

Anthony Aguilar: Iran Baited the U.S. & Is Bleeding It Dry

Anthony Aguilar is a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army, a Special Forces Green Beret who served as a combat infantry officer for 25 years in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. Aguilar worked as an aid contractor for Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), and became a whistleblower over the atrocities. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Anthony Aguilar, a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army who spent 25 years as a combat infantry officer in the Special Forces and who also worked as an aid contractor in Israel and became a very important whistleblower concerning the atrocities committed. So thank you for coming back on the program.

#Anthony Aguilar

Thank you. I appreciate it. Thanks for having me on.

#Glenn

I wanted to start, I guess, with an open question. That is, the United States has the best military in the world. I think it shouldn't be controversial to say it's the most formidable army in the world, but why do you see it failing against Iran?

#Anthony Aguilar

Well, the critical aspect of the U.S. failure in the war with Iran is that the war was initiated without any clear reason, political objective, without a clear military objective to achieve, to render a political end state or a negotiation or a treaty or a settlement or some type of negotiated peace. The war was started under the pretense that it could be won quickly and it would be won overnight. It would take a few days, and that the United States would be in and out. The world would rejoice, and the United States would be the victor because of its overwhelming military power. And it doesn't matter

how large or technologically advanced or professional and precise a military is. When a nation goes to war without a clear objective to achieve, your military is simply bombing policy out of the desert. And we're seeing the United States falling into that trap. And I think that the worst is yet to come in this conflict in terms of casualties and consequence to the United States.

#Glenn

But how do you assess the Iranian strategy? Because, again, they are the, well, I guess, the weaker side in this conflict. But again, in any conflict, one wants to use its strengths. But besides the geography, how do you see them fighting this? Is this a war of attrition, then? Are they simply aiming for the United States to increase its operational costs? And also, besides the means, what is the ultimate objective here? Is it simply to push the United States out of the region? Or how do you assess—I mean, if you would put yourself in the shoes of the Iranians, how would you explain what they're doing?

#Anthony Aguilar

If I were to put myself into the joint staff or the planners within Iran, I would look at this and consider: what are our strengths? Do we have the advanced Generation 5 fighters? No. Do we have the advanced naval, blue-water navy capability? No, we don't. But what we do have is geography. Time is on Iran's side in the close proximity to the U.S. elections. U.S. midterm elections are approaching. This war is becoming a voter issue. It's having impacts on the economy, which is probably the most important single voter issue going into the midterms. There's consequences. So if you are Iran, you're looking at that.

How can you turn the screws diplomatically, in the information space, militarily, and economically to render a position of relative advantage? And for Iran, I'd be looking at, in terms of the Strait of Hormuz, certainly a critical component of that. Ironically, not an element of the United States' decision to go to war in the first place. And that's now become the most consequential aspect of this war in terms of control. Is it open? Is it not? Who will levy fees? Who won't, etc.? That's become a thorn in the side of this administration in the United States. So the asymmetric warfare capability that Iran possesses is not in and of itself a recipe to success.

However, when you combine the asymmetric capability that Iran possesses with its drones, its shared technology with China and Russia, where we know that China and Russia are now providing not only intelligence and satellite imagery and various forms of assistance, but also in direct aid to where now Iran has a \$25 billion infrastructure nuclear deal with Russia, Iran is shaping new alliances in the region. And when you look at the ballistic missile threat that Iran has demonstrated, when you have a U.S. Patriot interceptor, the THAAD system, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, integrated with a Patriot interceptor or other types of interceptors, those interceptors cost millions of dollars apiece.

And we're now learning that in order to fight drones and ballistic missiles, you need a heck of a lot more interceptors than we have. But the calculus becomes untenable where you have million-dollar interceptors being fired against thousand-dollar, you know, to thirty-thousand-dollar 3D-printed drones that Iran has the ability to produce en masse. The attrition calculus soon becomes in the advantage of Iran, and we're seeing that now, where the U.S. is critically low on strategic interceptors and precision-strike munitions. The United States is at a disadvantage in that now the United States is faced with a dilemma: What do we do? Do we walk away from this?

Does Donald Trump attempt to walk away, claiming victory? We severely reduced their missile capability. We can keep eyes on Pickaxe Mountain with ubiquitous satellite observation. If they ever attempt to unearth the nuclear material, we'll hit them again. But Iran is not going to allow Donald Trump to walk away, because Iran now is in a position, as the United States is closing in on midterm elections, to then strike at will, to make the United States and its allies—its remaining allies that are still basing U.S. assets and soldiers in the region—pay. And we're seeing that even as late as today with strikes on Kuwait.

#Glenn

The geography aspect you mentioned, there's some contrast there. Iran is built almost like a fortress, with a huge territory, the mountains, the water surrounding it. And the U.S., in this regard, is more at a disadvantage. It's fighting on the other side of the planet. And as you said, it relies on bases, which seem to become very vulnerable with drone technology and so forth. It seems like it belongs to a different time. But there was a piece in the New York Times which wrote that around 20 U.S. warships are required to keep this blockade on. And those warships carry about 20,000 sailors and aircraft.

Each week they need like 420,000 meals and 8 million gallons of fuel. And the first thing the Iranians did was knock out the regional logistics sites, especially the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. So the article went on arguing that now the United States has to go to Diego Garcia, which is very far away, but even sometimes to Singapore. As we saw now with the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, it dropped off its sailors in Thailand. So it's—this is pretty far, you know. It's not the most convenient logistics we're talking about. So how sustainable do you see this actually being?

#Anthony Aguilar

It's becoming unsustainable. And I think if you—if it—I'm quite certain that before the decision of 28 February, that military joint planners in the United States Department of Defense looked at this problem set and realized that logistics would be the great challenge. And it's not only about getting the fuel and getting the food. It's about protecting those sea lines of communication and ground lines of communication and air lines of communication: ALOCs, GLOCs, and SLOCs. And by lines of

communication, I mean the logistics efforts that supply, support, and connect a military force. So as you mentioned, at the very beginning of this conflict, the United States was already reliant on forward-staged bases, Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain.

The U.S. Central Command forward headquarters is in Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The basing forward to provide everything that's needed to longer-duration deployments, we can no longer stage or provide in the immediate area of responsibility. So now we're relying on a second and third outer ring to bring in that support, whether it be from Singapore, whether it be from all the way further into the Indian Ocean and Diego Garcia, or simply we're seeing that many of the things that these naval assets require, they're going without. And we're seeing suffering in maintenance.

We're seeing issues with services provided to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines that are afloat or forward-staged in bases like Kuwait. I can assure you that in Kuwait, whether it be at Camp Arifjan or other bases that the United States has in Jordan, there aren't enough bunkers, there isn't enough space, and there isn't enough time and warning for every U.S. service member that's stationed there to do their job and be prepared for incoming ballistic missiles. So they're either in a position where they're walking around all day in full body armor and helmets, waiting to run to the nearest bunker, like a game of diabolical musical chairs.

Or they're not, and therefore not doing their jobs, therefore just sitting ducks, or they are doing their jobs in addition to having to respond to these strikes. And we have sustained far more casualties than the United States government is leading on to. And that's starting to weigh on the force. And we know that the logistics, in terms of—there's a matter of logistics of getting it there, and then there's the matter of supply as to whether or not we even have it. So when you consider the aspects of the costs of fuel, well, these ships, these aircraft carriers, these littoral combat ships, these cruiser-guided missile destroyers all require massive quantities.

Am I back? Oh, yes, yes. You're back. All require massive quantities of fuel and P.O.L.—petroleum, oils, and lubricants—all of which have now become at stake because of the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, the Suez Canal. When looking at the geography of the alternate routes that the United States can take from bases in the Mediterranean to get European-based U.S. assets, Greece and the like, to get resources through the Suez Canal, through the Red Sea, through Bab el-Mandeb Strait, into the Gulf of Oman, has now become under threat as well.

So the United States is now having to rely on a very long logistical supply line, where even the supplies to feed that logistical supply line are becoming at risk and depleted. When you consider that, with the distance and geography that the United States has to face in even getting to the fight and even getting to the war, much less fighting it, it quickly becomes a matter of calculation to where it's unfeasible. And even in the temporary approach to it, it's untenable and will continue to weigh heavy on U.S. forces in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

#Glenn

Well, given that it's producing so many casualties, though, and the logistics are becoming more and more problematic, the weapons, you know, they're running into profound shortages. And again, in the whole wider attrition, the Iranians have an inherent advantage. As you said, they're using cheap drones against expensive interceptors. Why do you think the U.S. decided to go back into this war? Because they had this MOU with the Iranians, and now Trump is communicating some optimism that, well, they might have a special trick up their sleeves.

I'm not sure what they're planning, but we now saw all these heavy strikes, especially against the Iranian ports and focused around the Strait of Hormuz. What has changed in the strategic situation? Has the U.S. acquired any advantages, or will it try a new strategy? Again, I know we have to throw in a little bit of speculation, but what are the possibilities here? Because it looked as if Trump had everything to gain from pulling back a bit, taking this whole war out of the headlines and shifting focus a bit. Instead, you know, go straight back in. Yeah, I think it took many by surprise.

#Anthony Aguilar

Well, I'll tell you, the memorandum of understanding that we saw in April, the 14-point memorandum of understanding, when it was first being discussed and it looked like there would be the opportunity for negotiation, the opportunity for diplomacy in light of this horrible conflict, at first I saw that with a bit of optimism. But then as soon as I saw the 14 points, it was very clear to me that we would be right back into escalatory kinetic war, because the very first point of this memorandum of understanding was that the U.S. and its allies would have to agree to this MOU, to which Israel would not agree.

Specifically, to include the aspects of Israeli forces, the IDF, withdrawing from Lebanon, and that being a condition of this 14-point MOU before any other conditions could even be considered. And I look—in reading through that MOU very thoroughly and over and over and over again, I said, okay, well, when it comes to lifting of certain sanctions, okay, there's negotiation space there. When it comes to lifting of or returning of frozen assets, there's negotiation space there. Even in the space of the Strait of Hormuz, there's negotiation space there. Tolls or not, administrative fees or not, who controls it, who doesn't—there's negotiation space. Same with even with the aspect of nuclear material.

Trump was even willing to entertain negotiation space and concession in that arena of, you know, keeping a certain amount, perhaps even having enough for a civilian nuclear program, et cetera. And looking at all that, that was a hard pill for the United States to swallow. But it was the best path out of this kinetic war, back into diplomacy, and any hope of ending this conflict with an attainable political end. But when you look at point number one of the MOU, it was very clear to me that we would be in a position to where the United States is then giving control back to Israel, because now the decision as to whether or not the United States can meet the demands of this MOU are now contingent upon Israel complying.

And Israel came out almost immediately with, "We're not leaving Lebanon. We're not abiding by that. The United States can go into whatever agreements they want. We're not." So I saw that, and I was like, okay, well, where does this go? I don't see Iran backing off from that condition. And I don't see the United States forcing Israel's hand, or forcing the U.S. hand to force Israel to abide by it. So soon we will be right back into conflict. And it was my assessment that that conflict—we would see that conflict return in August, which it did.

And I think what we're seeing now in terms of options for military action is to continue to bomb from afar, to continue to strike Bandar Abbas, Manab, Qeshm Island, Larak Island, Kish Island, and continue to hit these same sites over and over and over again with incredibly expensive munitions, of which the United States is running critically low. That is not a strategy. It's not going to yield a result. So I ask myself, going back, you know, if I'm—you know, we were talking about what Iran would—I'm looking at, okay, what is the United States—what would I do if I'm looking at it from a joint planner's perspective of the United States? Well, I have to provide options to the joint force commander to provide to the president. What are our options? We can continue to do what we're doing at the expenditure rate of our strategic munitions and our interceptors, and our bases continuing to get hammered, which is only going to lead to more rapid onset of very clear failure in the eyes of even the most, I would say, any American that's maybe a casual observer of this conflict and say, "Yeah, that looks bad." Or the United States can try a new strategy.

What is that strategy? Is it a large-scale ground invasion? I'm sure that that's one of the courses of action that's being developed, but it's not a choice course of action. And then there's limited ground incursion into the Larak-Qeshm Island chain to seize the Strait of Hormuz, to demonstrate that the United States has control over it. That's an option. And then there's the option for, if we're going to continue to strike, strike, strike, what is in the arsenal of munitions that the United States has, can, and has alluded to using? Well, that's the B61-12 nuclear tactical nuke. And I fear that that is very much in the menu of options that the Joint Force U.S. Central Command has provided to Donald Trump as a potential option.

And the reason I believe that is because we have B61 tactical nuclear bombs in the region already. We have over 250 of them throughout European installations, and some that have been moved closer into the CENTCOM area of responsibility that can be deployed from F-16s, the F-35, obviously your traditional bomber aircraft. But we have the means, we have the ways, and we have a president that seemingly has the will to potentially do this. And here's how I see that happening. The United States would use that capability to strike Pickaxe Mountain, or to strike wherever the critical nuclear facility is, to then say, "Look, we did everything," for the president to say, "We did everything I said I was going to do. They're no longer a threat. Their government is weakened."

The IRGC is all but destroyed. They don't have a navy. They don't have an air force. Sure, they're going to keep producing drones, but who cares? The war is over, and it's over on my terms because, look, they won't have a nuke. The United States—we're seeing that rhetoric pick up again. If you hear J.D. Vance just these past two days in the news, J.D. Vance went from the cheerleader of this

war: it'll be over soon. Yeah, other presidents have gotten us into wars like this, but they were stupid. Literally, he said that they were stupid presidents. Donald Trump's smart. He won't get us into a forever war.

And now even J.D. Vance is saying, "I'm not sure if this war will be over by the midterms. I don't know how this conflict ends." Well, when you have the president who's growing more and more desperate as the midterm elections approach—and let's not forget, October 27th is also Israel's elections—the president is desperately seeking some way to claim victory and walk away. But I don't think Iran is going to allow him to do that. So he's going to have to make a decision, and I think that the potential use of a B61 tactically deployed nuclear weapon is on the table.

#Glenn

So J.D. Vance made a comment on a podcast, something along the lines that we could be in the end times, which is not what you want to hear from a vice president. Exactly. But it appears, you know, the risk here, though, is for the U.S. to get trapped in some kind of an escalation trap or escalation ladder. Because if it takes these islands, as you suggested, then, you know, they're relatively small. And the Iranians will then be able to strike them day and night. So they will be sitting ducks there. And if the U.S. would pull them out, that would be a bit of a defeat because Trump would do a big victory lap if they go in. But then to support and supply, this would allow the Iranians to put immense pressure and impose a lot of casualties on the United States.

But same as if the U.S. goes after the critical infrastructure of Iran. Iran can retaliate against the entire region, which is often more dependent on energy, more dependent on desalination plants. And it just—even with a nuclear weapon, if there would be a nuclear strike, the Iranians could possibly put together something of a, I guess, rudimentary nuclear weapon. They do have the material, they have the know-how. I'm sure they're classified unofficially as a threshold state, that they could put something together. It just looks that none of this would actually result in any political objective. That is, yeah, they can bring more pain, but at the end of the day, the U.S. would only get further pulled into this, in which they could end up in a desperate situation where a tactical nuclear weapon would be seen as a way out.

#Anthony Aguilar

Yeah. That's what you just described, that escalatory ladder, that escalatory drain, so to speak, the swirling of the drain where everything just returns to escalation, is the concern. I by no means think that the use of a tactical nuclear weapon would succeed in achieving an end state. But we have an administration that went into this war without a defined and achievable end state. When you chart a path and you have no compass and you have no waypoint as to where you're going, well, everything looks like a way out. And Donald Trump is trying everything as a way out. We now have Operation

Economic Outcast. We've had this threat campaign. We've had indiscriminate bombing. We've had threats against the entirety of Iran's civil infrastructure, to include strikes against large portions of their civil infrastructure.

We've had this encroachment into near-total war—obviously total war for Iran, but limited warfare for the United States—where we are quickly running out of tangible, feasible solutions militarily, but we have still not moved the needle or created a diplomatic opening for Trump to at least proclaim some type of victory. Nothing's changed in that calculus. It's the concept of the albatross of decisive victory that Donald Trump has fallen into. So that escalation trap, I call that the albatross of victory, to where a nation thinks that they can bring overwhelming force, which brings overconfidence, institutional rigidity, strategic blindness to second- and third-order effects, because you think, well, we'll win this war quickly.

And when you don't achieve that, that becomes the albatross around your neck, to saying that, you know, it's—it's how I would describe Vietnam. It's how I would describe Iraq. It's how I would describe Afghanistan, to where when you don't know what victory looks like, anything looks like victory. Then you start swinging into the dark to find what that victory might be. So, going back to the concept of perhaps an amphibious assault or perhaps a limited ground incursion into the Larak and Qeshm Islands, would that be sustainable? No. Would that achieve any type of pathway to a clear victory? No. But what I think the Trump administration sees as a way for that to be successful is bring in massive strikes, hit sites all over Qeshm, all over Larak Island, all over Kish Island, Bandar Abbas, Minab—heavy bombardment, send in an amphibious strike group, an amphibious response group.

And we do have the United States Marine Corps' Fifth Amphibious Response Group there off of the USS Boxer, which is a Marine Corps aircraft carrier. So the forces are there. The 82nd Airborne Division has just been notified that their deployment to the region that was going to be six months is now going to be a year. So they're there longer. All of these are military assets that specialize in airfield seizure, vertical envelopment, amphibious assault. So it's an option on the table. And you're absolutely right. It would incur great casualties and cost. But I think Donald Trump sees it that if it's done quickly and precisely, surgically, in and out, look, we can control the Strait of Hormuz at will.

I can order the U.S. to take it, or I can bring our forces back. I control the Strait of Hormuz. I just let—I just let Iran have control. Donald Trump is looking for some way out of this. But whether it is the use of a tactical nuke, whether it is the option for a limited incursion, an amphibious assault, neither of them will be successful. But it doesn't mean that that's not an option that's being presented to the president. I just can't imagine a reality where the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the CENTCOM commander are sitting in this situation with the president and saying, "Hey, boss, we got nothing. We got no options for you. Sorry, sorry." No. Options are being developed. And I cannot imagine that those options are not on the table.

#Glenn

Well, I can imagine the desperation or panic there is, because you said earlier that, you know, the main focus of the war now is on the Strait of Hormuz. And I think that's—even though that wasn't part of the purpose of this war—but if Iran can simply hold some administrative control, impose some fees, it can always adjust these fees based on the extent to which countries would sell their oil in dollars or they would host American bases. Essentially, it would be a good instrument for Iran to redesign the regional security architecture so as to take into account its interests. And that kind of is the same issue with the bases, though. I mean, the U.S. bases in the region, you know, yes, they're used to attack the main rival, which is Iran. But it also links the entire security dependence of the region to the United States.

And this is, of course, then linked up to the whole petrodollar system, which is a key component of the U.S.-led economic architecture. I can see why there's a bit of a panic, because if there is no Iran walking away from the Strait of Hormuz, then again, the security architecture of the region, the dollar, everything could come under great pressure in the years to come. So I understand where this is, but... But also, if I was in Iran, I would, under no circumstances, give up. I would demand administrative control because that would be the only way to organize my security after 47 years of sanctions and threats. So what do you see as being the way out here, though, for the United States? Because it's very much all or nothing, which is why I guess the U.S. is prepared to go to such drastic lengths.

#Anthony Aguilar

Well, I do think that there is a diplomatic solution. But that diplomatic solution will not come while this president and this administration is in office. I think on both sides. Now, we had Marco Rubio earlier in the week. We had J.D. Vance earlier in the week, and we had even Donald Trump earlier in the week, all stating on various platforms in different ways that negotiations are off the table. Like, we're not negotiating with Iran. And until they stop striking ships in the Strait of Hormuz, which is basically the United States saying that unless Iran relinquishes control of the Strait of Hormuz, we're not negotiating. We're not going back to the talking table. Iran has said—Iran has not minced words, and they've said it.

We are not negotiating with this administration. We will wait until the next administration. And I think that they intend to adhere to that. I think they're preparing their society for that. And by no means would I say that this is not very difficult and hard on Iran. Has Iran taken losses? Incredible amounts of losses to their military, to their infrastructure, to their civil society. They are not going through this unscathed.

But I do think that Iran intends to and has the means to withstand this through this administration until there's a new president in the White House, until there's a new administration. And in doing so, they see in that time, in the two years and, let's see, November, December, let's say two years and three months remaining, that they can, in that time, reshape the balance of power in Western Asia.

We're already seeing that with the Mecca Defense Alliance between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey, and the notion of inviting Iran into that agreement, the notion of inviting other Gulf Coast countries and other nations in the region into that agreement. That is reshaping the power dynamic in the region to which the United States is.

Kind of the country sitting out, the outcast. It's ironic that Operation Economic Outcast is really going to make the United States the outcast rather than Iran. So I think that Iran understands that they hold the power of time in the interim, and that they're going to make this administration pay, and that this administration, if they want out of this war that was started by the United States, they're going to have to give up basically everything, cede everything, or continue to be at war. And this war is going to go on for multiple years to come. Whether that's two more years, three more years, this conflict as we are in it will survive past this president into the next administration. Whoever is the next president in the United States of America will inherit this conflict.

#Glenn

No, yeah, I see them inheriting the conflict in terms of it not being resolved. But I'm wondering, how long can this war be sustained in the current format? As you said, the U.S. is running out of interceptor missiles. You have a lot of the regional partners in countries like Jordan. You have some—well, upheaval is maybe too much—but you have a lot of political voices, academics, you know, signing this letter that says, you know, maybe we should rethink the partnership with the U.S. It makes us vulnerable, which is kind of interesting, that signing such a letter can come with a punishment from the government, and yet they did it.

So, obviously, there's some discussions happening in the region to what extent, you know, what was the ultimate security guarantee in the '90s is now a vulnerability. So how long can they continue the war in the current format? As you said, a lot of the sailors and military equipment, a lot of this doesn't seem to be able to sustain this. And the economy itself isn't going very well. I heard the Scott Bessent solution was, well, we'll grow our way out of the debt, which is not what you want to hear. So how long can the U.S. keep going like this, though?

#Anthony Aguilar

In the prosecution of this conflict under its current form, I'd say the United States can continue what it's doing now with this distant standoff—strike, defend, strike, defend—probably for about, at most, another 90 days in terms of military capability. So therefore, how is the United States military strategy going to change? What's going to change in how we're doing things? Is that going to be more focused on asymmetric warfare of our own, with some type of insurgency-like warfare with special forces and special operations from Iraq into Iran? Is it going to be a harder push for direct naval engagement to say, okay, we don't have the means to sit in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman and launch missiles anymore. We're going to have to go in with direct naval engagement. And this is war.

And if we lose some ships and some sailors, well, that's war. That's how I see the calculus that Donald Trump is thinking in terms of calculated loss. So how much longer can the United States continue the war in its current format? I'd say at most 90 days. In that time, what's going to be the new strategy? What's going to be the new method? What's going to be the new shape and form that this conflict, in terms of how the United States is prosecuting it, takes on? And I think that the United States will have to put more direct assets, quite frankly, into confrontation in order to change the shape of the way the war is going, and that ultimately will be more of a cost to U.S. forces. I see this getting more consequential, deadlier, and devastating for the United States in the coming months towards 2027.

#Glenn

Well, as you framed it, the U.S. goes a bit on attack, defense, but also the way the U.S. has been able to decide when the war starts again, when it slows down. From what I hear, the Iranians are not quite comfortable with this kind of, well, ceding this kind of escalation control to the United States. And there's the argument that they should be going on the offensive. And also they have other steps up that escalation ladder, for example, hitting the U.S. naval assets. Because I'm not sure if they do have the capabilities. Yemen certainly seems to have it, but it doesn't seem like the Iranians have really gone after it to display their intentions. So I'm not sure if it's capabilities or intentions, but are you surprised they haven't gone up the escalation ladder in terms of striking U.S. naval assets, or do you think they're simply too far away?

#Anthony Aguilar

So I don't think that the U.S. naval assets are too far away for Iran to have targeted them thus far. But they are far enough away to where it becomes a matter of what you're willing to expend on that long shot versus the close-up shot. So if I'm at the qualification range as a soldier in the military, I know that I have to score a certain score to pass. And I know there's going to be targets that pop up at 25 meters, 50 meters, 200 meters, 300 meters. And those 300-meter targets are real hard to get. And I know that if those targets are popping up, that I can't miss any of the 25s and the 50s, so I'm going to focus on those first. Well, I have the capability to hit out further, but I have to look at the threat that's closest. So I think that Iran has the capability to reach out and hit U.S. ships further away.

But because the U.S. is maintaining this distant blockade, and I think what's important to understand for anyone listening is that the United States does not have naval assets in the Strait of Hormuz. We do not have naval assets, you know, fighting in the Persian Gulf. They are in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, arrayed between Diego Garcia and the Gulf of Oman in an in-depth distant blockade. So I think what Iran now realizes is that, yes, this response, strike, respond, strike, respond, and escalatory timing has been largely controlled by the United States, the tempo and timing. That is changing. Iran realizes that that's not sustainable for them and that they have to

go on the offensive to make the United States the guesser in terms of when the strike is going to happen.

What we saw at Larak Island over the weekend that reinitiated this whole new round of escalation, where the United States struck mine-laying launchers on Larak Island, and that was the Fajr-5 mine rocket system. It's outdated, it's old. It doesn't necessarily pose a staunch threat to the entire Strait, but it's a threat that the United States can't ignore. And in doing so, I think that Iran moved those launchers to Larak Island from Qeshm Island, onto Larak Island, as a way to bait the United States Navy into expending even more of its precious, limited, and remaining precision munitions to see how the United States is going to then strike. So in order to strike these, we know that the United States struck from the air with jets that were launched from Jordan, hence the retaliation on Jordan. But it was also a test of what does the United States Navy have? Do they still have missiles or, you know, capability remaining close to Iran?

And it was demonstrated that, in order for the Navy to hit targets in Iraq or Qeshm, it's got to get a lot closer. And I think that's what Iran is betting on: to bait and bring U.S. naval aircraft closer into the Strait to force that direct engagement, to where that long-shot distant target is now closer. So does Iran have the ability, the capability, and the prerogative to strike U.S. ships? Yes, they absolutely do. Will they? Yes, I think that is coming. But Iran is currently baiting the United States Navy closer into the Strait of Hormuz to where a strike on a U.S. naval ship cannot be easily written off or denied.

For example, when the USS Abraham or the USS Gerald Ford sustained the laundry room fire, I am absolutely confident that that was not a laundry room fire. I think that Iran successfully struck the Gerald Ford, but the United States was able to hide it because the Gerald Ford was sitting all the way out in the Indian Ocean. Who saw it, right? If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound? And if there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound? So if an aircraft carrier gets struck in the Indian Ocean and there's no one there to see it, did it get hit, or was it a laundry room fire?

So I think that Iran is baiting the United States Navy closer into the Strait of Hormuz to have a devastating strike on a missile cruiser or a littoral combat ship, in order to send the message that: don't play around. So I think that Iran is gauging that calculus, and I think we're going to see Iran step up the direct strikes on U.S. naval assets in the Gulf of Oman as they attempt to get closer in towards the Strait of Hormuz. I mean, right now we don't really know the calculus of what that shore-to-sea naval battle would look like because we don't have any U.S. ships in the Strait. But it's coming.

#Glenn

Just as a last question, in terms of where this escalation could go, because again, it's not just the U. S. and Iran possibly hitting each other's more sensitive targets, but again, the war widening as well, obviously, in the region. But before, you mentioned that there was a risk of pulling Russia and China

into this war. And I would argue both have a strong strategic interest to assist Iran. That is, well, first of all, they can't accept Iran being defeated because that would make them both very vulnerable. That's a key source of stability for them on the Eurasian continent.

But also, if you're the Russians, a lot of those weapons will otherwise be sent to fight Russia. And for the Chinese, they see that a lot of these efforts to economically crush Iran are actually aimed against them. So, again, they have a lot at stake here. And I see it as doubtful that they would want to get into any direct fight with the United States. That's quite doubtful, if not suicidal. But on the other hand, this is how one gets trapped into this game. I mean, not everything is planned for. So how do you see that escalation risk, though? How could the Russians and the Chinese get pulled into this?

#Anthony Aguilar

Well, they're already—not even indirectly—they're already directly involved. In terms of getting pulled in further, you made an excellent point in that it is in Russia's interests for the United States to continue fighting a kinetic shooting war with Iran because it keeps us from giving more to Ukraine. It's to their advantage on that front. So, to continue to supply Iran with interceptors or munitions or missiles or intelligence to keep the United States expending all of those critical interceptors and ATACMS. I'll tell you, I was still in the Army when the United States first considered giving Ukraine ATACMS, the Army Tactical Missile System.

And Russia saw that as, at the time, almost as a red line. Like, no, you're not giving Ukraine the ATACMS. That's a red line. And we pushed the envelope. We pushed the envelope. We pushed the envelope, and eventually Trump did. And that's been devastating on the front lines. But if Russia can now force the United States to have to use those in Iran, which we have, we've expended almost all of our ATACMS on strikes against Iran now.

And that's the ATACMS that aren't going to Ukraine. So, from Russia's standpoint, it's to their benefit to keep this going, but it's also to their benefit to become directly involved, because Iran is too important to fail in the eyes of Russia and China, and same for China. I mean, China's trade with Iran is much more important in that relationship than any relationship that the United States could or would have. And when you look at the dynamics of that relationship, if the United States continues to escalate, that's going to then draw Russia and China more directly involved, to where we—I'm not saying we're going to see Russian forces or Chinese PLA or PLAAF getting directly into the fight with aircraft and boots on the ground—but certainly with naval assets, certainly with precision strike munitions assets, certainly with potential, as we know, like with Pakistan, that is in agreements with acquiring the Shenyang J-35 Generation Five fighter from China.

Why couldn't that opportunity be opened up to Iran? Would that be a red line? It sure would. But if the United States crosses the red line, well, then that red line now becomes the line to cross. So I think that's why, when I look at this conflict, it's nowhere near over or ending. The belligerents in this conflict, being Iran and the United States, and now the others that can be drawn in, are by no

means out of gas, so to speak, in terms of fighting this war. We thought that when we sent U.S. forces to Poland to help reinforce Ukraine, to help advise and assist from a distance, and we set up Joint Task Force Dragon to help provide Ukraine with targeting capability, we thought that, you know, look at how underprepared Russia is. Their logistics are horrible. They can't maintain the front. This will be over by next Christmas. And that war still rages on. So this war, I do believe, will become Donald Trump's Ukraine.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, he certainly got himself in a big mess. I think the Venezuelan success probably emboldened him a bit too much.

#Anthony Aguilar

Yeah, this is no Venezuela.

#Glenn

No, certainly not. Well, Colonel, thank you so much for taking the time. I very much appreciate it.

#Anthony Aguilar

Well, thank you so much, and I appreciate it. It's always great talking to you, and wonderful conversation and great questions.

#Anthony Aguilar

Thank you.