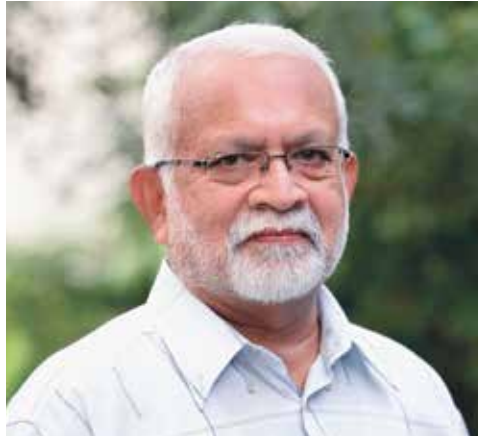


III. Interview

Dr. M.K. Bhadrakumar

A New Moment of Potential

The following is an edited transcript of the March 4, 2025 EIR interview with Dr. M.K. Bhadrakumar. Dr. Bhadrakumar served for 30 years at the Ministry of External Affairs of India, including diplomatic positions in the Soviet Union, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Türkiye, where he held the rank of Ambassador. A prolific writer on world affairs, he maintains a website called India Punchline where he posts his published material. The interview was conducted by EIR's Mike Billington. Subheads have been added.



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M.K. Bhadrakumar

peace. But I never had an opportunity to sit face to face with you, so it's a privilege. I have a small correction. I was not Ambassador to the Soviet Union. At that time in the diplomatic service, I served twice in Moscow, at the time of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, and at the time of President Mikhail Gorbachev. When I finished my second term, I was just becoming a minister counselor. I retired from the Indian Embassy to Türkiye as Ambassador.

Mike Billington: Greetings. This is Mike Billington with the *Executive Intelligence Review* and the Schiller Institute. I'm very pleased to be today with Dr. M.K. Bhadrakumar, who had a 30-year diplomatic career for India. He was the Ambassador to the USSR and also held leading positions within the Foreign Ministry. He had positions in Pakistan, in Iran, in Afghanistan. He is a prolific writer on world affairs. His blog is called *India Punchline*, which I encourage people to go to. Dr. Bhadrakumar, welcome, and thank you very much for agreeing to this discussion.

Dr. M.K. Bhadrakumar: Mike, good evening. It is my privilege, entirely my privilege. I have known and I have read a lot about you in your distinguished career as an activist and a promoter of world

Billington: Let me begin by noting that your most recent essay on the *India Punchline* website was on the extraordinary re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Russia, with the phone call between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Donald Trump, and then diplomatic meetings between several of their associates. What are your thoughts on how that's going so far?



Library of Congress

President Eisenhower greets Soviet Premier Khrushchev.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: I suppose I can see, in the limited time that President Trump has been in the Oval Office—he's in the second month into his Presidency—my feeling is that much ground has been covered, though it's too early to say what the future trajectory is going to be, because there are very many variables in the situation. The Russian-American relations have a long history. If you go back to the time of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, there

were very high hopes at that time that he and Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev might work out an understanding for peaceful coexistence. But you know how abruptly it ended. On both sides, there are forces, as far as I can see, who may not be happy with what is happening today. But I trust President Trump will be assertive in his second term. He has a wealth of experience from his first term and would have held a perspective on why he couldn't achieve what he had wanted in foreign policy—how he got constrained; how he couldn't proceed with that. I see traces of that already, the way he's going about his second Presidency. So, I expect him to be assertive.

But a new factor has come in, which is this: that unlike in the Soviet times, the Soviet period, where the variables actually were with regard to the United States primarily, here it is also with regard to the United States and trans-Atlantic allies; it's a new factor. Britain apart, I think the other European powers were quite inclined to get on with the USSR, especially Germany. The gas pipelines were set up in the 60s, early 70s, despite reservations from the United States.

A Ray of Hope

So, there is now a kind of role reversal here. The United States is pushing for this cooperation with Russia, and from the statements in Moscow, I have



White House/Daniel Torok
President Donald Trump speaks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Feb. 28, 2025.

come to a feeling that there is a level of transparency already existing in the dialogue, backchannel dialogue communications that are going on between the two sides. President Putin's remarks last Thursday while addressing the Collegium of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), which is the collegium of the top officials in foreign intelligence—he was optimistic, actually. I have never seen in the recent years such a ray of hope that he was holding out.

Of course, he cautioned at the end, and he did so rightly, that there are forces who may be working to undermine this process, and therefore utmost vigilance is required. He was telling the Russian intelligence

apparatus— We saw evidence of it already in the subsequent couple of days—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—the dramatic events in the Oval Office when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky came to Washington; then the meeting of 18 countries hosted by the UK, including Zelensky, and their determination to pursue their own pathway in Ukraine, no matter the dialogue between Russia and the United States. I find also that the American media is playing a very negative role. The mainstream media— There are other voices, voices of reason. But I cannot understand, I cannot



European Union

Volodymyr Zelensky (left, center), darling of the Europeans, across from Ursula von der Leyen and António Costa on her left, presidents of the European Commission and European Council, respectively.

comprehend why there should be such a fear about dialogue. I saw an interview given by the U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio where he asked this, very directly, forthright: “What is wrong with dialogue? You engage even your adversaries in dialogue. Why should you be terrified about it?” But that is the way it is; the way the discourses in the U.S. are going on.

We don’t know much about the discourses in Russia. I don’t think it will be coming out into the open, as assertive in the way that it is being asserted in the European capitals and in the United States. There are hard liners there also. But I think the Russians are more in control of the situation. And if Trump persists with this trajectory, I think there is a strong likelihood that it can gather momentum. Let us see how far the normalization of diplomatic relations goes. The resumption of activities of the embassies is very important, because a sustained conversation, dialogue, is only possible if the embassies are functioning full throttle. It’s not simply a matter of consular services and so on. It’s a matter of vital importance at this time that both countries are able to optimally perform on the diplomatic track.

Billington: Do you have an opinion on the Russian Ambassador who has been appointed?

Dr. Bhadrakumar: The Russians, I think, have chosen a thoroughbred professional, with very deep experience in handling North America, North American matters [Ambassador Alexander Darchiev]. They proposed the name quite a bit earlier, about a couple of months back, and they were waiting for the agreement from the American side. And when the representatives met in Istanbul, the officials of the two sides last week, the agreement was formally conveyed to the Russian side. He’s a very solid professional diplomat, and is in a position to roll up his sleeves and work from day one once he arrives there.

And I can understand that they have a lot of work to do, because they were denied any opportunity to communicate with the American public, at the people to people level. And that is very important, because a nonsensical narrative is there in America—all kinds of things. It’s almost like when George Orwell wrote about matters, that he could have been referring to a situation like in the Western world today. A kind of contrarian view is blocked—it’s absolutely censorship. Even American writers and thinkers, their point of



Embassy of Russia in the U.S.A.
Ambassador Alexander Nikitich Darchiev, Russia's new ambassador to Washington.

view is not coming through. And a lot of people were actually writing to me and asking me whether I could communicate to them some Russian commentaries. Even the Russian point of view was not available to the American public. So, reaching out to the American public will be a top priority for the new Ambassador. I’m sure about that.

Motiveless Malignity and Hubris

Billington: Let me ask you about the opposition to this process. I was quite impressed by the fact that when you referred to former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, you used the phrase that they were guilty of “wanton acts of motiveless malignity and hubris.” Now, that’s quite a phrase. But what I’m interested in is to what extent you think there is a British hand behind those policies, and in general, those of the so-called “deep state.”

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Oh, there’s no doubt about it. It’s not to what extent, it’s an all-pervasive influence—the British influence on the American policy. And often I think from the American side, they were led to believe—and Britain has the skill to get the Americans to believe—that it is their own policy! But it is scripted and it is thought through first in London and handed over. It’s almost like leading from the rear. This has been a consistent characteristic of British diplomacy. For Britain, the entire stature that it has in the world depends on its indispensability for the American policies and American foreign policy strategy. And therefore, you can see the centrality of it in the British side of things.

America is a global power. There are many countries which are willing to work with it. But in the case of Britain, it's not like that. It's an obsessive thought. And this was very evident in the last week—the panic that is there. It's going to be a very major negative factor in the coming weeks and months because the British intelligence has a stranglehold on the regime in Kiev. And now France also joined there. I saw a commentary by CNN earlier today discussing the possibility of the ouster of Zelensky. We are getting into very sensitive issues now, and British intelligence is doing a lot of havoc.

Most of these acts of terrorism on Russian soil were actually planned by British intelligence. And the Russians know that also—the missile attacks, targets inside Russia, assassination plots, such other things. Since yesterday, there has been talk that Ukrainian intelligence might have been involved in the second failed assassination attempt on President Trump, candidate Trump, during the campaign. This is something which was articulated by top senior Ukrainian politicians even at that time, that this is all a doing of these people. But who trained the Ukrainian intelligence? The Ukrainian intelligence is completely in the hands of MI6, and therefore, Britain's influence is not at all a positive factor in the situation today. It's one of the single biggest negative factors, Britain's capacity to be a spoiler.

End the 'Special Relationship'

Billington: We met British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to Washington this past week with a major flier, a four-page piece which basically called for an end to the "Special Relationship" between the U.S. and the UK. It reviewed the several hundred years-long role of the British in undermining the efforts of the American Founding Fathers, and then their intervention in the war of 1812, as well as in the Civil War, trying to disrupt and destroy the United States as a sovereign nation, and then trying to subvert it when they failed to do it militarily. And the subversion is what you've just described. It's basically their ability to—I like the way you put it—to convince Americans that these policies are their own when they actually come directly from British Intelligence. So, of course, Mr. Starmer went back, acting as if it was a successful trip. But I think it was a failed trip. And then he embraced Zelensky and sponsored this meeting at 10 Downing Street, which also failed to achieve anything significant, especially

since Europe itself is now crumbling economically and falling apart in terms of any kind of unity within the EU or even within NATO for that matter. So, where do you see Europe going at this point?

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Even Britain's capacity to fill in if the United States drifts away doesn't have a role any longer in the Ukraine war, as it has had during the Biden Presidency. Britain has no capacity to fill in. It has a standing army of around 60,000 soldiers. I read somewhere recently that its entire inventory of battle tanks works out to a mighty total of 25 tanks. So, what kind of peacekeeping role can it perform in Ukraine? Within a week they will become victims of the meat grinder. It has been a war of attrition. I don't think that Europe can play a significant role, except if it realizes the wrong trajectory that it took in 2022, and played a happily subaltern role. Whatever Biden wanted, they did, and they have paid a very heavy price as a result of it. Germany is the biggest example.

As I told you, I have lived in Russia, and have seen the kind of relationship that Germany had with Russia. Very frankly, Putin was discussing Germany as the next superpower. And where is it today? Putin has stated publicly, there were some thousands of German companies who were operating there, and Germany's export industry was very heavily dependent on the energy supplies from Russia. Putin once disclosed that the energy, the gas supplies, were given at subsidized prices to Germany. The Russians knew that it was a subsidized price, and the Germans bought a lot of it and sold it in the European market at marked up prices. And the Russians knew that also! So, you see such a close relationship was there.

Now, the entire production relations in the German economy are totally derelict. The export industry is not going to be competitive with the kind of prices they have to pay for importing gas and oil from outside. So, I do not think that the new government that is coming into power in Germany after the recent elections to the Bundestag—I have lived in Germany. I know the potency of the constituency which rooted for the trans-Atlantic relationship. But today, the new Chancellor-designate [Friedrich Merz], if he makes it as a Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader, he has spoken against the United States and he has spoken about a future for Europe that does not count on solidarity with the U.S.; that does not count on support from the U.S. and so on.

But I don't think this is the final word, because

Germany is in very serious trouble: from that high pedestal where it was four years, five years back, to more than half a superpower today. The economy is in recession, very deep recession.

I saw the *FT*, the *Financial Times*, had a report three days, four days back that already there is a talk about an American role in repairing the Nord Stream pipelines. I don't know if you have heard about it or not—the pipelines which Biden had destroyed. If that comes, then it's a very interesting proposition. Russia has abundant supplies, and massive quantities of gas and oil can flow from there again. An American company could manage that transaction on the ground, and the German economy could again revive, with plentiful gas supplies from Russia.

So, I don't think Germany is going to be comfortable with the kind of trajectory that Britain and France are promoting. Italy is also, from what I see from odd statements here and there, one can always discern there that Italy is also very uncomfortable with this. What are the other countries which can play a role in replacing the United States; to mentor Zelensky and his people there? So, I don't think the Europeans are on the right track; I think they are on a very wrong track.

Will the U.S. Cut Zelensky Loose?

And if you see the known unknown, there is also a factor there—that is, that a lot of it is a power struggle. There has been a power struggle in Kiev. And if and when this comes out— People were holding back Zelensky's rival camp, you know, holding back because they were nervous that any kind of effort to replace him would not have support from the United States. But now, if the United States just cuts him loose and goes its own way, and says, "you manage," then those forces will come up.

And I don't think the British intelligence can control that kind of a situation, because Russia has—I've lived in that country, I've traveled in Ukraine, and Russia knows that country like the back of its hand. Russia has its eyes and ears open there, even while the war is going on. If changes of that kind do take place, I



kremlin.ru

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, June 28, 2019.

can only hope—I have written that also—that it doesn't take a violent turn. But if that kind of a change takes place, then how does Europe address the situation, an emergency situation like that?

Whereas I think that both Putin and Trump are comfortably placed. They can build up the bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States. And I think Trump's line, his political line is a very smart one. It's based on smart thinking: that there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. So, it's a matter of sitting out, and that at some point some other side will give way. This is the way I see it.

Billington: Let me go back to the U.S. You said in another one of your reports that I read that it was, in your words, that "It's immaterial that the Trump administration is packed with pro-Israel figures and hard liners on China, for it is Trump that will be calling the shots." What is your basis for that judgment?

Dr. Bhadrakumar: I'll tell you, I never believed in this "Russia collusion" thesis—hypothesis—during Trump's first term. I don't know, Mike, whether you have seen a paper which I have in my collection, a one-page advertisement, a full page advertisement in *The New York Times*, a paid advertisement by a young man in his 30s by the name of Donald Trump. I don't know if you've seen it, dated 1980 or 81, when President Ronald Reagan was elected. You know what he had

written there? We both have passed through that stage in life. And I'm sure you'll agree with me that at that time, when you were in your mid-30s, you know what you're talking about, in your adulthood. Now, he had written there, strongly arguing, that this kind of a collision course with the Soviet Union is unwarranted, that Russia is not an enemy country, and peaceful coexistence is possible, and arms control is a necessity. It's an imperative need, arms control. And he offered his own services. This young, obscure businessman from New York offered his own services to be an envoy, a presidential envoy, to work on this. I think you know the Democrats have done a great injustice by caricaturing this man. He's a man of convictions. I was stunned when I read it, that he could have written this when he was in his 30s, you know, mid 30s.

Injustice to the Political Discourse

And what he is saying today, it occurs to me, is almost exactly the same thing; no change in that. I can only conclude as an outsider who doesn't have an emotional reaction toward him, that he is a rational thinker, and also that what he is saying is based on convictions. Putin said the other day that Trump is a "very transparent person." Putin said it, and Putin said that it's very difficult to be like that. Putin said it, but that's what it is.

So, this camp of liberals, globalists, the neocons in the American setup, who provided the political cover for the deep state, they have done a great injustice to the political discourses in the U.S. And they were singularly responsible for creating all these kinds of things—Ukraine, the expansion of NATO—starting from that time, from [then-President] Bill Clinton's time. All these are legacies of those people, that camp, and now they are hell bent, despite the mandate, the powerful mandate that he has got—and he didn't rig the election. He has a genuine mandate and a very strong mandate. And nonetheless, they are not giving up. They are trying to undermine it. What is it?

Billington: What's your view of Putin in light of what you've said about Trump and Putin?

Dr. Bhadrakumar: What I tell you may surprise you, Mike. Putin in my assessment was a "Westernist" in the sense of someone who believes that Russia's interests are best served by having a very strong relation-

ship with the Western world and a mutually beneficial relationship with the Western world, but with certain guardrails. Putin's problem is also this, that Putin is a trained professional intelligence officer. He has said openly that he saw the evidence that the United States helped the insurgents in Chechnya. He leveled this allegation publicly, and the Americans failed to respond. He volunteered even that he could produce good evidence to show that there was direct involvement by American intelligence in the war in Chechnya. Despite that, he was willing to work for a stable, predictable, mutually beneficial relationship, because he was convinced that it is important for Russia's own development, in terms of technology, in terms of trade, in terms of the standard of living of the Russian people, all that taken into account.

So, if he is replaced, it is going to be a tremendous loss of opportunity, actually, for the United States. While he is there, therefore, what I am recommending is that the Trump administration should make the fullest use of it, this period, and to go ahead, because you have an interlocutor in Moscow, a very powerful interlocutor in Moscow who can get almost any kind of decision taken there. He is not a dictatorial man. There is a collegial spirit in the Kremlin, and they are all people who are known to him, who formed the National Security Council—the present day Politburo. He can carry them along. Therefore, this period should not be wasted, because, you may not have a person of this kind of stature, experience, who has handled so many presidents across the Atlantic, and who is innately, intrinsically open to having a relationship with the West. I think that his assignment in Germany was a very formative experience for him. He is a fluent German speaker, so all this could be working to the advantage of Trump.

It will be somewhat audacious on my part to say this, but I have a feeling that Trump means what he says, that Putin can be an interlocutor for him. He believes in it, that there can be a partnership possible.

India-Russia-China Relationship

Billington: Russia and India have had a long, very close relationship, maybe with some troubles here and there. But in both cases, relations between India and China and between Russia and China are extremely important in the current volatile situation that the world is in. What is your view about this three-way

relationship between Russia, China and India, the three key countries in this new BRICS alliance and the leadership of the Global South.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: The troubled relationship with China is working to the disadvantage of India, especially in the present day times, because China is a huge reality, geopolitical reality, and it's an immediate neighbor. Not having a conversation with China, the kind of line that India adopted in the most recent years, I think, was a very flawed policy. My personal opinion about it is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, India could have taken a route like what Russian President Boris Yeltsin took vis-à-vis China: China-Russia reconciliation. Russian Federation reconciliation came after China began to know that Russia has a strategic autonomy. If India also had behaved that way— The U.S.-India relationship has been a very big handicap for India; there's a contradiction there. The relationship with the United States is extremely consequential for India. And as far as the Indian elite are concerned, this is an indispensable relationship for India, and therefore in the post-Cold War era, right from the 1990s, India pursued a policy which was almost, one can say, U.S.-centric. But one template of it was that the United States gave an impression to India, and sections of Indian opinion also came to believe that the United States is looking at India as a counterweight to China.

I don't think the United States had any illusions about India's weaknesses, and that India could never be a counterweight to China, because there's such a disparity in the comprehensive national power of the two countries. But a section of the Indian elite believed that. Then, of course, the United States was an interested party, to kind of invidiously fuel the China-India tensions, mutual suspicions and so on. This became a very negative factor in China-India relations, because for China, any kind of tendency on the part of the Indians to align with the United States— Though, of course, China has a very good awareness that in the final analysis, India will follow an independent foreign policy. And India cannot in any way be regarded as an ally of the United States working against China. Chinese commentators openly write about it, but they had their own anxieties and concerns as the U.S.-Indian relationship began to gather momentum. It's a very strong relationship. There is a bipartisan consensus in

the United States.

India is one of the few countries, perhaps, which can make a very smooth transition from the Biden Presidency to the Trump Presidency, and without any kind of hiccups. Even close allies of the United States, as we have seen in Europe or Japan or Australia, have problems in coming to terms with the Trump Presidency, but we don't have anything of that kind in India.

So, you see, India is very well placed that way. But this has been a negative factor. But now, having said that, let me also add a caveat here, that I think that the Trump Presidency will be good for India, because Trump has no reason, in fact, to act as a spoiler in the India-Russia relationship, which is very vital for India. Biden tried it, but that is not a worry that India has anymore. And similarly, Trump also, I don't think he will work to fuel the tensions between India and China: not openly, not even in a quiet way; I don't think he will do that.

So India, speaking that way for the first time, is in a position to pursue its relationship with Russia. And if the Russian-American relations improve, and if there is going to be content in the relationship, especially on the economic side and so on, India may even try to get a share of it; may like to join that. Because here, the Indians' focus is ultimately in terms of access to technology, trade, and the issues of development. There you see the predicament, which is this: that India doesn't have a strong manufacturing industry; India's growth is primarily in terms of the services sector. Infrastructure is developing; infrastructure development is picking up momentum—but it has a long way to go. So in these areas, the United States cannot help India. It is the Chinese experience which will be relevant for India. I've been strongly advocating that no matter the differences with China, India must tap into China's rise and create synergy for India's development.

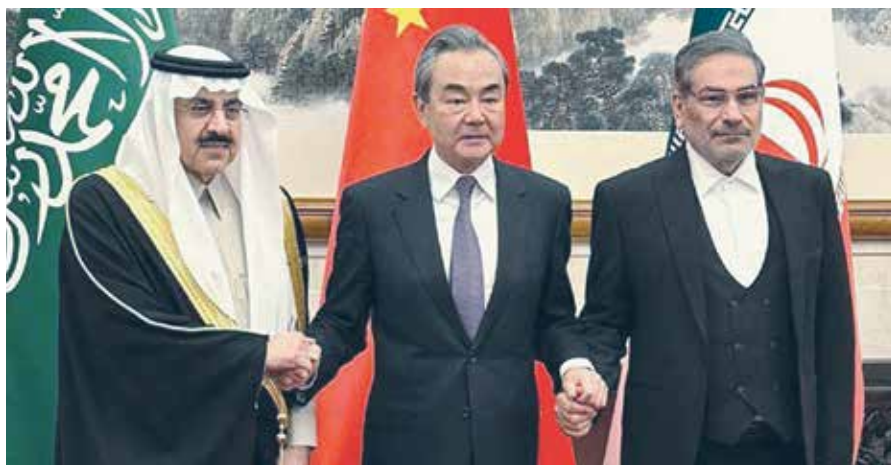
A Border Where No Border Exists

The border problem has to be set aside, Mike. What is often not understood is that this is not a territorial dispute between India and China. Why is it intractable? It is intractable because this is about the creation of a border where no border existed, either on paper or in political reality! So, there are vast vacant spaces in the Himalayas, where no one is in a position to claim that

this has been part of India. So, both sides are having their own claims, and it's a question of agreeing to create a border.

You can imagine how difficult it is. And now that the countries have picked up momentum as regional powers, national prestige always comes into play; public opinion comes into play. So, it's going to be very difficult. India has to have a leadership which understands this, that the border dispute is not going to be settled easily, and it may take a long time. But meanwhile, mutual confidence and, in terms of India's self-interest, it is useful to have a strong relationship with China.

One more point I need to mention is this: that in the final analysis, the fact remains that there are common



Government of Iran

Bhadrakumar: The Iran-Saudi rapprochement brokered by China brought a sea change in the region. The signatories (l.-r.): Musaad bin Mohammed Al-Aiban (Saudi Arabia), Wang Yi (China), Ali Shamkhani (Iran).

interests for India and China as rising powers in today's international order. They both are staking claim to have a voice at the decision making level in the international financial institutions, for example. They have a common interest in that. So, they are both ambitious about their role in the coming decades, well into the 21st Century. The Chinese commentary is often right about this, that if we work together, it has a multiplier effect, and that can be a game changer for both. But if you do not work together, then both are losing.

On the Cusp of Change in Iran

Billington: I'd like to ask you to address the situation in the Middle East, but I'd like to approach it through Iran. I think you were Ambassador in Iran, or you worked in Iran.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Well, yes, I have. I have a long experience on Iran, right from the time of the Islamic Revolution. Yes, I mentioned to you my postings at headquarters. I handled only Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan; I had no other charge. It's a very important division in the Indian Foreign Ministry; all very key relationships.

Billington: But I think you've mentioned in other writings that you're confident that Trump will not be drawn into Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's effort to have a U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. What do you think about Iran's role today, not just in the Middle East, but their role internationally?

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Iran is on the cusp of change. Although there are, I know, people in the U.S. who understand this, the old stereotyped notions are still dominating in the U.S. I went to Iran as an observer during the 2024 presidential election. I met people whom I have known from earlier times—for a long time, I interacted with them and talked with them, and I came away distinctly with an impression that Iran is going to change. And since then, there is much evidence pointing in that direction.

The problem here is that, just as we spoke about Britain, a similar kind of a pernicious influence is there from Israel. Israel will not allow a kind of normalization, which would have been useful for both the United States and Iran. But in my opinion, there again, we could see some interesting changes. The bottom line there is, I think, Trump is genuinely averse to wars, especially getting involved in wars, deploying the United States forces in a war in an outside country to defend another country's interests. So, if that holds good through this next four-year period, what is the way that it can develop if there is no war? Naturally, the United States will not decouple from Israel. Israel is hugely influential in the United States in terms of media, Congress, the political elite, think tanks and so on. So, that will not change, the so-called Israel lobby; that relationship will continue. But, I have a feeling that at some point, if it has not already taken

place during Netanyahu's visit to the U.S., I think Trump will convey to him, someone will get them to understand that if they embark on something of an adventurous policy toward Iran, in terms of a conflict, then don't count on him to step in and fight for Israel—fight Iran—for Israel's interests.

You see, a thing which is difficult for the Americans to understand is also this: that I have no doubt in my mind that Iranians are not interested in a nuclear weapon. And however much they try to say this, what option has been left to them in terms of when it comes to their enrichment? The United States pulled out of the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action]. Iran had fulfilled its obligations fully. Nonetheless, the United States did not deliver. Then it tore up the agreement and said that it will go for a "maximum pressure" policy. Sanctions remained; none of the sanctions were lifted.

So, what is it that one could expect the Iranians to do? They went back to the drawing board and their enrichment continued. And they have now come up to a point that they are a threshold state. Now, still, I don't think that they will go for—and it's not a question of thinking; I know the Iranian mind on this—they do not think that nuclear weapons give them any additional deterrent capability. So, they have developed their deterrent capability in other directions. We both can agree that that capability is very credible today, in terms of their missile capabilities and so on. A war means it will be to the detriment of Israel, which is a much smaller country ultimately. And unless the United States came into it, it's a much smaller country. And I think Israel will be completely destroyed if there is a confrontation, military confrontation. And I feel that Netanyahu is also ultimately a realist, and he knows this. But the rest is a matter of rhetoric and grandstanding that is straining at the leash to go for a war and so on. But I don't think it will happen because he knows it. He knows that Iran's capabilities are today at such a level that there will be no winners in such a war, and Israel will be destroyed in the process.



State Department/Freddie Everett

U.S. Middle East Envoy Steve Witkoff.

Besides, I think that Trump definitely would have conveyed this to Netanyahu, if not directly then through others. Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff was there two or three times. He would have conveyed to Netanyahu "Look, do not do anything." And much of Trump's own grandstanding with regard to the "Riviera of the Middle East" and so on in Gaza, I think it's a matter of publicly posturing that the American backing for Israel is very solid.

But that has its limitations. That cannot be logically taken to mean that the United States will align with Israel to fight a war against Iran. My understanding,

after conversing with very influential people in Tehran during my last visit in June, is this: that they also do not think that there is going to be a war between the United States and Iran. Of course, the Iranians were all along contemptuous about the Israeli threats to attack because they know that Israel doesn't have that capability without the United States. When you add up these tendencies, which are there for us to see, if you rationally look at the situation without pride and prejudice, then what is the result that you get out of it? That Iran can be an interlocutor for the United States.

A Sea Change in Middle East Relations

And in the present situation, a new factor has also come in there, that the old American strategy of creating an anti-Iran front in that region, with Israeli participation in it, to isolate Iran, that is not going to work. You know, the Iran-Saudi rapprochement brokered by China has brought about a sea change in the regional climate, so much so that it is doubtful if any of these countries would want to be seen as siding with Israel or the United States in the event of a war with Iran.

The third thing is this: that there is a Saudi factor. Saudi Arabia is also undergoing profound changes. And we must see that. It continues to be an important ally of the United States. That is because it is playing its diplomatic cards very carefully. But it has diversified

its relationships, and it has a very strong relationship today with Russia. It began with the creation of this brilliant idea of OPEC+, where they have aligned to influence the world market conditions, oil market conditions. And with China, they have a strong relationship again.

So, you see Saudi Arabia today is a very different Saudi Arabia. The most important thing about the Saudi approach to life now in regional politics is this: that the traditional attitude of using the militant Islamist jihadi forces as a geopolitical tool, they have ended that; they are not in that business anymore. Now, this is a sea change. This has brought about a sea change in the situation in the Middle East. And this young man, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is genuinely a modernizer. I know there's a lot of demonizing going on about him in the U.S., in the Biden period. But I think that he is a modernizer. And he is—like the Iranians actually—what is happening is that they are now moving in the same direction, giving primacy to economic growth and development. Iran also has a serious problem, an economic crisis. So they want to move also in the direction of greater trade, greater regional cooperation and so on. So what does it mean? This means that there are no takers in that region, if you want to pursue an inimical strategy toward Iran, be it the United States or Israel. If they want to do that, they are on their own.

This was not at all the case in all these decades that we have passed through. So, all this creates a very favorable setting. But let's see, I have a feeling that there will be an engagement between Trump with Iran at some point, sooner rather than later. He's only been there for a little more than a month—but this can happen; maybe this can happen. That will be a very historic development in the Middle East situation.

You see, ultimately, your people do not understand that this is a self-made man, Trump. I am looking at it as an outsider. I've never met him nor have I ever talked to him or anything like that. But he is a self-made man, and such people, self-made men, are hugely ambitious.



Presidential Press and Information Office

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

When they have made it big, they become hugely ambitious about their own legacy. This is particularly an American strain. He will be looking at these issues as legacy issues: Russia, Iran and so on. Now you may laugh at it; I can already see a smile on your face. But you know, the fact of the matter is that what he is doing is nothing really short of a revolution. Like Vladimir Lenin said, you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.

LaRouche's Oasis Plan

Billington: We've reached our one hour. But if you don't

mind I'd like to bring up one further issue, and that is our Oasis Plan. I don't know if you've looked at this, but this is a plan that Lyndon LaRouche authored way back in the 1970s, which was based on the idea that the real problem in the Middle East was that if there was going to be peace, there had to be a concrete development policy which would address the water crisis as well as the energy and transportation and basic infrastructure. The Oasis Plan is a very ambitious idea of building canals, of building nuclear desalinization in order to create huge quantities of fresh water from seawater, and other kinds of infrastructure development, not just for Gaza, but for the whole region, extending out into Iraq and Iran and so forth. I'm wondering what your view of that is. We're trying to intersect this policy debate now as powerfully as we can, into the discussions that are taking place because of the Gaza crisis.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: I think Trump would be interested in this; logically, Trump would be interested in this. The United States has a handicap. Why is it said that its influence is steadily draining, is losing its capacity in the region? It's a paradox, but Iran is actually America's natural ally in that region. The Iranian elite are, again, distinctly pro-Western, and that country is performing today much below its optimal level. It has a huge population, massive land mass and powerful agriculture, a well-developed agriculture base. If only it is allowed to bring out its LNG and gas to the world

market, it has a huge reserve. So, you see it can be of use and all these things become possible.

But, so long as that doesn't happen, how do you realize these dreams? They will remain on paper. Because I don't think any country there has got the kind of intellectual resources, absorption capacity for technology, and the national will and purpose in this way that Iran has. Trump will certainly be attracted toward this if an engagement takes place. I strongly suggest that you should promote an engagement, a constructive engagement between the United States and Iran. And this would be in some ways, I tell you, this would be even, I would say, as significant as the normalization of the Russian-American relationship. It will be in America's interests.

Billington: Very interesting. And thank you very much. I appreciate your taking the time. Your views on these things are very stimulating and insightful, and I think it will lead to further discussion, within our organization and with our associates around the world. I thank you. Do you have any final words you'd like to say?

A Golden Opportunity

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Mike, I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation. I have a sneaking suspicion that we are probably on the same page in the sense that you know you are. I didn't expect that you would be so receptive to these thoughts which I projected. So what does it mean? It means that there are thoughtful people in the U.S. who understand these things. And I think, therefore, you should use your influence to work on some of these areas. And the Trump Presidency, take it as a golden opportunity—and do not be misled by your own people there, your own think tanks and media, mainstream media and so on. He's opened a gateway, a pathway, through which, if the country can travel, it will be transformed phenomenally. I had never thought that this slogan of MAGA, you know, Make America Great Again, that it is anything but a pipe dream. But now I am beginning to feel that if he proceeds—I saw this morning, for example, the press conference by Trump announcing the \$100 billion investment to make chips in Arizona from Taiwan. How often did you see these kinds of things during the Biden Presidency? So, he is working overtime, and he has a hugely ambitious agenda. Please do not

handicap him by creating the kind of digressions and distractions and so on, as it happened during his first Presidency. This is the essence of democracy, that when someone has earned a legitimate mandate from the people—and what a mandate it is; such a strong mandate from the people, the American people he got—then he should be allowed to govern, because the people are going to get an opportunity after four years to go on the same path, or take some other path, which is what democracy is about. A peaceful transfer of power is no longer possible in your country. I find it is extremely frustrating.

Billington: It's like what many people are now saying about Europe. I think it was U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance who said the problem in Europe is not Russia or China—it's that they no longer believe in the voice of their own people, that there's no democracy anymore. And he pointed to Romania and the Alternative for Germany.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: And I'm telling you, this is the problem in Europe—you hit the nail on the head. And this is also the problem in the United States. You see, this has to be like—these people who are systematically undermining, decrying Trump. They should understand that they need to behave like adults and let the process of governance continue, discuss a policy but in objective terms, but leave it at that. Everything is not about winning elections. So, now you see the plate is like this: that unless he is humbled and he is destroyed, the other side cannot hope to have a revival. It's a zero sum mentality.

Billington: Yes, exactly. The win-win idea, the idea of mutual collaboration and the respect for the other, from the Peace of Westphalia, is totally missing in this “unipolar” world mentality.

Dr. Bhadrakumar: Let me thank you. And I wish you all success in your endeavors. You know, you have had a very eventful life and you aspired for things which were not even humanly possible. So you had such dreams in your life. I admire you, and therefore I feel greatly privileged, that you spent this one hour with me alone in a conversation.

Mike Billington: Yes. Thank you very much.