, they're going to have to deal with a whole new arrangement. And meanwhile, doesn't it behoove these people, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to say, well, I mean, this old architecture has fallen apart. Okay, we need a new—well, it's a fancy word—architecture. What it really means is we need new patrons. We need new ways to create some sense of solidarity and security. And it doesn't really matter about the U.S. anymore because they've proved that they're not really good patrons anymore. So this would be a sea change, with the U.S. out of the Middle East and Iran, Russia, China, and some of these monarchies, these very rich people, singing a whole different tune. Now, I think that's going to eventuate.

I think it will be months before it becomes clear, but there's more likely to be an early new architecture of stability in that area of the world than there is to be in Europe until those—I call them the three blind mice—Macron, Scholz, and Starmer—until those leave the scene. And I think Starmer is on his way out. I think Scholz is the most unpopular chancellor the Germans ever had. And then Macron also leaves next year. So again, I think Putin is playing the long game. I think he's got enough support from people. And I think the dissidents, Karaganov and those people, they're allowed to say these things. And part of the reason is that dissent is allowed.

I mean, hello, it's not like Stalin or even like Putin. You can have different voices, but it also serves Putin's purpose, insofar as it says, look, I'm under this kind of pressure, you know. And these guys not only want me to knock out decision-making centers like Berlin and Paris and, you know, London, they want me to use their hypersonics. And we have them. And actually, we just fired one, which we're not talking about very much, but it was in Dnipro. And it was against the same sort of big, big factory complex where they're probably making weapons. And so, you know, we've got all kinds of stuff that we can use short of nuclear weapons.

So nuclear weapons, I think, can be ruled out for the nonce. Airstrikes on European capitals, Article 5, cost-benefit—I think they can be ruled out. Whether the Russians will get Xi to give his nihil obstat, you know, his “nothing is in the way of your doing a little strike on an airfield in Latvia,” from

which, you know, drones were shot way into the... That may be allowed. Even that, I think, the Chinese would hesitate on, as I think Putin would. Maybe I'm being too—well, I've watched Putin very closely. He's a lawyer, and lawyers don't take big chances, and it's a big chance to test whether Article 5 of the NATO Treaty still works.

## **#Nima**

Ray, I want to play a clip for you that shows the members of the political delegation heading to Gaza. They have been detained by Israelis at the port of Ashdod. And here is the video, Ray.

## **#Nima**

Here Ben-Gvir says, welcome to Israel. We are in charge here. They came with a lot of pride, and see how they look now. Not heroes, nothing. Terror supporters. And Ray, what is—because Benjamin Netanyahu came out and said that we don't accept this sort of behavior, you know. The foreign minister of Israel was so angry with the case because he said that we are doing a lot behind the scenes, and on the scene, you're destroying everything. He was mentioning Ben-Gvir because Ben-Gvir published this video. And it doesn't seem that there is any sort of disagreement among them when it comes to the behavior, the way they're behaving, you know, these people. But he says, why are you showing this sort of—why are you publishing these sorts of videos showing what we are really doing here? And your understanding of what has happened with the case of the flotilla to Israel?

## **#Ray**

Well, there was an attack on half of these boats about a week or two ago, and that was an attack 1,000 nautical kilometers, if you will, from Gaza. It was in Crete, in Greece. So they wanted to bottle up half of this global Samud flotilla before it even got out into the Med, where they could disperse and come at Gaza in different ways—and they did. Now, one of my best friends has a husband—he's a medical doctor, one of a hundred medical doctors on this flotilla—who very bravely agreed to challenge the blockade, which is illegal, and suffer the consequences if the United States didn't have enough guts to stand up to protect their own citizens, and the other governments as well. I think there are about 20 U.S. citizens on that thing, 200 all told. Fifty boats were there, I've said, two nights ago.

And you see the way they're treated there. Now, it's really inconceivable. Well, again, how can you say anything Ben-Gvir does is inconceivable? But it betrays a haughtiness, a hubris, an arrogance that American people should be aware of. Now, I have friends in that flotilla. I have friends in most of the flotillas. And the flotilla, the Mavi Marmara in 2010, there was an American citizen killed on that flotilla. And what did the President of the United States do? Nothing, okay? So the old, you know, the old Roman adage where if you're a citizen of a powerful nation, *civis Romanus sum*, okay? I'm a citizen of Rome. Whoa, my God. Okay, well, let this guy out of his handcuffs. And if it's St.

Paul, he says he has got to go to Rome for redress. Put him on a ship and get rid of him. Citizen of Rome?

Well, a citizen of the United States doesn't mean a damn thing if the Israelis want to do whatever they want to do to you. And you saw that. You saw that. And this is to intimidate people. Now, we know that some of the IDF soldiers have taken pictures of their abuse of prisoners, Palestinians and others. And we have that fellow in the New York Times writing just five days ago a detailed account of how the Israelis have used dogs to rape people. And I looked that up, and yeah, it's possible. And one of them testifies exactly how it was done. And they took photos of that, and we have some of that. So here's Israel just flaunting, we can do whatever the hell we want to do. And again, with Biden and now Trump supporting a genocide, supporting forced starvation, collective punishment—my God.

So how long will we American citizens stand for that? I think we may know more as the months go by, because Israel is now down to about 32% approval rating in the United States. First time ever, okay? Disapproval? Two-thirds, 65, I think, okay? That's new. So will this translate into influence in Congress, which most people think is bought and sold by the Israelis? I don't know. But it's a sea change in public opinion. We just have to force that up to our representatives and senators. And sometimes the Israeli lobby is so powerful that just yesterday they removed the Republican, Massey, who was trying to do sensible things. They just poured so much money into his opponent's chest that he won.

So, you know, if we have another minute or two, I had a personal relationship with this boat to Gaza. Right the year after the Mavi Marmara, which is a great big Turkish ship, really, I mean, was attacked mercilessly by the Israeli, by the IDF special forces. There were about seven, eight people killed, including this American citizen. He was a dual American-Turkish citizen. Then what we did, and this was largely done by progressive Jewish people in New York, where I come from, they raised enough money to purchase a boat—not a ship, but a boat—refurbish it, get it all shipshape, so to speak. We called it the U.S. Boat to Gaza, and since Obama was president, we named it the Audacity of Hope. Whoa, okay? All set to sail from Athens, Piraeus, the port there, okay?

And it was inspected several times. Now, there were about 55 of us, including people like Alice Walker, a well-known writer. There were people from the New York Times, from Democracy Now, and other outlets, okay? So we had what we thought was a pretty safe voyage there until the Israelis did whatever they wanted to do. And I was told before we left that Obama had tried to persuade Netanyahu, same guy, not to interfere with us, but that we'd better forget about it. And so the White House was thinking, well, we can derive some benefit from this by, well, we're just seeing corpses of U.S. citizens and coffins coming back from this kind of thing, because that would really raise our stakes, really raise our reputation higher.

With AIPAC, okay? We were told—I was told—that out of the NSC, and my friend Craig Murray, ambassador from the UK, former, checked with his own sources at the State Department. Yeah,

Hillary Clinton had given the same instruction. So let me just be really brief. There we are, sweltering in Athens, trying to get out into the Aegean, and we're all set, you know, and then we're going to leave the next morning, and oh, we get another inspection from Athens. "No, no, you have a defective air conditioner. You can't go." So we had a council of war that night. We said, "Let's go anyway." And so we did. Ah, so auxiliary—we're nine nautical miles out of Piraeus. We're on, we see the Med, we're almost there, and Greek patrol boats, Greek, you know, Ninja Turtle-type people, people commandos, saying, "Can't go any farther." So there was a whole hour standoff. Our captain, who took a great risk, because it's a violation of their law to take the boat out when you're not allowed to.

Medea Benjamin, all kinds of people were yelling at these people. And the Greeks were very, very kind of apologetic, you know, "We don't want to do this, but we got orders." So after an hour, the captain said, "Now they're going to board us, so I think we got to turn around." So we turned around, lost the boat. It was impounded, and we were never able to get any further. Then what happened? Well, Obama leaned on the Greeks, who at that time were in dire need of an IMF loan, in dire need of more support, which they weren't really getting much from the EU. And so Obama called Papandreou and said, "Look, you want that IMF loan? Don't let that boat out of Piraeus."

### **#Speaker 03**

You understand?

### **#Ray**

That's what happened. And so these apologetic patrol boats, these Navy people or Coast Guard people, were really saying, "Look, we don't want to do this, but higher orders." So it was Papandreou after talking to Obama. And that left such a distasteful taste in our mouths that our people wouldn't even let us get out of the port. We were willing to suffer whatever the Israelis were going to inflict on us, given what they did the previous year. But we never got a chance to. So I really applaud these people because what they're doing is calling attention to a gross injustice. Gaza is a blight on humanity, and the people there were so enthusiastic about our coming and our being there. And maybe I'll just leave one more thing here. Tonight, I'm acting in a play. I've begun a thespian career. My name is Rachel Corrie.

A play which you could look up. In any case, I just had lunch with her parents. Talk about a poignant example of how the Israelis knew they could get away with murder. Short story: Rachel Corrie, international volunteer, staying in a house owned and operated, owned and peopled by Palestinian doctors, saw the bulldozer coming to raze the house, stood in front with her orange jacket, cleared everyone. And the bulldozer driver was given the order to run her over. And then he was given the order to back up over her to make sure her back was broken. And that's what

happened. Oh, there she is. Yeah. So, you know, I know her parents really well. I wear this bracelet, which her dad gave me back about 20 years ago. And all it says is: Rachel Corrie, April 10th, 1979 – March 16th, 2003. March 16th.

## **#Nima**

Oh, isn't that interesting?

## **#Ray**

Three days before the attack on Iraq. So this particular American citizen, killed in cold-blooded murder, was kept off the front pages of every newspaper. There was practically no mention of that. And she was the first international volunteer that was killed by the Israelis. There were several right after her. But they just wanted to give the international volunteers a message: look, you're not immune anymore. And if you want to stand in front of bulldozers, yeah, you're welcome to do that because we're going to run you over, and nobody will know about it because we've got a hold on the U.S. and the Western press. So... I have a part to play in this. We're reading this wonderful play that's been played before, but it's in Raleigh now. I wish I could invite all our listeners and viewers. I can invite them to read the play. It is poignant. It's in her writings to her mother and father, and it's very, very moving.

## **#Nima**

Thank you. Thank you so much, Ray, for being with us today. A great pleasure, as always.

## **#Ray**

That's my pleasure, Nima. Thanks very much for inviting me.