

INTERVIEW: *Chandra Muzaffar*

# Promote Humanity To Defeat the British Empire

*Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is a long-time friend of the La-Rouche movement, an international Islamic scholar and political scholar from Malaysia. He is the founder and the president of the International Movement for a Just World, which is known internationally as JUST since its founding in 1992. This is the edited transcript of an August 21, 2024 interview with him by Mike Billington. Subheads have been added.*

**Mike Billington:** This is Mike Billington, with *EIR* and the Schiller Institute. I noticed on your website Chandra the quote: “For the first time in history, a global empire has emerged.” So let me ask you to say a few words about JUST, its purpose and its history, and to explain that statement.

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Thank you, Mike, for this invitation, this opportunity to discuss certain issues which are important to both of us. This is an important moment in history to look at these issues in the larger context of what is happening in the world. Let’s begin with JUST. JUST is a registered society in Malaysia. It has a small membership spread across the globe, people from different parts of the world, from something like 40 odd countries. The membership is not large. It’s multi-ethnic, multi-religious in terms of its composition. Gender wise, it’s quite balanced. The whole purpose of JUST is to raise consciousness amongst people everywhere, of, number one, the danger of a demonic power, the consequences of hegemonic power, what it means for all of



*Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, founder and president of JUST.*

us, including people who are living within countries that see themselves as hegemons. This is something which we see as part of our agenda, to raise people’s awareness and to articulate an alternative, a multi-religious, multi-ethnic alternative, in a sense multi-civilizational alternative that draws out the values from the different civilizations, cultures, and articulates these values as the foundation for a different type of global order. That’s the whole purpose of JUST.

## **The First Truly Global Empire**

First, a critique of the existing global system, which is largely demonic. And number two, an articulation of an alternative which is egalitarian, which emphasizes human dignity and justice for everyone. And also articulates an alternative which is the antithesis of hegemony, by which an alternative that enriches, enhances the contribution of each and every human being, and of the different cultures and communities, to a world that is just beginning to emerge.

Now, that statement that you quoted just now, Mike, about global empire—that it emerged for the first time in history—is a reference to the first part of JUST’s mission. The hegemonic world we’re talking about, that’s the global empire, led by the U.S., with certain other countries in the West. Elites from the West and from the non-Western world, too, were part of this hegemonic pattern of power. And it’s a global empire, because if you compare it to the empires of the past, whether it was the Roman Empire or the Persian

Empire or the Ottoman Empire, none of them had the same sort of global reach in terms of the tentacles of the Empire stretching everywhere, encompassing the whole world. They didn't have that sort of reach. So I think it's right to say that this is the first global empire, in that sense, the American-led empire, in terms of its reach, its impact. Right. It is not an attempt to judge the Empire. All that we say is that there is such an empire. We are concerned about it, because it is hegemonic and therefore has a certain impact upon people. And that's what we are concerned about.

**Mike Billington:** You also created another organization, or participated in its creation, called SHAPE, Saving Humanity And Planet Earth, together with Richard Falk—I think many people watching this will know Richard Falk—and Joseph Camilleri from Australia, as co-conveners. You've sponsored several international conferences addressing the growing danger of war and of nuclear war. How do you see the purpose of that organization?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Very similar in many ways to JUST, which is why JUST is an active supporter of SHAPE. We have helped SHAPE in some of its programs. The difference is the emphasis which SHAPE gives to the danger of a nuclear war. We are also concerned about it. But I think SHAPE has made one of its principal goals to look at the question of nuclear weapons and its impact upon the world.

**Mike Billington:** Well, it's certainly the case that the world has come closer to global war right now than perhaps any time in history. This includes the escalation of the war in Ukraine, with the recent invasion of Ukrainian forces into Russia proper; the continuing and escalating slaughter of innocents in Gaza; and the escalation of the U.S. confrontation with China in Asia, which could explode into another war. Let me ask you first about Palestine, because I know you've spent a major part of your work in your life on the Palestinian issue.

### **Zionism and the British Empire**

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Mike, for me and for many of my friends, Palestine is our central concern. Why? Because if you look at global injustices, there are perhaps few injustices that can match the injustice related to Palestine. Here you have a situation where a people, the Palestinians, that lived together in peace

and harmony—Jews, Christians and Muslims—for quite a long while. And then you had the British Empire come up with this idea of creating an exclusive Jewish homeland in Palestine, which is the root of the problem. I tell people all the while, Mike, that the problem is not these different religious communities living together. That is not an issue at all. It's not an issue for the people there in the past. The problem is this notion of an exclusive homeland, which is what the British had proposed, the famous Balfour Declaration of 1917. It fits in with the pattern of British colonial rule everywhere, which is to divide people, to create animosity amongst different communities, and use that animosity as the basis for domination, which is what the British Empire had done in India, in parts of Southeast Asia, parts of Africa, during its long colonial rule. Palestine is very much part of the same thing from that perspective. It is a colonial project, and like other colonial projects, it resulted in the expulsion of the indigenous people in wars and bloodshed, and it has not been resolved to this day.

So this is why I think Palestine is so important. It is perhaps the one challenge which stains our conscience as a family first, because of the way in which the issue was manipulated and how it became an issue through colonial manipulation. And then, of course, what it did as a result of that to the people, and how it has continued for more than 76 years. It's difficult to resolve this, partly because of the powerful vested interests linked with the creation of Israel and linked with Zionism—the fact that this is a racist ideology, Zionism, which has nothing to do with Judaism, and that is something that we keep emphasizing over and over again. Zionism is Zionism. Judaism is Judaism; it's totally different. And so you have this Zionism parading as the ideology of the Jews, when actually it is a betrayal of the Jewish religion itself. And we would like to make people know this. We would like them to be aware of this, so that they would see the issue in its proper perspective. What had happened in history, the annexation, the usurpation of land, the expulsion of people. People have to understand all this. And I think there is a lack of understanding when it comes to these issues.

### **Ambitions of a Hegemon**

**Mike Billington:** The second major front is the Ukraine-Russia situation, which is moving very rapidly towards what could be a full-scale war between NATO and Russia, which would certainly be nuclear

and could very well mean the end of civilization. So, your thoughts on that?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** I agree with what you just said about what the Ukraine war could lead to, but I don't know whether that'll happen. One can argue that if all of us, the Global South and in other parts of the world, got together and told the U.S. and its allies, and the government in Ukraine, that there is no reason to prolong this war—Ukraine is not going to gain anything. It's not going to win. NATO, I don't think, would be able to win this war. This is what they're hoping will happen. If the aim is to defeat and to pulverize Russia, to create a situation where Russia as a state and a society is totally destroyed, that's not going to happen, either. People forget that we are talking of a very resilient society. Russia has proven by its resistance to Nazi occupation, to Napoleon in history. It's very resilient. Now, why are they pursuing this goal? I think people should tell them, look, this is futile. You don't pursue goals like this in international relations if you want a peaceful world. I think if enough people spoke up and persuaded the U.S. and the others—I'm not saying that they're going to change their course, but it may be possible to sort of check them. Not enough people are speaking out on this question. I am particularly saddened by the way in which Europe had rallied around the United States. Is it in Europe's interests? It's a very important question to ask. Is it in Europe's interests for this war to be perpetuated between Russia and Ukraine? Because at the end of the day, the Ukrainians just become cannon fodder. You're not going to achieve your aim of destroying Russia. And by strengthening NATO in this manner, you're not helping Europe either. Look at the impact of the war as far as relations between Germany and Russia go, and how it has impacted upon other European economies. Is this something which Europe wants? Is it in Europe's interests? I think these are very important questions that Europeans in particular should ask and try to answer.

**Mike Billington:** And then, of course, China. You're sitting in the middle of Southeast Asia. It clearly is the intent of the U.S. to find some way to destroy China, and to destroy Russia and the BRICS phenomenon, which is a threat to their ability to control the former colonial countries. I want to ask in particular—Beijing and Jakarta just concluded a high-level meeting between both military and political leaders, which was the first so-called “two plus two” cooperation between China and

one of the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries. This, of course, is the largest of the ASEAN countries, Indonesia. So I'm very interested in how you think this is going to impact the rest of ASEAN, the internal relations within ASEAN, and ASEAN's relationships with China.

### **ASEAN and Eurasia**

**Chandra Muzaffar:** It's a good question, Mike. If the various parties concerned adopt a mature attitude towards this issue, meaning by which they look at this as a challenge that we must all respond to in a positive manner—It is good for ASEAN that there is this tie-up between China and Indonesia. I think, generally, ASEAN has been supportive of this, and Indonesia is the biggest of the ASEAN states, and it is the most important; there would be no ASEAN without Indonesia. And so, this attempt to strengthen relations between China and Indonesia, especially in matters pertaining to security, economic development and so on, I think this is something that is most welcome. There would be people who would try to wreck this. This is for certain. Those who would not want to see these countries coming together—and it's a pity that they continue to harbor intentions which smack of colonial mentality, of the colonial mentality of dominance and control. If they had a different sort of approach and different sort of mindset, they would allow this relationship to flourish between ASEAN and China, the former colonies, and China and Russia. China and Russia are very important in terms of world politics, as you had hinted just now, because, taken together, they control this vast area of the world, the Eurasia region. And Eurasia is vital to the globe.

He who is in Eurasia and is able to set the tone and tenor of the development of Eurasia, will have a very big impact upon the world. Which is why I think the U.S. and Britain and so on are very concerned about this. You know, Britain has been obsessed with this issue for a long while. It goes back to the colonial period, the emergence of cooperation between Russia and its neighbors, and so on. And given what the British Empire has done in the past and what it is doing today, and will continue to do in the future, they will do all they can to wreck this attempt at forging stronger ties between China and Russia, countries like Indonesia, and perhaps even countries which are not part of Southeast Asia but in-between South Asia and West Asia. Russia and China are very cognizant of this. They want to

strengthen these relations. And I think it is for the good of people in this region and for the good of people everywhere if this happens.

**Mike Billington:** How do you think the internal relations within ASEAN are being affected by this question of the U.S. effort to bring about a confrontation with China, and the Philippine situation, for instance?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** I think Philippines is something which concerns all of us, the neighbors of the Philippines and others. One hopes that the Philippine government will be sober in its response to this, and shouldn't fall into the trap that the Americans have prepared for all of us. It's [dangerous for] not only the Philippines to fall into this trap. The Philippines should assert its independence, and it should give greater priority to its own sovereignty. That is what is important. The issues which separate the Philippines from China, which have led to some of the recent skirmishes, I think these are issues which can be resolved very easily through diplomacy. There is no need to flex your military muscles. You can resolve them through diplomacy. Yeah, it's true that they arise from a number of different factors, but they can be resolved. And I hope the Philippine government, and we have—I suppose I know what people would say about this—we have the example of [Rodrigo] Duterte, when he was at the helm, the president of the Philippines; he tried to establish a different sort of relationship with China.

So one can argue that that offers some sort of hope, if the Philippines can see things that way, if it values its own tradition of sovereignty and independence. After all, the Philippines was in the forefront of the struggle against colonialism. If it understands that and tries to develop a different sort of relationship, that would be good for the Philippine people. You should not be subservient to anyone. I'm against that. I don't want to see a Philippines as subservient to China or Russia, or anyone else for that matter. But the Western powers in particular should also respect Philippines' own independence and sovereignty. That is the right to shape its own destiny. It is the right to forge stronger ties with China, Russia, other countries. It would be to everyone's well-being if this happens.

### **My Role in Malaysia**

**Mike Billington:** You've had a long history of participation in Malaysian politics, including your close

relationship at one point with the former prime minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, and with the current prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, from somewhat different factions. But nonetheless, you've had collaboration with all of these. What do you see as Malaysia's role right now in the global geometry that we're facing.

**Chandra Muzaffar:** If I may, Mike, begin by saying that I've had a long history of involvement in civic political action, in other words, political action related to non-political parties. And that is very important. We've made the distinction. I was involved in a political party for a very, very short while. In 1999, I became the deputy president of the Justice Party in Malaysia, established in the aftermath of Anwar's jailing, in the jail sentence and so on. We responded to that situation and we were there at that time. I was there only for a very short while—two-and-a-half years. And then I quit politics completely, both Keadilan [a party run by Anwar Ibrahim—ed.] and the larger political scenario in the country. So, I wouldn't see myself as someone who's been part of politics. I articulate certain positions in relation to issues that are political, but that's what citizens should be doing. I regard that as citizens' responsibility. So, that sort of responsibility I was trying to fulfill. But being in party politics and seeking political office, I've never really been part of that.

Now, coming back to the main thrust of what you asked. Doctor Mahathir, yes, there were times when I was supportive of what he was doing. Foreign policy, or even in domestic policy on certain occasions. But there are also times when I was very critical. And that's the attitude that I have adopted, the approach that I've adopted to everyone in power. It doesn't matter what party they come from, what their affiliation is, and what their inclination is. If there's something good from the point of view of the larger society, we support it. And I would come out and support it, and if it is something which I think is going to be detrimental, I would criticize it. That has been my approach. Unfortunately, it's not appreciated very much. Sometimes they would expect you to be totally on the side of one person or the other, and I am not keen on that sort of approach to politics where you support one blindly and oppose others blindly. I think one should retain this freedom to evaluate, retain freedom to try to understand the situation and come to your own conclusion. So that's how I see the present Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Likewise, the former prime minister, Mahathir. The present

prime minister, if he does something good, like when he took a very strong stand against what the United States and its allies were doing vis-a-vis Palestine, we were supportive. I was very supportive.

### **No Compromise with BlackRock**

If, on the other hand, he seeks to strengthen the hand of the biggest American fund manager, BlackRock—if that happens and you allow BlackRock to gain control over our airports indirectly, I would be very concerned and I would speak out against it, which is what I've done. So it depends on the issues and the situation. On BlackRock, I think it's very obvious, if you look at the way it has entered into the Malaysian economic arena. We know that the 39 airports in the country, they are not in need of funding. In fact, last year and the year before, those airports made huge profits. So they don't need money as such from BlackRock. Why is BlackRock involved? Why is it involved in the management of our airports? Isn't that a security issue, a strategic issue that one should address? And these are some of our concerns. So it depends on these actors, whether it's Anwar Ibrahim or anyone else. If they do things which we feel are in the larger interest of the Malaysian nation, or the interest of the human family, we would certainly endorse what they are doing. But if, on the other hand, we find that it is detrimental, we would speak up.

**Mike Billington:** The title of a recent article you published was “BlackRock—No Compromise With Evil.” So you're not compromising with what you recognize to be BlackRock's intention, which, unfortunately, they are carrying out in countries all over the world. Do you expect any change as a result of addressing this?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** A lot of people are addressing this issue outside Malaysia. A lot of people, some Malaysians. But I don't think it's going to change that easily, because BlackRock is undoubtedly a major actor and closely linked to the centers of power in the U.S. and elsewhere, Britain. We have to be realistic. I don't think things are going to change. But nonetheless, we must speak up. That is our duty. We cannot fail to speak up. We must.

### **Islam and the West**

**Mike Billington:** On another side of your role, you're known internationally as an Islamic scholar,

even though you've been very critical of some factions within Islam. Could you comment on that and on the role of the current rise of Islamophobia in the Western world today?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Two different issues here, but perhaps interrelated. The first thing is about who wants a role in Islam. I don't see myself as an Islamic scholar, I'm not an Islamic scholar in the sense that I'm well versed in the scriptures and all the rest of it; I'm not. But I'm a student of society, and I see my role as a political commentator. And among the things that I comment upon are issues pertaining to Islam and politics. And my concern has been with the way in which Islam is perceived by others, and even by some Muslims. That's part of my concern. And you alluded to it. Islamophobia is something that I've been very concerned about for a very long while, and I've written quite a bit on this subject. I find that Islamophobia has deep roots in history. It goes back to the period before the Crusades. This attempt to demonize and to project Islam in a certain manner in the West. This has continued, even though the West has also produced some very fine scholars on Islam, open minded, who see the goodness in Islam and who are able to relate to it. So that's also been part of Western history and the Western interaction with Islam. So there are different dimensions to it. But Islamophobia is a product of a lot of factors. It goes back to the rise of Islam, the early confrontation between Islam and the West, and later colonialism, because that had a very big impact.

Most of the Muslim countries that interacted with the West were colonized by Western society, so also others who were not Muslims were colonized. But colonialism played a very big role. And in the post-colonial era, that's our era, after the Second World War, you find that this is continued partly because of one of the major resources that is so vital to the industrial world—oil. The major producers of oil are Muslim states, and because oil flows beneath the feet of Muslims, you find that the centers of power in the West have never been comfortable with this, because they want to control oil. They want to control its production and its export and distribution and so on. And they find that independent-minded Muslim countries, they are an obstacle if they don't want to just do the bidding of the U.S. or Britain or some of the other Western powers; they will be targeted. And this is what has been happening for quite a long while. But let me also add very quickly, it's not

just Muslim countries that are targeted. A lot of non-Muslim countries have been targeted, too, for strategic reasons, for reasons connected with resources, reasons connected with global economic or political power. So that's the challenge that we face, and one hopes that Muslim countries and Muslim groups that respond to this challenge, they will do it in such a manner that they would help people resolve these challenges for the benefit of everyone, that they will do it in such a way that it does not smear relations between Muslims and others. And I would regard those who seek resort to arms, who use violence—I would regard Muslims who do that as individuals who are doing something that is detrimental to Islam. But let me also add very quickly, as many people know, that many of these so-called terrorist groups are actually linked to Western intelligence in some way or other. Like what had happened in the case of Turkey and countries around Turkey some years ago. And it's still continuing. You have Islam being tarnished as the terrorist religion merely because it serves the interests of people who want to project Islam that way. If you look at the history of ISIS, if you look at the history of al Qaeda, especially al Qaeda and ISIS, if you look at their histories closely, very strong links to the Western centers of power and especially to their intelligence networks. This is a fact that has not been highlighted often by the mainstream media. We know of some of these groups that have controlled oil in Iraq, for instance, and in Syria, they were selling oil to the terrorist groups, while claiming to be fighting the terrorists, but they were selling oil to them and helping them to indulge in the terrorist activities. This is something which I think people should look at very carefully, with the manipulation of terrorism, like the manipulation of many other things by the colonial and neocolonial centers of power.

### **Iran's Strategic Thinking Today**

**Mike Billington:** What do you think about the Iran situation now? And what do you think they're going to do in these circumstances?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** The Iranian leadership, by and large, is quite rational. They calculate very carefully. They look at the various options. Look at what they did in April 2024 after what had happened to Iran, in Damascus. It was a rational calculation. They didn't want an all-out war, but on the other hand, they wanted to send a message. I think that is their thinking even

now, after what had happened recently, the killing of the Hamas leader in Tehran. They didn't just react emotionally. They've been calculating, looking at various options, because you have to think of Gaza. You have to think of Lebanon. They have to think of the Houthis and Yemen. You have to think of all these actors, and they have to look at the United States of America, too. You get the impression that the U.S. understands certain dimensions of this, at least certain individuals, which is why the U.S., in a sense, worked hand in glove with the Iranian government in the situation that emerged after the recent episode, where people thought Iran would act very strongly against Israel, but they didn't. I think it's partly because the U.S. also did not want that sort of rash action to happen. All parties concerned—with the exception of perhaps Netanyahu—I think all the other parties concerned were quite measured in their response. The Iranian leadership, if one had to describe them in a sentence, I think they will continue to be measured and careful in the way in which they respond to situations. They will not start a war.

**Mike Billington:** They might be dragged into one anyway.

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Yeah.

### **The Goodness of Man and the Council of Reason**

**Mike Billington:** The last thing I was going to ask is that Helga Zepp-LaRouche has issued what she calls the Ten Principles, which she proposes to be the basis for a new global security and development architecture for all countries, for a world which is in desperate need of such a new paradigm. These ten principles cover the global economic breakdown crisis that we're living through, the social crisis, but also the cultural decay which is dominating the Western world today and which is pretty obvious to the rest of the world. I'll read you her 10th principle, the last of the Ten Principles. "Man is fundamentally good and capable to infinitely perfect the creativity of his mind and the beauty of his soul, and being the most advanced geological force in the universe, which proves that the lawfulness of the mind and that of the physical universe are in correspondence and cohesion, and that all evil is the result of a lack of development and therefore can be overcome." This has provoked many different kinds of responses from people. And I'm interested in what you think.

**Chandra Muzaffar:** In principle, Mike. I support this notion of linking peace to development and the underlying principles behind Helga LaRouche’s thinking and the thinking of the Schiller Institute, including this clear vision of the human being as inherently good, capable of developing his or her goodness. The tremendous potential for this is something which I agree with. I’m very comfortable with this sort of thinking, because it is the sort of thinking which coincides with, runs parallel to, what all the major religions tell us about the inherent goodness of the human being. All the major religions, if you look at them in great depth, that is what they also believe in, and [they] lead you to a better world if we can help that inherent goodness to shape our public policies, our attempts at ameliorating the human condition. But that’s not happening, because there are always other forces that are opposed to this. Nonetheless, I think it is a very good model. This model of linking peace with development and most of all, anchoring this model in the goodness of the human being. It is something that is worth pursuing. We have been supportive of this, as you know, Mike, and I hope it’s something which we can continue to work on in the future.

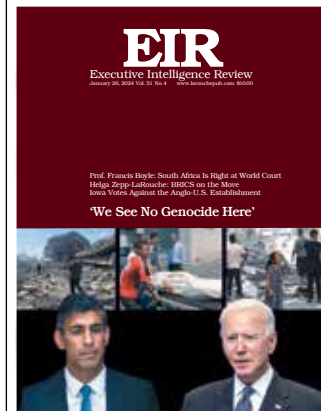
**Mike Billington:** You’ve agreed to participate, yourself, in what Helga is calling for, the building of a Council of Reason, of “senior” citizens who have made a mark, through their work in the world, to come together to effectively try to counter the kind of madness that’s leading the world to economic and military disaster. Do you have any other thoughts on that?

**Chandra Muzaffar:** Any attempt to respond to the challenge we face, the insanity that’s taken over, and the insanity which is so prevalent in certain capitals of the world—any attempt to respond to this, to provide an alternative, to offer concrete, tangible instances addressing this challenge, is welcome. It doesn’t matter where it comes from. And I think the Schiller Institute and the LaRouche movement, they have been at the forefront of some of these attempts. It’s something that we welcome, and it’s good they brought different people together. I’m aware of the IPC [International Peace Coalition—ed.] meetings and so on and participated in a few of them. It is an attempt to respond to the challenge of the hour. It is for that reason, something that we should all encourage. We should support this endeavor. If you can make people aware that there have been instances where people have worked together, where they have stood up against the tyranny of the he-

gemony; if we can show them that this is something that has happened, that people are capable of standing up and articulating what is just and true and noble in the midst of all the challenges that confront us, we can convince people that this is possible and people have done this. You know, Scott Ritter is an example, and various other individuals and movements that are examples of people who have stood up. And if we can tell them, look, this is possible. I think it is in one of those recent articles written about the situation confronting the world that I read this quote from Margaret Mead about changing things. Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, said that “All change that has taken place is due to the work of a small number of people who are prepared to place the interests of the larger community of the whole over their own interests and the interests of small pragmatic elements.” We can do that. We can look at the larger interests and work together. Then I think it would be something worthwhile, even in opposing what is happening today. I feel sad that even the peace groups are not able to work together, you know, and they are all committed to the same goal, and they are all sincere in different ways. They should learn to work together.



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