

Alastair Crooke: Iran & Yemen's Strikes

DEVASTATE Trump

Alastair Crooke discusses why Israel is shutting down a key port as Iranian and Yemeni strikes on US military assets trigger an oil shock that is fueling revolutionary changes across the Middle East. Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat and the Founder of the Conflicts Forum based in Beirut. <https://conflictsforum.substack.com/> PATREON.COM/DANNYHAIPHONG Support the channel in other ways: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/dannyhai...> Substack: chroniclesofhaiphong.substack.com Cashapp: \$Dhaiphong Venmo: @dannyH2020 Paypal: <https://paypal.me/spiritofho> Follow me on Telegram: <https://t.me/dannyhaiphong> #iran #iranwar #trump

#Danny

Welcome back to the show, everyone. As you can see, I'm joined by Alistair Crooke, former UK diplomat and prolific geopolitical commentator and analyst. So we're talking siege politics today and the roots of siege politics. So Iran has struck three vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in the last day. This coincides with the fact that only a few ships per day right now are crossing the strait. Missiles were also fired at the naval vessels that the U.S. has 400 or so kilometers out as a warning. Now, Yemen, Ansar Allah, their offensive continues also to lay siege to the oil markets. It has been reported that an Italian F-16, two Eurofighter jets in Saudi Arabia, were hit last night. This comes as The Washington Post warns that gas prices, if they aren't high enough already, for diesel gas in particular, it's about to get a lot worse in the days to come.

So bad that even Israel has suspended activity in Eilat port again today due to the escalating threat, they claim, and Israeli media claims, of Ansar Allah. Of course, that also is a nod to the fact that not only does Ansar Allah control the Red Sea now, but they have blockaded Israel before in solidarity with Gaza. Alistair, help us understand where this is, how we got to this point, and what is truly important about what is going on right now, with Trump saying that he is mulling a decisive kind of move against Iran, whether for peace or for more war. And, of course, the Saudi situation against Ansar Allah's offensive, which is not looking good, and no one in the oil markets or elsewhere are very enthusiastic about it. Your thoughts about what is going on, what we should really understand about this.

#Alastair Crooke

Well, I think, I mean, obviously, the question of the energy situation is crucial to the Western perspective and thinking about it. But in so doing, it misses what's happening, a lot of what's happening, which is rather different from how it's presented. And with the oil, and particularly with the diesel, I mean, we've been talking for some time about the crisis, and it's coming. Well, it's

come, and it's pretty obvious that it's affecting everywhere. And why has it suddenly become so sudden? I think it's come suddenly because there's a vast difference, if you like, between flows. You know, we've known that flow is less.

There's been a big dispute between Bessent and Trump that, you know, how many tankers are going through or whatever. And it was all focused on flow, as if the flow of oil suddenly transforms into energy in terms of gasoline to go in a car or diesel. But it isn't quite like that. And what it is, is also the stocks matter, and ultimately the ability to deliver oil. I mean, real oil, physical oil, not just, you know, say, well, the market says this or the price says this, because at that point price really becomes pretty meaningless. Because what counts, I mean, particularly, it's obvious when we get to fuel for airlines, which also is about to double in price, and certainly in Europe. But I mean, everywhere will be more or less the same.

So the price of kerosene fuel is going very high because, really, I mean, you know, you've got a plane ready to fly and it's full of passengers. I mean, either there's fuel to get it to go or there isn't. I mean, and this is what happens when it comes. You can sort of perhaps manage cars in a different way. But I think, you know, this is where the stocks are hurting. The stocks have run out. And I think the CEO of Chevron said very clearly, you know, the crisis has now come. It's with us, and it's only starting now. It's going to get worse, and diesel is going to be in shorter supply, and heating oil. But the point here is, you know, people say, "Oh, well, you know, the farmers, they'll manage, they'll get through," and everything like this.

Well, first of all, many of them won't get through. I mean, there's a large number of bankruptcies in American farming at the moment, so some of them won't get through this period. But the other thing is, you know, it's not just farmers, because everything—certainly in Europe, it's the same in America—everything is delivered by diesel-powered vans and trucks. And if you don't have diesel or the diesel price spikes up, it's going to put the price of everything up dramatically. Because, you know, if it's your vegetables, they come by diesel. If it's water, it comes by diesel. Whatever you're buying will be delivered by diesel. Western states are entirely dependent. Modernity is dependent on this fuel. So I think it's going to be a lot worse.

So, I mean, that's where we are. The Iranians, there's no change on Hormuz. There's nothing changed there. There are no negotiations. They made it clear there will be no negotiations until all the conditions are accepted by the United States. Even then, I'm not so sure if Trump said, "I accept the conditions," I'm not even sure that that would, if you like, unfreeze it. Certainly, as I'm just coming back from Russia, I can say to you that, I mean, the Russians have absolutely no trust in America's word or its negotiating positions. And I imagine that that is transmitted pretty clearly to the Iranians. So even if there was a shift, where would it go? And what will be the endgame?

I keep saying, and I repeat it again just for the sake of it, is the MOU is not a document. It was basically, you know, I've done ceasefires, several of them in the Palestinian context, and what you have to have before you get to the diplomatic process, you have to have the security aspects all

nailed down very clearly. What happens if this occurs? What happens if that occurs? You've got to have an understanding between the parties on the security aspects of a ceasefire. And then you can move to, if you like, a political level. But you can't start top-down. It doesn't work. You've got to start bottom-up, not top-down.

And what you have there, the MOU is basically just a framework for reducing violence, tension, if you like, to see if there's room for a political process. Well, there isn't. Trump has completely denied the MOU. So is it going to happen? Is it going to come about? I have doubts now. I don't think anyone really trusts it. So nothing really much has changed. And in Yemen, things are changing, but they're changing very, very rapidly in favor of the Houthis. The Houthis are really pummeling these mercenary forces of the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the border, on the coastal areas, and in the south of Yemen. They said the strait remains open except to Saudi vessels.

But my feeling is this is just, you know, this is a prelude to some serious negotiations that are going on that we don't see. And I'll have to explain that, but I think there's something—the electricity is wobbling—so I'll have to explain that in a while. But so I don't think the Yemeni thing should be a sort of preliminary statement. It doesn't mean that this is going to hold. And even as it does hold, the Yemenis, or at least someone, is again attacking Aramco facilities in these last hours. There's again been attacks on them. I know that the Saudis are saying, "Oh, well, in about five days it will be doing a bypass pipeline around the pumping stations."

Oh, sure. I mean, you know, in the desert and under attack, I think it would be one to five months, not one to five days or something, to do that. And anyway, you know, the Houthis will—my understanding is the pipeline has been broken, severed in four different places, not just one pumping station. So that's the situation. But what I think this is doing is, if you like, obscuring what really is happening. Because what's happening is that we've had the Iranian revolution. And by Iranian revolution, I mean, if you've seen or looked at the videos, they've just had the 200th day of protests in Tehran. Millions have come out in favor of it. There are, if you like, posters and other things calling on people to join self-sacrifice units.

And self-sacrifice is like martyrdom units. But they're talking about forming a million-man army of these. Don't forget, most Iranians—well, all Iranian males who are fit—already have military training. I mean, it's not starting from boot camp, if you like. They already have military training. It's just a sort of topping-up exercise. And topping-up exercises have already begun. I mean, they're in the training camps. They're being trained on using MANPADS, handing out MANPADS to these young people, and people are queuing up. There are marches by women, a huge march, only women, taking place in Tehran. But throughout Iran, there are people volunteering and offering their services to this huge mobilization that is taking place.

They want 1,000 battalions of 1,000 people each, and they're getting it, and you can see it. I mean, it's quite visible. You can see it on all the channels. That's the revolution. This isn't, you know, just the sort of normal institutional workings of a state. This is institutional. This is revolutionary. When

people volunteer in such vast numbers for martyrdom battalions, self-sacrifice battalions, and things like that, I mean, you have to be fired up and you have to be full of belief in what you're doing to be able to do this. And I think this is the thing that was completely missed and continues to be missed. It is, you know, something happened when Iran was attacked. It fell back onto its older traditions, older traditions of a disposition toward the world, and that meant they see it differently.

And that type of change is both forward-looking because it specializes focus. Formerly, the world was being specialized for them. Now they are specializing their own way. And, of course, part of that opens new spaces. And those new spaces pull young people forward to that and give them hope and give them aims and purpose and meaning. And so we have something that is quite profound taking place in Iran and in Yemen, because that is even more clearly a revolution that is taking place there. So forget all the worries. I mean, the West, of course, understandably looks at the whole process by how many barrels of oil are leaving and coming out and whether the pipeline is repairable in so many days or whatever, because that's their focus. But for the region and the Middle East, this is something quite different.

#Danny

You had the Iranian Revolution.

#Alastair Crooke

You have the Iranian Revolution, whatever people care to call it. It is revolutionary in its sentiment and in the emotion, the emotional level. And now the Houthis have, in a couple of days, cleared the whole of that area that still is part of Yemen. Because don't forget, the Saudis stole three provinces of Yemen in the 1930s, which they're still holding in, say, a part of Saudi Arabia, which I don't think the Houthis would agree with. And there's action taking place in those three areas too, because Yemeni tribes have close links with those areas, and the Houthi tribe particularly has close links to those areas. So you can expect more to happen there.

This is, I mean, it always seems to me this is Saudi's vulnerability in that respect. Its southern borders are far from being loyal to the palace, far from it. They're not. And so that's one part of it. Now, I think the other part is that Saudi Arabia has imposed on the Houthis, I mean, for years. I mean, they engaged the Egyptians to try and crush them at an earlier stage, but it ended with 20,000 Egyptian forces dead. So it wasn't a great success. And the Houthis are now, as I say, mobilized and moving, and this has been well planned. It's been in the works for, as I understand it, for about seven years, five or seven years anyway.

And so the plan is going ahead. And then we turn to Saudi Arabia. And for that, you need to understand that Saudi Arabia, as it's perceived by the West, it's this modern state with everything shiny and expensive, and lots of money going on these ostentatious new hotel buildings of a kilometre length and other things. And they see them owning football teams and sports things. It

looks thoroughly modern and sound, but it isn't, because Saudi Arabia was basically founded around by Abdulaziz, when he founded it. It was founded on these particularly violent Puritan, if you like, vanguardists.

I call them vanguardists because they went raging around the region, killing anyone who disagreed with them. And these were called the Ikhwan, but it doesn't mean the Muslim Brotherhood. This is Wahhabism. This is the extremely Puritan, austere, intolerant Wahhabism of the desert, the Najd Desert, which is not the same as the Islam that existed in other parts of Saudi Arabia. It was very different. Even some parts of Saudi Arabia are Shia, on the eastern side. But it was quite—it was—they went, for example, they went and raided Mecca. They nearly took the whole of the Arabian Republic. They went to Karbala. I think 20,000 were killed.

Some huge number were killed by these people. They were just, I mean, you know, Cromwell's Puritan revolution was pale by comparison with this Puritan revolution army, military army. And eventually Abdulaziz decided that, you know, having used it, because it was a British intelligence officer called St. John Philby who told the Saud, said, "Listen, you weaponize these Wahhabis and you'll control the Middle East. You'll be king of the Middle East. Let them loose and you'll control the Middle East." Well, Philby got his way for a while, but eventually Abdulaziz wanted to become more respectable, more acceptable to the West. Petrol, oil was starting to flow, money was coming in, and he wanted to be more. So he attacked them, and he attacked all the tribes that were against him, and the British machine-gunned.

The Wahhabis completely machine-gunned them. And then he attacked the other tribes of Saudi Arabia and forced them to provide a wife for him, which is why he had 22 wives. All the tribes were providing one wife to him. But the point I'm making is, you know, the pillar on which Saudi Arabia stands is a very fragile pillar, a narrow one. It is a pillar that is based on this very sectarian type of Islam, of Wahhabism. What's the difference between Wahhabism and the sort of variants that you have seen later, the ISIS, in doctrine? Nothing. So, therefore, there is a great resentment amongst the tribes at this one-family construct for Saudi Arabia, where all the money goes to one family and all the decisions and all the politics are taken by one family.

Probably all of you can remember the Ritz-Carlton case, when all these senior tribal leaders were sort of hung upside down—not literally—but hung upside down in the Ritz-Carlton until they turned over lots and lots of money to the one family. So there's not so much love for the one family from these tribespeople. So it's precariously based. And then subsequently, I won't go into all the details, but then subsequently, with Vice President Cheney, built on the Clean Break document, which laid out that future American policy would all be dependent on Saudi Arabia and Gulf states. They were going to build energy dominance and American policy on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and away from Iran.

They were going to overturn, upend the old power paradigm of the region. The great powers of the region for hundreds of years have been Mesopotamia, Iraq, and Iran, Persia. Iran was always a real

power. I mean, it wasn't a fake one. It was a real power for hundreds of years until the Shah was deposed. But America was going to switch it and replace Iran with the Gulf states, and the Iranian allies would be removed. That was the Clean Break policy, because Netanyahu sat on that document and it was a document that was made for him, and therefore it was also part of the planning, the Israeli planning, or at least Netanyahu's planning, for the Abraham Accords. Of course, this switch should take place. The switch would take place.

And then in 2006, Dick Cheney sat with Prince Bandar, who was in the intelligence service, and they agreed that Saudi Arabia would be responsible for destroying Syria. The king had said this was the weak link for Iran. And when Cheney said, "Well, how are you going to do that?" Prince Bandar said, "You can leave it entirely to us. We'll use Islamists." And really, that was the point at which sort of Wahhabism emerged. This extreme Puritan group was legitimized by the U.S. government for sectarian war in the region, sectarian war which we've been seeing since Afghanistan onwards, of using Salafist extreme Islam to destroy the Shia and also to destroy all the secularists, because they were also used against the Ba'athist-type socialist governments in the region.

So that's where we are. And the whole structure of Saudi Arabia is based on the very fragile battle against the tribes that took place, and on this very radical, dangerous form of Islam. So, and into this has come revolution. And that will go back to the point I said I would come back to. I said, you know, when the Yemenis say, are they just going to content themselves with stopping Saudi ships? I mean, I have no direct evidence, but I have seen and heard one major figure in the region has said categorically that for seven years beforehand, Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, had sent a prominent Hezbollah officer. He's named, and there's a photograph of him, and he lived for seven years with the Houthis.

With instructions from Nasrallah: you do not order them, you do not tell them what to do. Everything they do must be theirs, not ours. And this was, of course, concerted with Iran. And what I think is happening, again, I'm not saying this—I have special information or privileged information—but I've seen what Iran does in the past. I suspect quiet negotiations, both by the Yemenis and others with those tribal leaders, are taking place to say, you know, do you want a more equitable relationship? A turn in Saudi Arabia, one that isn't where all one family gets all the cash and all the kudos, and you are just diminished and cast aside. And I think that's what I saw happening in Afghanistan years ago, when everyone—and I was surprised too—you remember, the Afghan government just fell like that. Ten days and it was gone.

But afterwards I learned, you know, that was years of patient negotiating being done by Qasem Soleimani, getting the agreement of all these differing, warring sort of clans and tribes of Afghanistan. And they were very difficult, I know from experience. But he got them to the point at which they all agreed, "We'll change the government and we won't oppose it." And perhaps something like that is going on. I don't know, but certainly... I think it's quite possible. And that's why I think the Yemenis are, you know, keeping their cards to themselves at the moment.

They're not going to say anything because they want to find a reasonable deal, perhaps with the power brokers amongst Yemenis, the tribes, as well as just another. So you have these two layers going on, in a sense. You have, oh, you know, the foreign minister of Oman and the foreign minister of Abu Dhabi and the foreign minister of Egypt are all sitting together and discussing what to do about Iran and the other... But then you have another layer where, you know, a different form of politics is probably being discussed. That's usually the way in the region. The unseen part is always the more important.

#Danny

Yeah, very well said, and critical information, because it provides the backdrop and the context for what's happening, in particular Yemen's lightning advance, but also Iran's steadfast approach to maintaining not only their position in this war, but also their advances and what they hope to advance now and in the future. But how devastating, Alistair, is all of this to U.S. interests in particular? Because there's so many debates happening about, well, now we're talking about the potential fall of Saudi Arabia, the potential—or if not fall, just complete decline and collapse potentially because of this war. And there's, of course, so many debates about, you know, the U.S. interests here.

Is the U.S. purposefully just holding back? Now we even have, though, I think the outcomes are kind of showing to be pretty catastrophic in the sense, as I pulled up, even Israel is very, very, very worried about what's happening. So worried that they're willing to diminish their own economic activity from the threat of what happens in the Bab al-Mandab Strait. So what do you make of this? How devastating is this to U.S. interests, both on the Yemen and Iran fronts, now that, yeah, the Trump administration doesn't seem to have, and the U.S. itself doesn't seem to have, very many good options or answers to the revolutions that you just described taking place?

#Alistair Crooke

Well, what we're seeing is the gradual reverting of the region to its old paradigms of power. Iran—I think you should keep a close eye on Iraq and Kuwait and Bahrain. I think that it is reverting to it. You should say, is this American interest or not? I don't think they care a damn whether it's in the American interest or not. They're just going ahead with it. They're going to do it. I mean, to say, you know, American interests might not be assisted by what's happening, I mean, it presupposes the endorsement of this sort of extractive colonial structure that we've had in the region and the sieges. Don't forget, the Houthis have been under a siege, under a blockade for nearly 10 years, and Iran for 47 years. And what they see this as taking place, and it's not just confined to one narrow part.

I mean, even the Maghreb is sort of getting excited. You've seen protests in Syria, protests in Iraq taking place recently, massive protests taking place. This is known as national liberation policy. This is known as an anti-colonial, if you like, operation that is underway by Iran and possibly others. And so, I mean, it is what it is. And I think, you know, what is America going to do? I don't know what it

can do. I don't think we've seen it. At this present stage, Saudi Arabia is pretty dysfunctional. I think Jordan is pretty dysfunctional. I think the Gulf states have no money. Saudi Arabia, I think, in this last period, its oil sales went to zero. So, and it can't sell treasuries, presumably, because Bessent would veto any Treasury sale, any bond sale. Maybe they get special permission. I don't know. But Trump doesn't seem inclined to help.

And it seems that what we see reported—again, I can't say that I can confirm that absolutely accurately—but I am told there's a fairly active lobbying exercise going on in Washington by Abu Dhabi to prevent Washington assisting their old rival, MBS, in any way. The bitterness now—the bitterness, you remember, when there was a sort of complete breakdown between the two states—is now surfacing in a quarrel in Washington about whether or not anyone should run to the help of the Saudis. But, you know, this is toxic politics, frankly, because, you know, UAE is closely associated with Israel and has chosen to use Israel as its closest ally. And so all of this has become quite, quite incendiary. So I don't know. And I don't think anyone else is rushing. I said to you already, you know, this talk of Egypt coming into it.

But some years ago, I mean, Egypt suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Houthis. Twenty thousand dead, I think it was. And then, you know, is Pakistan going to join in this? I mean, I won't say almost. I'll say certainly not. It has a large Shia population. If you remember, when the Supreme Leader was killed, there were huge riots, and they nearly burned down—or they did burn down—the U.S. consulate at the time. Pakistan is not that stable. I mean, it has problems with the Baluchis, and it has problems with the Shia. So to go and join Saudi Arabia against Iran or the Yemenis... The other thing is, the Yemenis actually are the cradle of the Arab world, when the West tends to sort of see them, you know, Saudi Arabia is the Arab world and Sunni Islam and everything.

But actually, it's Yemen which is, if you go to any tribe anywhere, some of them are either big tribes, you know, a million people in the Shamad, for example. I mean, the Yemenis have, you know, real standing as the cradle of the Arab world, more so than Saudi Arabia does, very much more so in that respect. So, and then think about what happened after the assassination of the Supreme Leader and the funerals that took place in Iraq. I mean, millions turned out in Karbala. Even Najaf, which is more conservative, huge turnout, huge turnout across the whole of Iraq. It's just worth putting in your pocket and just keeping it there and watching. So many things are happening. But in essence, again, the West is so literal. It doesn't try to see what's really happening, or therefore how they can deal with it.

So they come up with the wrong answers, because if they think the right answer is to get someone to drop bombs on the Houthis—I mean, they did that during the siege of the Red Sea before. I mean, the Houthis, you know, they don't have that sort of infrastructure out in the open, and most of it is in tunnels and other places. They've been very clever at that. But they've thought about this. They've thought about it and they've planned it. So, I mean, we'll just have to see how it turns out.

Maybe it won't work. Maybe it'll go wrong. You can't tell in these sort of circumstances. Ultimately, I remember it was the Prime Minister, I think it was Macmillan, who said, well, answering the question, "What scares you most, Prime Minister, today?" "Events."

Events, dear boy. That's what frightens me. And so, you know, events are moving very rapidly, so we have to... No one knows what will happen next or change. When you asked me—I'm sorry, I've sort of gone in a roundabout way—but you said, "Well, what about Trump's threat to annihilate? I've got this decision whether I'm going to choose to annihilate Iran or not." I think he used the word "annihilate." Certainly, in some transcripts it says "annihilate"; in other ones, it's been sort of seemingly tidied up a bit. But anyway, the sentiments are the same. Is he able to do that? Will he be able to?

I think it's quite doubtful, I mean, for November. First of all, I mean, you know, he has 50,000 troops that have been on station for a year. I mean, I think they're getting tired and fed up. I mean, it's not just on the carriers. I mean, the 83rd has been there for a year, I think. And the equipment is showing signs of lack of maintenance, lack of serviceability. Air defenses have been badly reduced. You're not going to replace those in, what, two months? I don't think so. It'll take several years to really get back to those levels. So I think the advice, whether he chooses to accept it or not, will be, no, don't do that.

And as for putting troops on the ground, I think this would be, I mean, from the American perspective, at least, an extraordinary mistake, and from the Iranian perspective, an extraordinary gift. So I'm not sure that that's going to happen. I think the whole thing will hang on one thing, which we don't know. And I think it will hang very much on what happens in the midterms in the Senate. I think it looks pretty much almost sure that the House is going to default to the Democrats. The Senate's more complicated, and I'm not an expert on the intricacies of the Senate seats, but people who seem to be much more so say that even that is in danger. Now, that's been Trump's power base.

That's been the base from which he's been able to ignore Congress, to just ignore laws, just to ignore what the Supreme Court says, because he's got the space in the Senate. Now, if that goes too, then I think we're in a different era. It'll be a different era. There will be impeachments imposed and legal measures taken. And I think he'll be pretty occupied with that. I don't think the American public is wanting, you know, to go back to this war, which has been such a failure. If you sort of suddenly said, "Oh no, we're going to have another round of the Iran war," I think there'll be a great big thumbs down from Americans. You can judge that better than me, but that's my feeling.

#Danny

Yeah, that would be an accurate feeling. And all the polls demonstrate that as well. And of course, as the economic situation deteriorates, which it is already, it's already here, as you said, the energy crisis, which is an economic crisis, and that will only get worse if things go on like they are going.

And at least for the foreseeable future, that's how it's going to be. Because I think, to connect the dots a bit, when you're talking about Iran and Yemen and their processes, revolutionary processes, advancing toward their goals and not considering what the U.S. wants, which is 100% in their perspective the correct way to move, well, then it's the United States where the responsibility falls at its feet to address the crises that are coming up based on how it has approached this region.

And, you know, you mentioned the military crisis as well. Well, now for the first time, you're getting images directly leaked to mainstream media sources like CBS, showing the images of what has happened in this war, which is new. There has been a huge attempt to strangle that imagery in order to continue to forward this war as viable. Now that's no longer the case. Now anybody who reads CBS or ABC can see what exactly happened, and it doesn't look good. And I can pull that up, but some have been saying, Alistair, that there's been a debate.

I've been receiving a lot of messages about, okay, well, what is the significance of a weakened Saudi Arabia, maybe even a collapsed Saudi Arabia, if this war continues on in the direction it's going, which is Yemeni advance and Yemeni victory, plus Saudi being the focal point of a massive energy crisis? How does that impact U.S. hegemony? Does it benefit U.S. oil companies versus does it make up a significant loss for the U.S. as a whole in terms of its power projection? What do you make of this debate? Because those are the questions I'm getting asked, and I'm wondering your thoughts on them.

#Alistair Crooke

Well, it depends very much on the Saudi tribal structures, who I think favor more of a sort of confederation than anything else. And I think that the direction we're going, I mean, effectively, is to fold Saudi Arabia into the Iranian-Houthi revolution. I mean, many of these Saudi tribes are quite sympathetic to the idea. Now, of course, I mean, there will come a point when they will want their share of the resources of Saudi Arabia. The eastern provinces will have to be discussed with Iran, of course, because it's basically Shia territory there. I don't think Iran is going to necessarily take it. But all of these things will have to be discussed. Does it leave room for American oil companies? Maybe, but only when things have sort of settled down and some agreements have been reached between the tribal leaders, and who gets what and how and in what way?

I think then perhaps there might be something. Saudi Arabia, even if it's run by the tribes, needs revenue, of course. So something will change that will do that. Is it going to go to American companies? I think that's highly doubtful. Their experience of American companies has not been great. So I doubt if it's going to lead to a return to sort of all the agreements. I imagine, you know, what we're going to see is that many of the formal agreements are no longer current, will be deemed no longer current, and some of these will have to be renegotiated. So I think, you know, the aim, the principle here is, you know, the people are going to take back what is theirs. That's the sort of sentiment that's underneath it, whether you're a tribal leader of Saudi or whether you're just, you know, an ordinary Saudi or Yemeni.

They want to change the system away from the system which saw all the revenues either going to the one family or being simply siphoned back to Wall Street through the petrodollar and these other structures. I don't think the petrodollar exists now. I don't think it's going to exist in the future. I think it's over, and that's going to affect Gulf states very seriously as well. So this is, I mean, it's going to be a lot more—I think it's going to be much more, how should you say, not just fluid, but it's going to be much more sort of decentralized, de-organized structures that will have to come out of this because we are witnessing, I mean, an inflection point in the past structure.

And at the bottom, the final say—I'm not saying they will use the final say—but the final say is obvious. It will be with Iran. Iran is just putting together a million-man army, remember? So, you know, the question is, what would America do about all of this? I mean, I think, you know, the plan is unfolding. Now it's in process and it's going—it is unfolding. You know, I'm maybe, you know, getting ahead of myself because, you know, things can always go wrong in these circumstances, and there can be some terrible disaster, or Trump can do something unimaginable.

So, you know, I proceed with caution, but I think the lines of where this is going, the direction of travel, is pretty obvious: that the region is going through metamorphosis, a profound metamorphosis. We can't say exactly what the endgame is going to look like or how we're going to get to the endgame, but the region is not going to be the region it was before the 28th of February. It's going to be a different region. It's in metamorphosis. How is that going to affect the United States? Well, badly, I mean, quite clearly. I mean, it will have lost its position in the region. I mean, they're not going to all go back and ask.

I mean, you know, the United States walked away from all these Gulf states, very obviously, during this conflict, and then have got to invite them back. I think, you know, don't read too much into this talk that Trump is going to sell 24 F-35s to Saudi Arabia. I mean, first of all, they don't exist. You know, I did say at the beginning to someone, I said, look, I think Trump is just holding back until he gets some cash paid back. He might as well squeeze the Saudis for what he can while he can. So I think that's all it is. I mean, you know, they'll never be delivered and whatever. But Trump has said he's got to have the cash by Monday, I think.

#Danny

Which is astonishing.

#Alastair Crooke

Which is astonishing. It's not only astonishing, but it's characteristic. But I mean, all I can say is, you know, don't read into this as a sudden switch of allegiance back to the United States. You know, this is what we have to pay Trump to keep him on side. So I always thought he was just waiting for that. Now he's got it.

#Danny

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's quite astonishing too, in the sense that, I mean, for one, you have Trump squeezing Saudi Arabia for what seems like lunch money, with the reports that, as you said, the F-35s don't exist. And there's not even any estimation that this deal could really get into motion until sometime like 2030, something so far away that it's not going to be relevant by the time we get to 2028. So any Saudi cash going to the United States because of this is just literally a handout to the United States.

#Alastair Crooke

It's just a payoff.

#Danny

Yeah, it is.

#Alastair Crooke

So it doesn't symbolize anything, really. It doesn't symbolize anything except business as usual.

#Danny

No, exactly. And then the other side of this, as you said, the U.S. incurring significant losses because of these processes happening. I mean, if we look at this from even just a recent historical perspective, you had, not too long ago, before October 7, 2023, you had Israel and the United States behaving like they were sitting very pretty on their own ambitions in the region, so much so that the U.S. felt like it could turn around and say, "We can just leave this where it is. Things are going in our direction regardless." Then you had Syria. Then you had, of course, October 7th and all these events.

And now everything looks different, very different. You even have protests in Syria, and you have Israel—the election coming up, the fact that, you know, as I mentioned before, they're very concerned about what's happening to Bab al-Mandab because of Yemen's revolution. I mean, it's a very different region now, as you said. And so I'm wondering if you could help the audience understand just how recent history makes this even more significant, if we look at it from further beyond February 28th, even in the last decade or so. It's been massive changes. Your thoughts on this?

#Alastair Crooke

Well, I mean, we've been going through that. I mean, it has been portrayed and looked as if Israel was on a winning streak because they had very obvious, sort of highly publicized, if you like, successes, sort of giving people exploding pagers and such, and the killing of Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah leadership. And in these sort of wars, they don't follow a simple course. They sort of go one side or the other side. But the reality is that actually Israel is now in deep crisis, really deep crisis, because the election is coming up.

And it looks as if it's certainly—the polling throws a swing towards the right in Israel. And Netanyahu, having been very low in the polls, is starting to look a tiny bit better. But the divisions in Israel are profound. And the divisions are really internal as well, because the chief of general staff has told the cabinet, and he said, "I'm turning on all the warning signs. The IDF will implode. We would need seven or eight times the IDF to manage what we're doing now. We just cannot continue like this. We are overstretched. The idea of discipline is breaking down. Its logistics are breaking down."

#Danny

Its ability to operate is breaking down.

#Alastair Crooke

I'm not saying that.

#Danny

That's what the chief of staff told the cabinet.

#Alastair Crooke

It was reported not in the English-language press, but it was widely reported in the Hebrew press. And so it's going in, and the divisions between, if you like, the groups, if you like, particularly the settler groups and their support from Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and a cohort of very hardline rabbis that support them, about a thousand of them, against the army and against the Supreme Court. So you have, you know, the Kingdom of Judea at war with the State of Israel. And it's really becoming that, very much so. And I don't know what's going to happen in this election, but it's very close to violence even now, civil unrest and violence. They're talking about it.

And also the right are suggesting, to cement a win in this election, they're going to stir up a conflict in the West Bank, in Gaza, to start up, provoke an intifada in the West Bank, from which they will expel as many Palestinians as they can from the West Bank. And then they may also do a provocation at Al-Aqsa, Temple Mount, the Haram al-Sharif, whatever you call it. And that will set off the intifada almost certainly, because Al-Aqsa is a symbol not of Shiism, Sunnism, this front. This is a

symbol of the whole of Islamic civilization of the last thousand years. I mean, it would have a huge, century effect. So I think people should be very worried about the outcome of this election, and so should Mr. Trump, and so should the Americans.

Netanyahu is betting everything on winning this election. He's down at the casino putting all of his chips on red. And if it doesn't turn out that way, I don't know what will happen in that country. It's very, very precarious. We follow it quite carefully, as you know. And if you look at the last ones we've just issued today, selections from the Hebrew press, I mean, you see former major generals, Major General Brick, saying, you know, it's catastrophic, it's going to break down. I mean, major generals don't go on record that easily in Israel to say something like that, that Israel is collapsing. But if you look at what we've written, you'll see it's all set out. You can see it on our Substack.

#Danny

Yeah. Well, Alistair, this was a great program. And I think that's a great place to end because, you know, oftentimes Israel now is being forgotten as a major force, especially of destruction in the region, as these major processes with Iran and Yemen continue to take shape. The U.S. is the focal point at this moment of this massive energy crisis. So Israel's still there, and what happens to it, both internally and how it moves, is going to be critical in what happens in this region and the world. So, Alex, I want to make sure everybody knows that in the video description, Conflicts Forum Substack is there so people can subscribe and support all of that hard work that you are doing, as well as I want to thank everyone for tuning in. I want to thank all the generous Super Chats. Alistair, I will give you the final word as I pull some of these up on the screen to acknowledge them. Your final thoughts before we head out of here.

#Alastair Crooke

It's a sort of reset. It's a restoration of the Middle East as it was before the American intervention. It's slowly, inexorably shifting back to a different power setting, different power paradigm.

#Danny

Yeah, great. All right, everybody, hit the like button before you go. Thanks to everyone who gave a Super Chat. Thanks to all the moderators, of course, who came today to help with the chat. Be sure to hit that like button. Check out Conflicts Forum Substack. I'll be back tomorrow, 2 p.m. Eastern with KJ Noh.