

# The Iran Crisis, #9: Vijay Prashad on linkages of Iran war with Gaza, Lebanon, and globally

*Transcript of the conversation Helena Cobban had with Vijay Prashad on 3/24/2026. Find the full audio of this conversation [here](#). Video coming soon to this [Learning Hub](#).*

**[Helena Cobban]**

Hi, everybody. I'm Helena Cobban, the president of Just World Educational, and I am delighted that today we have with us Vijay Prashad, the director of Tricontinental.

Vijay, it's always a real pleasure to talk with you. Thanks for being with us.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

It's a pleasure. Thanks a lot, Helena.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, we have so much to talk about. I think, you know, over the past couple of days, today is Tuesday, is it? Tuesday.

It is the 24th already.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Can you imagine?

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, this war has been going on since February 28th. So today is Day 25 of the war. And it's in the morning here in D.C. and presumably also in Santiago de Chile, which is where Vijay is with us from. So, yeah, over the last few days, we saw, obviously, President Trump issue a very stern ultimatum, all caps, of course. But he's always all caps and threatening the Iranians that if they didn't open the Strait of Hormuz immediately, then he would obliterate their power system. And then he backed down, which was interesting.

And the timing was interesting. It was just before the markets opened yesterday. So a lot of people in his entourage presumably made a lot of money from doing this or that on the stock market.

So, Vijay, how do you read what's happening in this war?

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Well, firstly, it's very important to say, because you and I believe these things, that what Donald Trump did by indicating that if the Iranians didn't accept his ultimatum, the United

States would bomb the power grid. It's important to say that that's a war crime. And Mr. Trump is, in that sense, following an Israeli practice which became commonplace during the genocide, which is to announce that we're going to cut off food and then cut off food. That's a war crime. You need to establish when a war crime is committed that there's intent to commit the war crime. So had the United States bombed Iran's power grid and made Iran go dark, there would be no need to speculate about intent to commit a war crime because Mr. Trump broadcast it. The Israelis have, of course, done this now for almost three years. They've said we're going to do this, and then they've gone ahead and done it. And when you read the submission by the government of South Africa to the International Court of Justice, it's filled with statements such as Mr. Trump has been making on Truth Social, where he's basically announced we are about to commit a war crime, and then the U.S. government goes ahead and commits a war crime. I think it's important for us to say that up front because we believe in these things and we continue to fight against war crimes, which have become completely normal in our time. This is a war crime because Iran, in good faith, was negotiating with the United States, with the Omanis, as the, as it were, middle person. They were like the sheikh in a Muslim wedding, going back and forth between one room and the other, between the bride and groom.

And, you know, the Iranians, it seemed, even though they didn't need to, were willing to make all kinds of concessions. They don't need to because they don't have a nuclear weapons program. So prima facie, there's no need to negotiate.

But they still came to negotiations. They still agreed, you know, on all kinds of things which they didn't need to, including zero enrichment, which the Omanis said that they had come basically close to agreeing to. And right after that, the United States and Israel conducted a war of aggression against Iran.

That's Article 2 violation of the UN Charter. This whole thing is a war crime. So, I mean, in that sense, Elena, we can talk about Iran's incredible resistance on the battlefield and so on, in terms of their ability to strike back and to paralyze the United States.

The United States is actually in a situation of paralysis. It miscalculated this war. But I want us to start here, that this whole thing is a war crime, that this is what is known as a war of aggression.

And in Nuremberg, Nazi generals got the death penalty for the crime of a war of aggression. That's what this is, an unprovoked war of aggression.

### **[Helena Cobban]**

You're absolutely right, Vijay, to underline that, which I have tried to underline as much as I can. You could say that this whole concept of war crimes is very like pre-2023. It's very old fashioned.

But you're quite right to underline it if there is to be anything like a coherent global society. The history of war crimes, you know, Hague Convention, Vienna Convention, all of that stuff goes back to the middle of the 19th century. No need to go into that.

It was a very European, the way it was put together, it was a very European concept. But every great civilization in history has had very clear constraints on what is lawful and what is not lawful in the conduct of war. So I think it's worth underlining that.

And you're focusing in on the two questions, really important, the war of aggression. Now, the war of aggression is the war crime of all war crimes, because without a war, without the concept of a war that in itself is completely illegal. Then if that war hadn't happened, then none of the things that happen inside that war would have happened, if you like.

People sometimes describe genocide as the crime of all crimes. But in parallel with that, a war of aggression is the war crime of all war crimes. So we need to underline that.

And then the second thing that you rightly underlined was the matter of intent. In the genocide convention, intent is very important, but it's very important throughout. If Trump had, well, for example, when he went ahead and let the Israelis and coordinated with the Israelis, because we need to understand that the Israelis do nothing in this war without close coordination with the U.S. military. He coordinated closely with the Israelis, both to decapitate the political leadership of Iran and then to attack the South Pars gas field and gas terminal. Both of those are in themselves war crimes. They were not announced ahead of time.

So you didn't have that matter of intent. But clearly the intent was there. You didn't need to have the announcement to have the intent.

But those are really crucial issues to focus in on.

### **[Vijay Prashad]**

Yeah, I mean, you know, you take the South Pars field. You know, what is the military utility of attacking any energy infrastructure? Zero.

Because firstly, it is not provable that the Iranians were drawing energy directly from South Pars, let's say, to power the missiles. But I'll give you an even better example. The Indian government holds an annual Navy exercise in the Indian Ocean.

Every year there's a Navy exercise. And often friendly countries, in this case, Iran, send ceremonial ships to join the Navy exercise. Why do you send a ceremonial ship?

It's actually diplomatic. It's part of a military diplomacy. The ship comes, it's an unarmed ship.

It brings officers who typically are military diplomats. And when the ship docks, they come on shore. They give talks about their country.

You know, they meet with their ambassador. There's, you know, basically ceremonial things. People come on board the ship.

They get to meet Iranians and so on and so forth. Well, this ceremonial ship, unarmed, was sailing in Sri Lankan waters, not international waters. It was in Sri Lankan waters.

Unarmed, it had made no threats to anybody. It was going home and the United States sunk the ship. Half, you know, a very large section of the crew died.

The rest of the crew were flailing in the waters, rescued by Sri Lankan Coast Guard, not assisted by anybody. That itself is a crime. It's a crime against Sri Lankan sovereignty because the United States fired on an unarmed ship in Sri Lankan waters.

The ship was a guest of the Indian government, unarmed ceremonial ship sunk in Sri Lankan waters, but a guest of the Indian government. I mean, I can enumerate a number of different crimes that were committed. You know, those soldiers who died, the Navy personnel who died in that sinking, have not been really talked about anywhere.

The press in the West has not covered this story adequately. What they have said is that a naval frigate was sunk in Sri Lankan waters. In fact, they don't even mention Sri Lankan waters.

Naval frigate, sort of assuming, making people imagine it's a warship. It is indeed a naval frigate, but it's an unarmed ceremonial ship that goes for these military exercises. You know, I mean, I can enumerate so many examples in this very case of the United States contravening international law.

The killing of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, for instance, is in contravention of international law, just as the kidnapping of Nicolas Maduro was on January the 3rd, 2026, from his bed in Caracas, Venezuela. Another Article 2 violation, a violation of customary law, which is the kidnapping of another head of government under false pretenses, because they kidnapped him, saying he's a drug lord. And then when they took him to New York, they dropped that charge, because that charge is completely specious.

It's a farce against the so-called international order. You can enumerate so many examples. The oil blockade on Cuba is in contravention of a range of conventions, including, I would put on the table, and I hope that a country goes to the International Court of Justice just to make the case, the oil blockade in a modern society is a genocidal act.

You know, I visited, I was in Havana about 10 days ago, visited a neuropathy hospital. They cannot conduct brain surgeries for brain tumors and epilepsy and things like that because of the fluctuations in electricity. You can't open somebody's brain up with all the modern tools that you need and the electricity fluctuates.

You're going to kill patients. Patients are dying on ventilators because ventilators are negatively impacted by fluctuations. People can't get dialysis.

You know, these are all acts of genocide. And I would like to have somebody, I would like to have somebody take this to the International Court of Justice to test the genocide convention against something like a complete blockade of an island so that it cannot get electricity.

**[Helena Cobban]**

You're quite right. And it's also good to note that all of these kinds of actions were pioneered by Israel in Gaza. And the Israeli government was testing, testing, testing the limits of international law, of the genocide convention, of all the constraints of international law.

And President Joe Biden just allowed them to bust through all those limits. You know, so in a good sense, since I mean, not a good sense, a bad sense, but in a real sense, Joe Biden is responsible for all of this because he knew what was happening. OK, talking about Joe Biden and cognition is another issue.

But he should have known. The people in his entourage certainly knew, and yet the arms and money and diplomatic and full diplomatic support to Benjamin Netanyahu continued unabated, unconstrained. So he is largely responsible as a co-conspirator with Netanyahu in the commission of all those war crimes, crime of genocide and just, you know, terrible contraventions of international law since October 7th of 2023.

But why are we talking about international law? I mean, you know, why are we talking about the United Nations? When the United Nations has just like bowed down and just been supine in front of Donald Trump last November with their adoption of Trump's outrageous border peace proposal.

And then more recently, I think it was March 17th, the Security Council adopted this resolution. Criticizing Iran for for taking actions against targets that had been involved in the unprovoked war of aggression against it. So what is the value of of the Security Council?

What is the value of the United Nations? What can those of us who care about a peaceful, well-governed international order, what can we do?

### **[Vijay Prashad]**

Well, look, firstly, it's impossible to turn your back on on international law, because otherwise you don't have a standard to judge things. You know, it's important. And by the way, if we consider that the UN Charter was signed in 1945 and then increasingly by other countries, the Genocide Convention in 1948, the principal geography of violation is really not Israel.

The principal geography of violation was the U.S. government in the northern half of Korea, when the U.S. government wittingly destroyed all the dams, destroyed the water sources, destroyed power plants to such an extent that the U.S. airmen were saying we can't find any more targets. I mean, the real the first violation of the UN Charter that we have historically is the United States bombardment of the north of Korea, where they flattened the whole country, left it as rubble, and now make all kinds of disparaging comments. It's a lot like how Henry Kissinger said Bangladesh is a basket case.

Well, you know, when Charles Trevelyan first went to Dhaka in the 18th century, he said this city is more modern than London. It took a lot of work for the British to destroy Dhaka and make it to the condition where Henry Kissinger could so arrogantly describe it as a basket case. In Korea, it just took a handful of years for the United States to bomb Korea to rubble.

You know, what they did there was extraordinary. It sets in motion behavior that goes from Korea to Vietnam and onwards, you know, just pummeling agricultural land in Vietnam with Agent Orange, such that you visit Vietnam and people say that we'll never be able to grow crops there for generations. And I want to make a point about different parts of the world having different approaches to this.

Some years ago, I interviewed soldiers who fought in the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988. These are Iranian soldiers. They were mid-level people and so on.

I was interested in talking to them about their experiences. Well, you know, they tell you the normal things. I mean, war is ghastly, you're sitting in trenches and so on.

But one of the things that I did learn is that they faced the mustard gas attack from Iraq. It's important to know that the mustard gas implements that made the mustard gas came from the Federal Republic of Germany or West Germany, from the United States and from other Western countries. They provided Saddam Hussein's Iraq with the tools to make the mustard gas, which they fired against the Iranians liberally.

Iranian waves of soldiers, you know, because they had population, whereas the Iraqis had technology given to them by the Gulf Arabs and the West. And by Donald Rumsfeld. Donald Rumsfeld and not just Rumsfeld, a range of people were out there providing that.

And the Federal Republic of Germany played a big role in this. Anyway, these soldiers said, you know, we experienced mustard gas. It was horrible.

We didn't have proper equipment, etc., etc. So the question I asked them was, why didn't you feel that you wanted to fire mustard gas at the Iraqis? You know, you are a modern society.

Why couldn't you fire? Well, no, this is not this is not the high ayatullah with the fatwa saying no weapons of mass destruction. These are soldiers who experienced the mustard gas.

They didn't feel they wanted to put, you know, an eye for an eye. They accepted the Gandhian adage that an eye for an eye makes the world blind. They said we would not have wanted to fire weapons like that.

It's not honorable. It's dishonorable. And this is very interesting because in the film we go from the ordinary soldier all the way to Ayatullah Ali Khamenei, who wrote one of the fatwas saying no to nuclear weapons, no to weapons of mass destruction.

That there is an ethic that developed in Iran against these kinds of weapons as dishonorable weapons. It's very interesting. During this war, there were indications given in Iran.

Why not, you know, get some nuclear equipment from other countries, escalate to a nuclear test, et cetera, et cetera. Even now, the Iranians refuse to escalate a nuclear program. Between the July 12 day war in 2025 and this attack, the Iranians refuse to escalate.

I mean, they have enriched uranium. They just will not use that for a weapon. They are using it for radioisotopes, for medical purposes.

They are using it for nuclear energy. They are testing better ways to get nuclear energy. So on and so forth.

Agriculture. There's all kinds of things you can use enriched uranium for. They just don't want to build a bomb.

They just don't want to do it. And like, you know, logical people are saying, you know, what are you doing? Libya gave up its nuclear weapons program and then the West destroyed it.

North Korea simultaneously tested in 2006. They're still standing. Why won't you just test a bomb?

You don't have to use it on anybody. They just won't do it. This tells you something about the Iranian ethical sense.

They just don't want a nuclear bomb. When Trump says, why won't they say they don't want a nuclear bomb? What are you talking about?

Two weeks before, Trump said that the Iranian foreign minister tweeted, we do not want a nuclear bomb. The Iranian president said it in public. We do not want a nuclear bomb.

They do not want a nuclear bomb. What's going on here?

### **[Helena Cobban]**

And it needs to be underlined at every possible moment that, of course, Israel does have a very robust nuclear arsenal. So we're in a situation of gross asymmetry. But the Iranian military, the IRGC and the regular military have have survived this far, not just survived.

They have shown really quite notable inventiveness and capacity to respond in unexpected ways. And as some people are now saying, since Trump's back down of yesterday, March 23rd, it seems clear that the Iranian side has escalation dominance in this war because they were able to get him to back down. So this is new.

This is something that hasn't happened to the US in this form. For a very long time, if ever, I mean, you know, the Vietnam War and defeat, the Iraq War and defeat, the Afghanistan War and defeat, they were all very long drawn out and they weren't really the defeat of the United States was not a result of battlefield strategic dominance by the colonized country. It was more kind of exhaustion by the US electorate and people and political elite.

But in this case, the battle is ongoing. We're only in day 25 and we've already seen the Iranian side establish escalation dominance, which for the United States, which has had a sort of an idea that the whole of the Persian Arabian Gulf, I just call it the Gulf because that is contested. I like to call it the Khaleej, actually, which is a term that is used by both both Persian speakers and Arabic speakers.

The whole of the Khaleej has been essentially an American, a lake for American strategic operations, military operations for a long time, with the exception of the south coast of Iran, which is the north coast of the Khaleej since 1979, since the Ayatollahs and their amazing mass following seized control of the whole of Iran. So since 79, the Khaleej has been contested at a certain level. But the Americans still like to think that they have most of the seas of the the western portion of the Indian Ocean are under American strategic control.

And crucially, we have Diego Garcia, the Chagos Islands, which is a US, mainly US base that is given to them by the Brits who have zero valid claim to the Chagos Islands. But that's another matter. But so the American military has been able to operate quite freely across that whole area.

And as you noted, over on the east side of India, in the waters of Sri Lanka against the vessel, the Iranian Navy vessel, unarmed Iranian Navy vessel, now the Iranians are challenging the US ability to control the Strait of Hormuz, which, you know, if you look at the history of it, it's been a key node for the whole Indian Ocean trading system since time immemorial. And even more so after the discovery of oil in Iran, Iraq and the Arab Gulf states. So I have actually written about this and I'll put the the link to to the essay that I wrote into the description of this video conversation that we're conducting.

But I'd like to know what you think, Vijay, about this kind of it's not quite geopolitical, it's almost geopolitical contest between Iran and the US that is not just in the Khalij right now, but is also in other parts of the Indian Ocean.

### **[Vijay Prashad]**

Yeah, I mean, you know, your point is is well taken that this is not a narrow conflict, this is a much greater conflict, you can expand it even further, which is that Iran is a key node in the Chinese Belt and Road Project. You know, northern Iran is where the train lines run through, you know, and go up to Lake Van where you transship goods to Turkey and then into Europe. I mean, these are all crucial areas.

Iran is geographically very, very central, you know, to the linkage of Eurasia. It's either Russia or Iran. There's no other land bridge between Asia and Europe.

You know, so this is key as the Asian, you know, center of gravity increases of the world economy in terms of production, India, China and so on. Iran is going to play a greater and greater role, which is why some of the problems are not the Iran-US problems, but the border disputes to Iran's east, the border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, India and China, India and Nepal, India and Bangladesh and so on and so forth. These are all very messy geographies, you know, but Iran has until now been a pretty stable geography despite the fact that there is this contest with Israel, because that's really what it amounts to.

It's a contest with Israel. I mean, Iran has emerged as one of the states which is the largest supporters of the cause of Palestinian emancipation. And for that reason, the United States and Israel has cast Iran as a terrorist state, as a state sponsor of terrorism, because they basically said that every single one of the Palestinian factions is a terrorist group.

I mean, they have disallowed Palestinian politics. They have said everybody is a terrorist, you know, unless those who surrender completely, and that's Mahmoud Abbas and three or four other people in Ramallah. But everybody else then becomes a terrorist.

So if you support Palestinian emancipation, you are supporting terrorism. You know, this is a longstanding problem. It's part of the problem between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for instance.

You know, their disagreement is who to fund amongst the Palestinians. That's one of the reasons why they keep breaking relations. The Muslim Brotherhood on the one side, on the other side, some of the more conservative groups that don't want, you know, to have actually an emancipation for Palestine, but would be quite happy with just a lot of funding and them in control of the malls in Gaza and whatnot.

I mean, these are real class and sectarian contradictions that mess the whole region up. But Iran has been, by and large, a very good actor. Iran does not, neither Iran nor Oman, charge fees for tankers to exit the Strait of Hormuz.

This is different from Egypt, which charges fees to go through the Suez Canal or Panama, charging fees for the Panama Canal. Or in fact, forget canals. You could say, well, these are, you know, you're going through their territory and so on, transiting.

But that's not even true. There's lots of places where fees are charged, even for natural waterways. The Iranians allow complete free transit and have protected shipping, even though ships enter Iranian waters, you know, when they transit there.

They have not been a, quote unquote, bad actor. In fact, you know, many years ago, I interviewed a diplomat in Qatar who told me, we had planned to get fresh water from Iran. We wanted to build an undersea pipeline so we could get water from Iran and pay good money for it.

This is before desalination plants had become economically viable. But the United States didn't allow Qatar to do that, to go ahead with that project. And, you know, he didn't tell me the U.S. didn't. He said, you know who stopped us. Well, that's interesting. You know who, why can't a Qatari diplomat who's walking with me on the Corniche in Doha just say, Washington, put a, you know, shut the dungeon door on it.

But even at that point, he said, you know who says. Well, you know, these are all interesting pieces of evidence. It shows you that since, let's say, 1945, the U.S. charter being signed till the present day, the Iranians have actually been good stewards of the Straits of Hormuz. You know, they have not been aggressive. The United States has complained that the Iranians had sent out their motorboats to harass U.S. naval ships. Yes, because the Iranians continue to say we don't want the United States military in these areas.

Why should the U.S. military be here? Nobody is posing a threat to anybody. Iran is not posing a threat to any shipping.

So this history is very important, I think, Helena, in this, because what they have been saying for decades to the Gulf Arab states is that, you know, you think that having a U.S. base is a

shield. But we are warning you, a U.S. base is a target, not a shield. You have a U.S. base, we're going to hit it. If we get hit, we're going to hit it. And I want to make one more point about this idea. You know, you said that the Iranians currently are in possession of escalation.

You know, they have the they have a kind of escalation ladder on their side. Well, let's put two of them on the table. Number one, they haven't yet released their small motorboats.

Those can wreak havoc in the waters of the Gulf. You know, as you say, the Khaleej, they can wreak havoc. You know, they can go and attack U.S. ships. U.S. warships, like all warships, are one-hull ships. It's the two-hull ship that is the oil tanker. So, you know, you have a one-hull ship.

You remember the attack in Yemen when this Al-Qaeda fast boat came in and rammed the U.S. warship. It's a one-hull ship. It completely destroys the warship.

You don't want two hulls in a warship. It slows it down. You want a sleek one-hull ship.

But it's then vulnerable to sinking because of that. So they have not yet deployed their fast motorboats. Apparently, there's over 2,000 of them, all hidden in caves and inlets that the U.S. has not bombed, not been able to know where they are. They are underground somewhere. Well, that's that's interesting. The U.S. knows they are there because they've seen them previously. And you may remember this a few years ago, the Iranians released a video showing the underground caves, not where they are, but showing the depth of the cave. You remember it was broadcast on Iranian TV. The Iranian TV crew was was moving on some vehicle and they just kept going.

And as they kept going deeper and deeper into the cave, there were more and more of these fast boats lined up one after the other. They have not deployed those yet. And secondly, it's good for people to know that when we talk about, you know, Iran being attacked and we say, well, the the the axis of resistance created by General Qasem Soleimani has been weakened.

Hezbollah has been weakened with the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government. The militias in Syria have been largely disbanded, unable to function. But wait a minute.

The militias in Iraq are still standing down. They haven't acted yet. They haven't been given this.

The whistle hasn't blown for them. There was only one or two attacks on US bases. Those were mild.

When the whistle blows, those militias are going to emerge and they will emerge not only in the two thirds of Iraq, Iraq, but they will emerge in the north. They will hit the US bases in Kirkuk. They will hit the US bases in Erbil.

There will be chaos there. And finally, talking about this aspect of the sleeping militias, in Manama, in Bahrain, majority Shia population. There was one large demonstration in support of the Iranian government, a very large demonstration.

But there's been no massive, massive violence yet in Bahrain. And if that happens, remember, during the Arab Spring, there was a major uprising in Manama. And what happened?

The Saudis had to send a military across the causeway. Saudi military came, tanks, armored cars and so on. And they crushed the uprising.

They killed, we don't know how many people died in Manama in 2011-12. We have no idea how many people filled the jails. It's basically an absolute monarchy.

But if the whistle blows, Iraq, Bahrain, the Ansar Allah group in Yemen, which has also been relatively silent, they will fire. And all of this is not part of the escalation ladder that's been revealed yet. So I would say if I was in the CIA, I would be writing reports saying, look, the Iranians have all of these things to go.

What the United States can do, the escalation ladder is to kill more civilians. But that provokes a revulsion against the U.S. or United States and Israel launch a nuclear weapon, which is going to provoke even more revulsion against the United States. There's nothing the U.S. can do to escalate, which is not going to have political fallback. There's a lot the Iranians can do to escalate that will not have political negativity for them. In that sense, Helena, the Iranians have both already won the war and it's inevitable that they will win the war, not necessarily militarily. They will win the war politically.

There is no way, there is no scenario, no supercomputer can devise a scenario where Israel and the United States can win this war politically. It's just it is actually impossible.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, I totally agree with you. And thank you for pulling it all together in that very smart way. There's no way that the U.S. and Israel can win it politically and there's no way they can win it militarily. I mean, using a nuclear bomb doesn't, you know, it won. It succeeded in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 because they had Emperor Hirohito, who, you know, was the Emperor Hirohito, who at that point surrendered. So they're not going, you know, even if they use a nuclear bomb, how many Ayatollahs in Tehran are going to come forward and say, oh, now we surrender?

No, I mean, and then you've used your nuclear weapon. And that really is it for the U.S. having any respect anywhere in the world. I want to just come, I want to come over to two.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Can I just make one little point on this, Helena, because this is about the Marjahs. You know, as you know, in Shiism, there are 56 living Marjahs. These are the emulatable figures in Shiism.

They're not really, they're not like popes or anything. They're figures to emulate. It's misleading for people to think that Ali Khamenei was the number one Marjah, because they're actually numbered.

The number one Marjah is not Iranian. The number one Marjah is in Iraq, and that's Ali al-Sistani. And Mr. Sistani has condemned this violence. But if you read his condemnation, it's actually, it's straightforward. It's a condemnation of the United States' attack on Iran. But it doesn't go beyond that.

If Mr. Sistani escalates, as he did during the violence in Iraq, this is a great problem for the United States because they cannot kill him. There is no way they can kill him. They can kill, they could kill Qasim Soleimani in Baghdad airport.

They assassinated him there. They killed Ali Khamenei in Tehran. But if they kill Ali Sistani in Qom, you know, in Najaf, wherever he is sitting now, wherever he's sitting, because he moves back and forth between Iran and Iraq, wherever Mr. Sistani is sitting, if they kill him, I mean, I don't know what will happen. I grew up in a neighborhood in Calcutta in India, which was a Shia neighborhood. You know, Lucknow in northern India is a huge Shia population. I literally do not know what would happen if the leading Marjah is killed by the United States.

### **[Helena Cobban]**

That's a depressing thought. But I want to come back to the connection of this war with the genocide in Gaza, because obviously there is a kind of a chronological connection that the Israelis tested so many of their genocidal techniques and the limits of what they can force the Americans to support and so on and so forth. They did all that with Gaza and then they reduced the population of Gaza to its present just terrible situation.

And then they also launched the war against Hezbollah. Two wars, in essence. There's supposed to have been a ceasefire in November of 2024.

And now we've got the new war that's even worse. I mean, I lived through two of the Israeli wars against Lebanon in 1978 and 19, well, 1982. I wasn't there, but I was there very soon thereafter.

But. And each time it didn't work out for the Israelis as they had wanted, but this time they seem determined to lay waste to those entire societies, Palestinian and Lebanese society, and a huge portion of the society of southern Syria. And they're kind of getting away with it right now because, you know, all the big eyes in the world are on the big contest with Iran.

So I've been calling for a few weeks now for the creation of a zone of peace in the Gulf that involves, crucially, the exit of all US military bases from there. But that would obviously have repercussions across the whole of West Asia. How do you see that connection between essentially an American defeat in the Khalij and an Israeli defeat in the Mashriq?

### **[Vijay Prashad]**

Yeah, I mean, look, firstly, I understand that one in five or so Lebanese are refugees and Lebanon is in great pain and suffering and people are sleeping on Beirut's corniche. You know, it's just in a bad way. You know, I don't see, I don't see Israel being able to find an ally in Lebanon.

You know, however grotesquely pro-US and right wing and pro-French they could be. Yeah, I just don't see them. I think Israel is ruining the possibility of the future party and so on.

To conjure up a pro-American, pro-French, pro-Israeli politics. You know, I think when you batter a society so much, it turns against you. I don't think the Lebanese population are feeling this is all Hezbollah's fault.

You know, Nasrallah has been killed. Hezbollah has been weakened. They see this as part of the genocide against the Palestinians.

It's going to be very difficult, Helena, for a Lebanese politician, you know, some Maronite politician to stand up and say, let's cut a deal with Israel. It's going to be really difficult. I think Lebanon's sectarian system is going to be battered by this particular, really fierce and uncompromising attack by Israel that has taken over not just the land south of the Litani, but all the way up to Beirut.

I mean, they basically bombarded this territory mercilessly. You know, I used to think that Metula's finger, you know, this finger area of water that Israel seized from Lebanon was an abomination. You know, the Lebanese have to drive around this narrow strip of land so that the Israelis can control the water source.

It's ridiculous. Can't drive straight. It takes you 45 minutes longer in those roads.

You have to go past, you know, the Beaufort Castle and so on. It's beautiful, but it's crazy. Yeah.

Now the whole south is basically in that situation.

**[Helena Cobban]**

And they're bombing, you know, vital infrastructure, bridges, and so on.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Exactly. They're just destroying. So I think what they are doing is they are destroying the possibility of a Lebanese pro-Israeli partner, which used to exist until quite recently.

Even recently we heard from a politician of the Lebanese right talk about making a deal with Israel. I don't think that's going to be a viable political way forward. You know, I think that the Lebanese are destroyed.

The Lebanese are themselves not seeing that. They are seeing themselves now victims of the genocide equal to what's happening in Palestine. And in Palestine, I mean, I don't see what the end game is.

You know, Israeli military, you know, there are lots of smart people there. I don't see what they think. They cannot possibly believe that they can intimidate the Palestinians for generations to come to no longer want to live in their homeland.

I mean, what are you doing? You think you can massacre people, make their lives unlivable and they'll disappear? I mean, in the March of Return, you know, when on that miraculous day last year or was it already the year before when Palestinians who were in camps near Rafah one Sunday just walked along the Gaza River Road up north all the way to Gaza City, the Israelis were taken by surprise, an enormous intelligence failure.

They couldn't block this march. It was enormous numbers of people just walking with their, you know, pathetic little belongings, you know, trying to go back home to recover things. That shows you that the Palestinians are not intimidated, that despite grueling genocidal attacks, they still wanted to walk home.

I'm just editing a book by Wasim Afifa, a terrific book in which which is about the prisoners from Gaza who were taken to some of the worst prisons. And he interviews a prisoner, Osama. It's a terrific story.

I can't wait to get this out. Anyway, in the book, one of the things that really affected me as I read it were these Palestinian prisoners who are eating off the floor. They don't get plates.

Their clothes are sticking to their bodies because they haven't bathed. They have blood soaked. There are cuts that the cloth is just sunk into the skin and has become part of their skin.

When they eventually in the book, when they rip it off, they rip their skin because the cloth is just repulsive to read this. This book is, in a sense, repulsive. But there are these moments, this one, Palestinian prisoners sitting in the Negev desert, boiling hot.

What do they talk about? They say to one guy, tell us you are the most recent to come. Is the resistance still alive?

Are they still fighting back? And when this person, this is two and a half years into the genocide, says, yes, brother, you know, the resistance is still striking. They go, yes, you know, our indignity is worth it.

Our dignity is being held up by the fact that we are fighting for our humanity somewhere else. And therefore we are going to fight here to survive. I think it's powerful.

And I just I don't there's no end game for the Israelis, man. You know, unless the Israelis actually kill four million or so Palestinians and actually kill a million, maybe two million people who are supporters of the Palestinians in Lebanon, that's about six million. Unless the Israelis in the United States are willing to kill about 80 million Iranians, you're going to have to live with people, OK?

If you want to be, you know, you are Israeli, whatever you are, unless you want to kill 100 million people in this region of the world, you're going to have to live with them.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, I mean, you're quite right, and I can see that we need to wrap this up very speedily. I'd just like you to do one more thought exercise. If the U.S. military gets essentially defeated in

the Khalij, can the Israeli military continue in the Levant? I mean, given that the Israeli military is totally dependent on U.S. military intelligence and financial and political support.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

I mean, I sort of wanted to walk around your question, Helena, because it's it's just too hypothetical in a sense, because it's not just the U.S. military, you know, in a real practical sense. It's it's another question, which is when is Europe going to wake up? You know, the Europeans have allowed the use of Cyprus in this genocide, you know, Cyprus, which is contested between Turkey and Greece.

This is the Greek side.

**[Helena Cobban]**

A key RAF base in England is is being majorly used for refueling and for for all kind of transit.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

That's the base I'm talking about.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, but then when it comes from England, I forget what the name of the base in Western England, they can't fly over Europe. They have to go down the south of Spain and across the Mediterranean because the European countries, at least until now, won't allow overflights of these U.S. military planes. But yes, the UK position is is outrageous.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Yeah, but so are the Europeans. They are hypocritical on this. They may say no overflights here and there, but the Germans are still providing material.

And and this is important. You know, the the the pressure to increase European military spending to five percent is related to the fact that the U.S. wants to disengage from Europe and engage elsewhere in this brutal fashion. Europeans should not allow this.

I mean, I don't see why the European public is allowing five to six percent of GDP to go to military when you're basically starving at home and can't put the heat up. I mean, it's ridiculous. You're in a war that way.

Ukraine and Russia are going to have to make a peace agreement at some point. Why? Why is everybody holding all this up?

I don't understand it. We have terrible leadership in the world. There's terrible politics.

New politics need to emerge in these countries. We can't live like this. And I think I mean, that's that's what I'm saying to people is you just can't keep living like this.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Well, definitely here in the United States, we see this, you know, with the collapse of infrastructure here, the collapse of basic health care and so on and so forth, and our tax dollars go to provide to the people of Israel, you know, full cradle to grave health insurance, free education and this outrageous military that they have. And obviously we have all the money that the U.S. military itself is using on all these wars. So we have a lot more to talk about Vijay Prashad.

But thank you so much for like this has been a really fine conversation. We have to do this more often. And, you know, sometime if you're back in the States, maybe we can get together in person.

But anyway, this has been the ninth episode in our Just World Educational series on the Iran crisis, which is a follow on from our earlier series on Gaza and the world in which you also played a really super role. So thank you for that as well. And people watching this go to our website, [www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org) and our new Substack, which we're just setting up right now, which is [justworldded.substack.com](http://justworldded.substack.com).

So, Vijay, best of luck to you and best of luck with this book that you'll be publishing. Sounds like you have a lot of really great projects.

**[Vijay Prashad]**

Thanks a lot, Helena. Talk to you later.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah. Bye then.