

# Garry Kasparov, From Chess Icon to State Dept Cheerleader

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After retiring from the world of chess, Garry Kasparov has found a new calling: promoting U.S. foreign policy goals. From his hawkish foreign policy positions, including supporting American invasions and the use of nuclear weapons against its enemies, his full-throated defense of Israeli genocide, and his bizarre belief that the Middle Ages never happened, MintPress examines the career arc of the former World Chess Champion turned U.S. State Department flatterer-in-chief.

## Dubious Definitions of Democracy

Garry Kasparov has become a star of the Western human rights industry. In addition to appearing regularly in print and on cable news, the former chess star is the founder and chairman of the Renew Democracy Initiative (RDI), the vice president of the World Liberty Congress, and the former chairman of the Human Rights Foundation (HRF), three U.S.-based human rights organizations.

Together, these groups claim to fight for a better world, free of authoritarianism and political prisoners. Closer inspection, however,

reveals that they are deeply embedded with the State Department's agenda.

The RDI describes its mission as to "unmask and confront the alliance of dictators threatening freedom around the world." "By doing so," they [state](#), "we inspire those in the United States and in other free countries to value and protect their own democracies."

Yet its [board of directors](#) reads more like a weapons corporation or a neoconservative think tank than a human rights group. Sitting alongside Kasparov are a host of American military leaders, including:

General Mark Miley, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and chief of staff of the Army;

General Stanley A. McChrystal, former commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the leader of U.S. forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq;

Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, ex-Commanding General of the U.S. Army Europe and NATO's current Senior Mentor for Logistics;

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, the one time Director of European Affairs for the U.S. National Security Council.

In addition to the military leaders, senior figures from the U.S. government are also present, including the RDI's vice chair, Linda Chavez, who was the Director of Public Liaison under President Ronald Reagan and President George W. Bush's Secretary of Labor.

While the RDI couches itself in the language of democracy promotion, the countries they appear particularly focused on, such

as China, Russia, Cuba, and Nicaragua, directly line up with U.S. strategic ambitions. In 2019, the RDI's first [conference](#), "Reawakening the Spirit of Democracy," was headlined by neoconservative figures such as Bill Kristol, Max Boot, Dana White, Bret Stephens, Anne Applebaum, and Paul Wolfowitz.



Kasparov speaks about "Russian propaganda" at the re:publica internet conference in Berlin, May 8, 2017. Britta Pedersen | AP

Kasparov is also vice president of the World Liberty Congress, an organization that [describes](#) itself as "the world's largest action-

oriented movement of political activists" working together to take down authoritarian governments across the planet. Those governments specifically named include Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and China.

The World Liberty Congress is [funded by](#) the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a front group set up by the CIA to carry out many of the organization's most controversial projects. "It would be terrible for democratic groups around the world to be seen as subsidized by the CIA," NED founding president Carl Gershman [said](#), explaining its creation. A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA," the organization's co-founder, Allen Weinstein, [told](#) The Washington Post.

Recent NED projects have included [funding](#) and training far-right Venezuelan forces attempting to overthrow the government of Nicolás Maduro, [fomenting](#) anti-government demonstrations in Iran, and [channeling money](#) to the leaders of the 2019 Hong Kong Protest movement.

The World Liberty Congress' executive council is a who's who of these regime change projects. The organization's general secretary, Leopoldo López, was a [leader](#) in an NED-sponsored coup in 2002 that briefly deposed President Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chavez, from power. Twelve years later, he [led](#) a wave of political violence in Venezuela in 2014 killed at least 43 people and caused an [estimated](#) \$15 billion worth of property damage. A major figure on the Venezuelan far-right, López [told](#) journalists that he wants the United States to formally govern his country after Maduro is overthrown. He was convicted of terrorism and sentenced to 13 years in prison. He later escaped and [fled](#) to Spain.

Joining López on the World Liberty Congress' board is the organization's president, Masih Alinejad. Alinejad is a presenter at Voice of America Persian News Network, a U.S. government-funded outlet [described](#) by the New York Times as "a worldwide propaganda network built by the CIA."

In 2022, Alinejad's speculation about the death of Iranian activist Mahsa Amini helped [spark](#) nationwide protests in the country of her birth – protests that the U.S. government attempted to turn into a regime change effort.

Data from the tracking website GovTribe [reveals](#) that Alinejad has received over \$834,000 in federal contracts from the U.S. government. After an apparent attempt on her life, she lives in an FBI building in New York City.

Also on the World Liberty Congress board is Joey Siu, one of the leaders of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. After failing to overthrow the government in her homeland, Siu fled to the United States, where she was [given](#) a job at the National Democratic Institute, a semi-governmental organization funded largely by the NED. She is also a [Freedom Fellow](#) at the Human Rights Foundation.

Until [last year](#), Kasparov was also the chairman of the HRF, a similar organization headquartered in New York's Empire State Building and founded and headed by Venezuelan activist, Thor Halvorssen. Halvorssen – Leopoldo López's cousin and close confidant – is the son of a former Venezuelan government official [widely accused of](#) being a CIA informant and a gunrunner for the agency's dirty wars in Central America in the 1980s.

Like the other two "pro-democracy" organizations, the Human Rights Foundation extols the virtues of the American system,

condemns official enemy nations such as Venezuela, Russia and China, and works closely with U.S.-backed celebrity activists, such as [Yeonmi Park](#) and [Enes Kanter](#). Kasparov stood down as HRF chairman in 2024, and was replaced by Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of U.S.-supported Russian politician, [Alexey Navalny](#).

## The Gaza Litmus Test

Together, these three organizations present themselves as moral leaders on the world stage, spearheading a crusade for freedom, justice and human rights everywhere. Their response to the Gaza crisis, however, has been notable.

Leading organizations around the world, including the [United Nations](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and the [International Association of Genocide Scholars](#), have stated that Israeli actions unquestionably constitute a genocide. This conclusion is even shared by many inside Israel, including the country's leading human rights group, [B'Tselem](#), and retired Israeli general and deputy head of the Mossad, [Amiram Levin](#).

As the most prominent human rights issue of our time—one where the case is so clear-cut—it is obvious what position a minimally credible institution must take. And yet, Israeli actions have been fully supported by the United States government, who see the region as crucial to their geopolitical goals. Gaza, therefore, becomes a useful litmus test to ascertain what organizations' true priorities are.

The entirety of the World Liberty Congress' output on Israel/Palestine consists of a boilerplate, six-sentence [statement](#) vaguely calling for peace, released six months after the October 7

attack.

The Human Rights Foundation, meanwhile, [condemned](#) Hamas' actions, spread falsehoods about Hamas using civilians as human shields, and merely cautioned Israel to protect civilian lives while "pursuing legitimate Hamas targets." In addition, it [platformed](#) Palestinian-American analyst Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, an employee of the NATO think tank, the Atlantic Council, who MintPress News profiled in an [article](#) entitled "Meet The Palestinians Paid To Promote Israel's Genocide."

The Renew Democracy Initiative, however, that has taken the most hardline stance of all, the organization offering nothing except full-throated support of Israel and denunciations of any group failing to sufficiently support their actions.

The RDI [demanded](#) Hamas lay down their arms and surrender, claiming it was the Palestinian group itself that is the barrier to peace in the region. It also attacked pro-Palestine activists in the West, suggesting that the upsurge in negative sentiment towards Israel is largely the result of a foreign conspiracy to manipulate the public. As it [noted](#):

*Mere hours after the attack, Russia, China, and Iran began planting the seeds for a coordinated disinformation campaign, setting up accounts across online networks to profess support for Hamas and deepen divisions in the democratic world. Meanwhile, rallies decrying Israel filled the streets of open societies before Israel even had a chance to muster a response."*

Kasparov himself [described](#) Israel as a "frontline democracy" that isn't "fighting only for themselves," but to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of anti-democratic nations. Israel's recent

"achievements" in the Middle East, he noted, have been "impressive." Unfortunately, he stated, victory could already have been secured if the forces for good had not had to "fight with one hand behind their back." The 62-year-old grandmaster denounced the United Nations as a broken institution that has been hijacked by authoritarian regimes such as China, Russia and Iran, who have "fostered a purgatory of false equivalency" and turned the world against Israel.

He also bitterly condemned the International Criminal Court for issuing an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, declaring the move a "disgrace," and "the last nail in the coffin of the international order." "Politicizing and criminalizing self-defense against terrorism also discredits previous judgments against real war criminals like [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," he [explained](#).

## Political Pretensions

Kasparov was born in Soviet Azerbaijan in 1963. He came from a politically conservative family; his parents named him after U.S. president Harry Truman, impressed by his strong anti-communist stances, and his decision to invade Korea. American bombing of the peninsula killed an [estimated](#) ¼ of the North Korean population. (Kasparov, however, [describes](#) the U.S.' actions as "saving millions of Koreans.")

As my namesake Harry Truman said while saving millions of Koreans, we fight small battles in order to prevent big ones. Cold War containment was based on this concept and, as dark as those times were, it worked.

— Garry Kasparov (@Kasparov63) [February 25, 2022](#)



He has used his Soviet background to attack any actor proposing even the most modest of left-wing reforms in the United States, including Bernie Sanders. "Hey Bernie, don't lecture me about socialism. I lived through it," he [wrote](#), as a rebuttal to the senator's ideas about Medicare for all and taxing the rich.

During the 1990s, Kasparov supported the rule of Boris Yeltsin, an autocrat who came to power thanks to a massive interference and disinformation campaign organized by the U.S. government. A vocal opponent of Putin, in 2005 Kasparov quit chess for politics, attempting to become president of Russia himself, leading the Other Russia coalition. Although given significant media coverage in the West, the movement failed to gain traction inside of Russia, partially because of the significant official pushback and repression they received. His political opponents also [point](#) to the fact that he often communicate in English rather than Russian as an explanatory factor. Giving up on his domestic political ambitions, he moved to New York City in 2013.

Almost immediately, he became a prominent figure on the media circuit. He very publicly [chastised](#) President Obama for "negotiating with a dictator" (Putin) during the 2014 Ukraine crisis, and was among the earliest proponents of the [RussiaGate](#) conspiracy. Even before the 2016 election, he was warning that the Kremlin would hack into American election systems in order to secure a Trump victory. "Putin has a unique opportunity that was never thought of by any KGB or Politburo boss before to influence the results of these elections. And I think that [he] will use every opportunity that is given to him from hacking," he [said](#), adding: "I'm afraid it's just the beginning."

Kasparov has been one of President Trump's loudest critics,

regularly insinuating that Trump and Putin share a special bond. In 2018, when the pair decided to meet for showdown talks over Ukraine, Kasparov was disgusted. "I'm ready to call this the darkest hour in the history of the American presidency. Let me know if you can think of any competition," he [stated](#) on Twitter, leading to more than 2,800 comments suggesting other moments in U.S. history.

In stark contrast to his position on Gaza, Kasparov was immediately ready to label the Russian invasion of Ukraine a genocide. "We are witnessing, literally watching live, Putin commit genocide on an industrial scale in Ukraine," he [wrote](#), barely a week after the invasion.

He also called for an immediate NATO response, [demanding](#) that NATO bomb and sanction his homeland "back to the Stone Age." "I hope [the] Americans will revise their strategy and will show their strength," he said, castigating President Biden for his lack of spine. Kasparov predicted the destruction of the country he had attempted to lead only 14 years previously, [stating](#), "I don't think the war will go beyond next summer for a simple reason: Ukraine will win. And after this win, the Russian economy will collapse."

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-Gary Kasparov, 11/15/22 [pic.twitter.com/CDKRG1Sqde](https://pic.twitter.com/CDKRG1Sqde)

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [February 20, 2024](#)

But it is not just with Russia that Kasparov dreams of war. The chess star has also suggested that the West attack China. Last month, he published an [op-ed](#) in Politico, explaining that, "The age

of the peace dividend is over. A new era must begin — an era in which Europe stands up for itself and its allies." "There will be no peaceful coexistence with Putin's Russia... such coexistence with Xi's China is also impossible," he pronounced, stating that Europe must "transform from a peace-loving commune" into a continent "capable of responding to threats of real violence, able to stand firm against those who wish its demise."

## Regime Change Operative

Given his advocacy for a potential Third World War against Russia and China, it is perhaps unsurprising that Kasparov enthusiastically backed the U.S.' invasion of Iraq. Indeed, supporting American wars has been one of the few constants in his tumultuous life. In 2002, he confidently predicted a swift and decisive victory in Iraq, and stated that it should be used as a stepping stone to invade a host of nations. "Offense comes first. Baghdad remains the next stop but not the last. We must also have plans for Tehran and Damascus, not to mention Riyadh," he [wrote](#) in the pages of The Wall Street Journal. Once Iraq is defeated, he predicted, "the pressure will be strong to then declare the war won and the offensive stage over. That would be disastrous." Instead, he wished to pursue a global campaign of war to ensure U.S. hegemony – a position similar to the most hawkish faction of neoconservative thinkers in Washington, D.C. He also supported the first invasion of Iraq in 1991, [calling](#) for the United States to drop an atomic bomb on Baghdad.

As for Iraq's neighbor, Iran, Kasparov has supported regime change with actions and words. In 2021, he participated in the Free Iran Conference, where he claimed that the Iranian government "has no authority from the people. Instead, it fears its people, it oppresses

and tortures them.” The Free Iran Conference is closely associated with the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) a radical group [known](#) to have carried out terrorist attacks inside Iran. Until 2012, the MEK was officially [designated](#) a terrorist group by the United States government, and is still considered as such in much of the world.

Kasparov is also [alleged](#) to have participated in a recent attempted coup d’état in South Sudan. The chess grandmaster is accused of having facilitated the sale and smuggling of millions of dollars of weapons, including rifles, grenade launchers and missile systems, to South Sudanese “peace activist” Peter Ajak.

Ajak has a close relationship with Kasparov. He is a [senior fellow](#) at the Renew Democracy Initiative, and sits on the [leadership council](#) of the World Liberty Congress. He is also the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy. Despite these credentials, the U.S. Department of Justice has charged him with three counts relating to attempting gunrunning and attempting to topple the government of South Sudan.

Kasparov is widely reported to have introduced Ajak to Wall Street executive Robert Granieri, who allegedly put up the money to finance the operation. Kasparov certainly has intimate ties to Granieri, who [donated](#) at least \$1 million to the Renew Democracy Initiative. But both Granieri and Kasparov have vigorously denied any wrongdoing.

## The Peter Thiel Connection

Another American oligarch with a questionable moral record financing Kasparov’s career is Peter Thiel. Thiel’s corporation, Palantir, is [aiding](#) the Israeli military target Palestinians in Gaza,

providing the brains for their hi-tech slaughter. Palantir software is also used by the FBI, ICE, and other U.S. enforcement agencies to undermine privacy and attack whistleblowers.

Thiel has a direct line to the White House through Vice President J.D. Vance. He met Vance while the latter was still in college, offering him his first job, financing his venture capitalist firm, and bankrolling his run for the Senate.

Thiel also funded Kasparov's ambitions, [donating](#) more than half a million dollars to the HRF between 2007 and 2011. The pair enjoy a close personal friendship. Kasparov was the inaugural headline [speaker](#) at Palantir Night Live, a series of events dedicated to exploring cutting edge issues in the world of technology.

In 2012, they [appeared](#) at the Oxford Union together as debate partners, and wrote an [op-ed](#) in The Financial Times about the need to step up the pace of technological development.

Four years later, they would again come together, this time at the conservative think tank, the Hudson Institute, for an [event](#) promoting Kasparov's book, "Winter is Coming: Why Putin and Enemies of the Free World Must be Stopped."

For more on the German-born tech billionaire, read the MintPress [investigation](#), "Peter Thiel: From Gaza AI War Criminal To White House Puppet Master."

## Conspiracy Theorist

Kasparov is often presented as a disinformation expert. From the pages of The New York Times, he [decried](#) the "onslaught of misinformation" Americans are exposed to. In the Soviet Union, it

was the government spreading lies, he states, but, thanks to the power of the internet anyone can “become a propaganda minister from the comfort of home.” Hostile foreign state actors, like his native Russia, he adds, are fomenting political tribalism and conspiracy theories across the West.

Yet despite this self-appointed position, Kasparov has been prone to promoting a number of conspiracy theories himself. In 2017, for example, he [suggested](#) that the St. Petersburg Metro bombing was a false flag attack by the Russian government, “perfectly timed to serve Putin’s political agenda.”

Tragedy in St. Petersburg. Once again “unknown terrorists” perfectly timed to serve Putin’s political agenda. Forget protests, back to fear.

— Garry Kasparov (@Kasparov63) [April 3, 2017](#)

Surely the most bizarre conspiracy theory he subscribes to, though, is that of the [New Chronology](#). Believers in the New Chronology attest that the Middle Ages are a conspiracy and did not happen, that Jesus lived in the 12th century, that the civilizations of Ancient Greece and Rome ended only a few hundred years ago, and that Western nations have conspired to hide the true history of the world, one that is actually centered around a powerful global empire called the Russian Horde.

A highly obscure idea, the New Chronology is known largely only because Kasparov has spent decades promoting it to his bemused fans. The chess grandmaster first encountered the idea in the 1990s. As he [wrote](#):

I came across several books written by two mathematicians from

Moscow State University... Using modern mathematical and statistical methods, as well as precise astronomical computations, they discovered that ancient history was artificially extended by more than 1 000 years. For reasons beyond my understanding, historians are still ignoring their work."

His attempts to popularize the theory met with near-universal negative pushback. Yet, given ample opportunity to distance himself from the pseudoscience, he has refused to do so. When directly [asked](#) in a 2021 Reddit "Ask Me Anything" if he still believes in the New Chronology, he replied:

*I believe in questioning everything and in evidence, and agreed with some of the New Chronology's critiques of how thin the evidence is in some areas of the standard chronology of ancient civilizations and the Middle Ages, which are often based on a singular disputed account or object."*

"History belongs to the present, so we must question," he concluded.

It is these sorts of bizarre beliefs that have earned him comparisons to another controversial chess grandmaster: Bobby Fischer. After his famous 1972 World Chess Championship win, Fischer experienced significant mental decline, becoming a recluse and developing paranoid tendencies. After reading the book, "The Secret World Government," he began to believe that every mishap that befell him was the result of an international Jewish conspiracy, despite being Jewish himself. Fischer's increasingly anti-Semitic views and outbursts eventually led to him becoming an outcast. He died alone in Iceland in 2008.



Kasparov's beliefs are arguably no less bizarre. Yet his political positions align with the U.S. government. Therefore, far from being shunned by polite society, Kasparov has been welcomed into the halls of power. Even as commentators [describe](#) him as "clearly deranged," and having [descended](#) into becoming nothing more than a "liberal shitposter for the U.S. empire," he is treated as an expert, and invited onto cable news and to elite gatherings such as Bilderberg and the Munich Security Conference to share his opinions about Russia, China, war and peace.

Ultimately, then, Kasparov is a man of contrasts: a humanitarian supporting the Gaza genocide; a democracy activist who advocates for regime change; a Russian politician who calls for his own country to be attacked; and a chess genius who appears to believe that the Middle Ages were faked.

His career arc has seen him move from World Chess Champion to a key member of the think tank industrial complex – an impressive and fascinating journey, whether one sees him as an inspirational voice for democracy, or as Washington's favorite crackpot.

Feature photo | Garry Kasparov attends the 59th Munich Security Conference in Germany on Feb. 18, 2023. Alexi Witwicki | AP

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