

US Gulf Empire Collapses, Ukraine War Escalation in Kiev | Larry Johnson

Why lose in one war if you can simultaneously lose two? That seems to be new strategy of the US empire as it is headed toward escalation but ultimately regional defeat in Ukraine and the Gulf. But is it real or just an elaborate scheme to lull us all into believing that the Empire is crumbling? Larry Johnson argues that Iran has exposed deep weaknesses in American military power, from vulnerable Gulf bases to overstretched aircraft carriers. Drawing on his recent Russia visit, he discusses Moscow's outlook, Ukraine's battlefield prospects, and the danger of direct conflict with Europe. He also warns that damaged energy infrastructure could prolong shortages and inflation worldwide. The conversation examines China's resilience, satellite navigation, Pakistan's balancing act, and the potential consequences of renewed fighting between Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Ansar Allah movement. Larry's Links: Sonar21: <https://sonar21.com> Larry Johnson Substack: <https://larryjohnson.substack.com> Counter Currents YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@counter_currents_channel Larry Johnson Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/user?u=80288936> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Larry's Russia visit and Western narratives 05:00 Russia, Europe and the risk of wider war 15:12 Larry's prediction for Kyiv and Ukraine 19:05 Hormuz, diesel and a prolonged energy crisis 23:39 Will economic warfare against China backfire? 28:54 Iran and the vulnerability of U.S. military power 40:46 China, Iran and the changing strategic balance 44:12 Pakistan, Yemen and the Saudi stakes

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today for an update with the man in the hat, the cigar, and the Hawaiian T-shirt, our Larry Johnson. Larry, welcome.

#Larry Johnson

Hello, my friend. Good to see you, Pascal.

#Pascal

Good to see you, too. Larry, you recently were in Russia, and can you maybe give us a short update on what you've learned over there? We spoke already once about this, but I was wondering if what happened in the meantime with the increased attacks on Kyiv is somehow, again, throwing a new

light on what you've discussed over there already. And also in regard to the discussions in the Valdai Club that just happened last week, if something new came out that kind of, you know, rekindles what you've learned in Russia.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, no, look, it was—this was my eighth trip. I had to spend time both in Moscow and St. Petersburg. You know, the Western narrative that the Russian economy is on the verge of collapse is—you know, you had Con Coughlin write this ridiculous piece in the Telegraph claiming, "Oh man, Russia's going the same way that the Soviet Union did under Brezhnev. It's, you know, spinning itself into oblivion with defense spending, and it's on the verge of collapse." Oh my God. I mean, that stuff is so delusional. And what's so disturbing about it is that so many people in the West believe it. And I did a rebuttal to Coughlin's article, pointed out that unlike the Soviet days, when they didn't really have this robust oil and gas industry, they do now.

They're able to supply all their oil and gas, and despite Western claims, you know, Trump's insistence that Ukrainian attacks on the refineries have crippled Russia domestically, no one has it. I saw some gas lines in Moscow, but again, I'm not sure if those were unusual or normal because they weren't massive. You'd have this one narrow piece of highway that sort of follows a creek that runs from Kremlin up into the northeast corner. It's heading to RT, and they've got these little gas stations on the side that can handle two or three cars. So, you know, like I buy my gas at a place called BJ's. It's one of these massive shopping clubs. Well, they've got 14 stalls for cars, so they can handle a large number. And even there, I've seen in the past where you've had, you know, 20 cars backed up waiting to get gas, 40 cars.

Well, you know, that's why I saw two or three or four cars here and there. The notion that Russia's diesel exports are dependent upon those refineries misses the point entirely. Most of the Russian oil that's exported and turned into diesel, that hasn't been touched. I mean, that's still flowing. That hasn't been disrupted at all. Putin's decision to essentially take the gloves off and turn this into a war footing as opposed to a special military operation has, I'd say, widespread support. And I was there, you know, my last weekend there was for the elections that took place on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so 18th, 19th, and 20th. Then on the 20th, they had, you know, news media reported this massive drone strike, 160 drones. You know, I didn't hear a damn thing.

I woke up in the morning to hear that report and went, "Oh." And I looked outside, and I could see some smoke still drifting. I was up in an area called Moscow City, which is about six, seven miles north of Red Square. And, yeah, there was some smoke in the—this was 9:30 in the morning—from the refinery that had been hit in southern Moscow. But within an hour, all that smoke was gone. And apparently they got the fire out pretty quick down at the refinery, because I was down in southern Moscow later that afternoon—didn't see any smoke, nothing.

#Pascal

So, I mean, the situation for Moscow and for Kiev are simply incomparable, right? I mean, Kiev is getting hit and pounded like there's no tomorrow, which for the city there might not be if this continues much longer. But the narrative from the West still, to this day, to October 2026, is Russia's on the verge of collapse. Ukraine, you know, whatever it takes. And we keep supporting Ukraine, by which they mean just shoveling weapons in there and young men to the front to die over there in the east, busified. The busification keeps going on. So, I mean, it just seems to be getting more and more desperate, while at the same time now we in Europe also hear all of these rumors about, you know, a larger war with Russia. Everybody in Europe is now screaming the Russians are going to attack us. And Vladimir Putin himself had to say, "We are not planning on attacking anyone. Stop this stupid narrative." But this narrative is not ending.

#Larry Johnson

Russia is not going to just on its own attack Europe. They will attack weapons factories in Europe, in Germany, France, and the U.K., if those countries continue to produce weapons and then those weapons are used with, you know, they cause some significant damage inside Russia. At that point, Russia will hit those factories.

#Pascal

Right.

#Larry Johnson

Pepe Escobar and I had a good interview with General Ahti Lehtinen. I'll be posting that later tonight as well. And he just—it was very matter-of-fact. He says, "Look, we're going to be at war with Europe." He wasn't suggesting that Russia was going to go on the offensive against Europe, but he was just simply saying the combination of the rhetoric and their actions is going to create a situation in which we're going to have no choice. And that's what the Europeans need to be aware of. They need to, like, back off, take a deep breath, sit down, and accept Russia's offers to talk.

#Pascal

I heard exactly the same thing from Stas Krapivnik last night. It's like the Russians, through all ranks, and I think your discussions also with some of the Russian leadership, like Sergei Lavrov, confirmed that as well. The Russians, all ranks, are now getting ready to have a war because they think that the Europeans will make it inevitable. The Europeans are so ready and are in such a war frenzy and in such a mass formation moment that they're going to war with Russia, and Russia then having to defend Russia becomes inevitable. So we have this self-fulfilling prophecy now already on

the horizon. And the only way to avert that would be to change the narrative in Europe. But this seems to be just as far away as before. Although my question is, the European or NATO strategy has always been salami slicing, right?

Salami slicing themselves into Russia, into deep strikes into Russia and so on. And at the same time, rely on this Article 5 kind of, you know, the boogeyman, saying like, "Oh, if you ever hit even just one facility in one of the NATO territories, then automatically Article 5, and everybody will latch on you, Russia." And Russia has actually tried to avoid that. But if now the calculus keeps changing and say, like, okay, war with Europe is inevitable, then what will be the strategy to manage that kind of problem of, like, all or nothing? Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on NeutralityStudies.com. Links below. See you there.

#Larry Johnson

Russia still will be very, let's say, precise in their strikes. You know, really, the strikes in Kiev have been going on for like two months, and they've been, you know, hundreds of missiles and drones every night, you know, day after day after day. What's remarkable: hardly any civilian casualties. Because with that amount of firepower, you would expect, if they were just firing indiscriminately, which they're not. So the Russians still have taken seriously to minimize civilian casualties, even in Kiev. Of course, that's one of the reasons now they're encouraging people: get out, because I think the next phase will be far more destructive. And they want the civilians to evacuate. We can't emphasize enough how the Great Patriotic War, the fight against the Nazis, still lives on today as an issue.

On the 20th of September, I got to visit a private military museum. It is set up by the man who owns—he owns the equivalent of LexisNexis in Russia. It provides databases and legal documents for all law firms. So he's become quite wealthy with it. What he did with his money is he created this... It's a private museum, but it's open to the public, free of charge. So anybody can go there, and you can visit, and you don't have to pay an entrance fee. It's free. But he's got tanks, armored vehicles, staff cars, artillery pieces from World War I up through World War II and through the Cold War. So, you know, I got to climb around on a Sherman. They've got a Sherman tank, and all these tanks work. They've got functional engines.

This Sherman tank was used in the movie *Fury* that starred Brad Pitt, and sitting right next to it is a T-34 tank. So I got to get inside that, and the Russian gentleman that was guiding me goes, "Want to start it?" And I go, "Hell yes." So I got to start the T-34. What I learned from that is that any of the Soviet crewmen that served in tanks, particularly T-34s, in the Great Patriotic War, if they survived, they were deaf as a stone at the end of that war because it is loud. And I don't think they were wearing ear protection at the time. But at one point, this man, his name is Dimitri, took us in and he showed this board, and it had all these people on it. Well, there were his relatives, relatives who had died in that war.

He was remembering grandfathers and uncles on both sides of the family. And then he took us upstairs. They also had some exhibits, like the start to finish of World War II in Europe, and they brought it forward to modern day, when NATO was set up, the map of the NATO countries in 1958, and then what it is today. And the movement of NATO to the east is an unmistakable threat from the standpoint of the Russians. They have not forgotten that. And when you got Friedrich Merz popping off about the Fourth Reich, the Russians take that damn seriously because they lost 27 million people. And what's interesting is this museum is located where one of the front lines was, where the farthest penetration of the Nazis got, up in the northwest corner of Moscow. And they had exhibits in the museum of shells and other things that had been recovered from that battlefield around the property.

#Pascal

No, it's, you know, the way in which this war is being remembered in Russia and the way that it's remembered in Europe are, of course, like complete opposites, right? In Europe, everybody, including the Germans today, they remember it as having resisted the Nazis themselves, right? As in, oh no, my family, we always were against the Nazis, even those who had Nazi relatives. They will tell you that, no, no, no, the new Hitler is in Moscow, right? So it's this absolving of the self, at least for Germany right now, at least twice over: one with the Nazi in Moscow and the other one with the Nazis in Palestine, right? So on both counts, you have to help the Nazis, poor and weak, in order to defend them because Germany learned its lesson, which, I mean, tragically enough, now turns out to be, of course, the exact opposite.

I mean, question, though, like, how do you think that this change in the battlefield is now impacting this? Because, like, these strikes on Kyiv cannot be ignored anymore. And although right now the Western media still does a hell of a job at ignoring that the front line itself in the Donbas is also moving, and that the Ukrainians are on a very serious back foot and are losing their last fortifications, they are still ignoring that. But Kyiv is unignorable. So do you have any hope that this narrative changes, especially also because, like, actually in the United States, to me, the reporting from The New York Times, Washington Post, and so on seems to be a little bit more nuanced than what we get in Europe. I mean, Europe is on full war propaganda footing, whereas in this core of the empire, the discourse seems to be still more free.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, it will change when the Russians enter Kyiv. That'll be the final wake-up call to the West that, hey, guys, you're losing. And I think Russia will take Kyiv. They're going to move on Sumy here within the next month or so. And once they have Sumy, then they've got a straight highway shot down to Kyiv.

#Pascal

Why do you think that is? Because in my mind, I always thought they would go for Odessa first, and now it seems they're doing that at the same time.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, because I think once they basically cut the head of the snake off, then it's easy to take the body down in Odessa. I think taking out Kyiv will be the first step. They've essentially neutered Odessa. You know, the Black Sea blockade, it's strangled. Nothing's going in, nothing's going out, nothing of any consequence. And so it's no longer an economic gateway for Ukraine. It's a dead end. And so the combination of the economic strangulation from the south, the military movements on the ground in eastern Ukraine from Sumy all the way down to Kherson, and then this methodical destruction of infrastructure, production facilities, communication facilities, power facilities, and the bridges—starting to take out the bridges—I think has finally gotten through to them that Russia is going to cut off the logistical supply to the armies of the East.

#Pascal

So basically, a preparation for splitting the country in half, right? Something in the West is going to be left, but the consolidated part in the East will be an occupation zone, or whatever it will be.

#Larry Johnson

Actually, I think Russia will do what they did in September of 2022. They'll allow the people to vote: do you want to come back with Russia, or do you want to stay on your own? It's up to you.

#Pascal

And they'll allow the voters to go forward without coercion.

#Larry Johnson

And the people say, "No, we'd really rather stick with Ukraine." I think Russia will honor that. Watching how the election was run for the Duma, and there were a number of international observers there, and I got to have lunch with them and talk to some of them, they were all very impressed with what they saw from how the election was being conducted. You know, no political pressure, no intimidation. People could come in and freely vote. What was interesting is they had a much higher turnout in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson than they did in other areas of Russia. Other areas of Russia were like, "Oh, it's the Duma election." They weren't that excited about it. But the folks in the newly liberated territories, at least liberated from Russia's standpoint, they were quite excited to vote. And they were up in the upper 70s.

#Pascal

Yeah. No, I mean, as so often, you know, what then comes out in these elections will also heavily depend on how you slice the pie, right? If you had an election in Spain, in the Basque territory, Spain and France, they would immediately choose to be independent. But if you have the whole of Spain and the whole of France vote on the independence of the Basque territories, you will have a resounding no, because it will outweigh this. So the question will be how to slice that. But let's maybe shift gears a little bit to Iran. We have had some news that actually much more oil was coming out last month in September from the Strait of Hormuz than we had expected. Mohammed Marandi told me that is propaganda. That's not true.

#Larry Johnson

He's absolutely right. It's a total lie. Look, there was physical damage. I'm in touch with an energy analyst that's on the ground out there. The physical damage that's been done to the pumping stations, the oil terminals, all that infrastructure—it's going to be five years to get it all repaired. Five years. Right now, if they opened up tomorrow with free flow, they'd be lucky to get out maybe 50% of what they had exported prior to February 28th. So this is Western propaganda. It's ridiculous. They keep insisting, "They said, 'Oh, we got more oil out now than they were pumping prior to February 28th.'" Okay, if that's the case, why are you putting the squeeze on France and Germany to go into their strategic reserves? Because if you've got plenty of oil, what's the problem? And the point is, they don't have plenty of oil.

#Pascal

And actually, it's getting worse now because China is starting to refill, to go back up to its normal levels. I mean, the most fantastic thing was that China was basically able to cut its oil imports by 50%. That's an insane level for a country that big, which has also quite a flex of China's muscle, just to say, like, by the way, dear world, have a look at what we are able to do if need be. So all of this would indicate that actually the petrol, the oil, the diesel crisis will get worse over the next couple of months. And of course, in the Northern Hemisphere, we are headed toward winter. What will this do?

#Larry Johnson

This diesel crisis is going to persist for at least the next year and a half. It's not going to get fixed anytime soon. And it will be winter that will force the reality to dawn on people, because it's not just the shortage of the crude oil that's used to make the diesel. It's also the shortage of diesel itself because some of the refineries aren't operating. I mean, the refineries that operated previously in the Persian Gulf, they are not operating. So they're not sending out diesel. And whatever Europe is doing to store diesel, it comes with an expiration date. It's like trying to store milk. The milk doesn't stay fresh forever. It's the difference between storing milk and storing a good bottle of wine. You can put a good bottle of wine away for 20, 25 years, and no problem.

Put the milk in there and you're going to have cottage cheese or something in a month or so. The same thing applies to diesel. Once it's stored, you've got to use it. You've got to have a turnover of the stock because it gets contaminated. And then contaminated diesel doesn't quite run as well as others. But it's not just the diesel. It's not just the oil. It's the nitrogen, the urea, and the sulfur that play an important role in fertilizer. So you're going to have a food crisis. You've got the helium for computer chips. You've got inflation. What this war has done is it's built-in inflation that's not based upon somebody printing too much money. This is inflation because there's an actual shortage of these critical items. And as people chase the shortage, the price of it is going to spike. It's going to be a global spike. And we're already seeing that.

#Pascal

No, the surest way to create inflation is by increasing the price of energy, because guess what? You can't even get any kind of Amazon goods to your doorstep without fuel, right? And if that gets more expensive, everything gets more expensive. But I wonder about your interpretation of this, because currently we have two strains out there. One strain that basically argues this is a self-inflicted wound: the United States is shooting itself in the foot because it doesn't comprehend how the entire system actually works. The other strain is what Brian Berletic and a couple of others are saying, like, look, overall, this is still within the playbook of trying to fight China.

And actually, I just was in Istanbul, and a couple of Chinese colleagues were presenting there as well. And they interpreted it as such as well. This is meant to hurt the Chinese economy and prevent China from keeping up the economic growth that they've had over time. So the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz is part and parcel of the United States' playbook at trying to get at China. Which one of the camps, or what type of interpretation of those, do you think are valid, and which one is just over-interpreting what's happening?

#Larry Johnson

Well, I do not deny that the United States would like to hurt China. But if this is a strategy, shutting down oil, liquid natural gas, sulfur, urea, and helium, the United States is somewhat insulated from that, but it's not insulated from the rest of the world. And it does inflict great pain on the rest of the world, and it's causing economic disruption in the United States. The United States, with its debt-to-GDP ratio now of 128, 130 to one, you know, I mean, its deficit now is larger than its GDP, right?

#Larry Johnson

Now, it got away with this in the past because it could sucker in all these other countries to buy up its debt, to buy the U.S. Treasury bills. Well, what are we seeing? Countries are not lining up to buy. They're doing the exact opposite. They're buying up gold, and they're also dealing in foreign currencies other than the dollar. So this was an attempt. I don't even want to call it a Pyrrhic victory because it's not even going to be a victory for the United States. China comes out of this stronger.

Why? Because China's not oil-dependent. China has made tremendous strides on the electric vehicle front. I mean, not just cars, trucks, massive trucks, mining trucks, trucks that work in the mines that are self-driving. All of a sudden, it has put China at an advantage of working in mines that the traditional Western technology of diesel-fired vehicles can't even compete with.

So, and then China anticipated—I don't know if they anticipated this—but by God, they've got plenty of electricity to power through, and electricity that, again, it's not dependent upon oil. They've got a broad swath of sources, whether it's nuclear or hydro or solar or coal or oil in some cases. But they're not tied to any one area where they're vulnerable. The United States is. The United States absolutely is, which is why Trump's in this desperation mode, trying to pretend everything's fine, folks. Oil prices are coming down. Not coming down. There's been a temporary slowdown of diesel price. It's come down a little bit in the area where I live, but that's not going to last because, again, the market manipulation that's been taking place in the oil market in particular is just out of control. And when it lands, it's going to land with a thud.

#Pascal

Okay. You know, it's quite interesting. Also, the Chinese colleagues, they have this ambivalence about this. On the one hand, they interpret what's happening in Iran as meant against them. On the other hand, they are saying, like, well, last time the United States had a war in the Middle East and West Asia with Iraq, it bought us 10 years of peace and tranquility on our side so that we could develop. So probably the Iran war might do that as well. But overall, because overall it looks as if there is no fast solution to this. I mean, Marandi and others keep saying, like, Iran is ready for a long fight. They fought Iraq for eight years. This wouldn't be new to them, to kind of dig in. And it seems to me the United States is at a similar place at the moment, right? Donald Trump might restart the kinetic phase of the war sometime, probably after the midterms. But it seems like both sides seem to just plan with these scenarios now.

#Larry Johnson

Well, the U.S. is in a very, very different position today compared to what it was in 2004 after the start of the Gulf War. It had secure bases throughout the Gulf. No longer. It's lost those bases. The base, the Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain, it's history. It's done. It's toast. It ain't coming back. But in tandem with that, they've lost critical radar systems. I mean, huge—they lost a billion-dollar radar system in Bahrain and a billion-dollar system in Qatar. They're beyond repair. They'd have to build new ones. And building new ones is going to take some years.

And it's not clear that the United States has the funding for it or can get the actual parts for it. Because guess what? Some of it depends on rare earth minerals that come out of China, and China has put some restrictions on those. The U.S. has been forced to withdraw military from bases that once it felt very comfortable at, particularly Al Udeid. I went through Al Udeid back in 2006, so 20 years ago now. And it was the home of what they called the Combined Air Operations Center, the

CAOC. Now, that was AFCENT, the Air Force Central Command. So under CENTCOM, Central Command, you have this AFCENT, which is a subsidiary of it.

Now, its real headquarters is at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. But, you know, for more than, I'd say more than 30 years, the de facto headquarters had been there in Qatar. They closed that just before the start of the war, recognizing it was vulnerable. And now they're back at Shaw Air Force Base. So the CAOC is not operating there. And plus, its prior operation depended heavily upon this billion-dollar radar that no longer exists. Iran destroyed critical infrastructure for the U.S. military to sustain itself there, and it doesn't have any current plans to get that rebuilt and up and running again because it is, frankly, vulnerable to attack.

#Pascal

So, I mean, Iran managed through its military capabilities to really degrade the United States on that front. On the other hand, what this also showed is, you know, the state of at least the U.S. Navy. I mean, the pictures and so on that we got out of these ships on the high seas and the aircraft carrier, and the length of time it was deployed. And I've just talked to a U.S. veteran over the weekend saying, like, look, among the service members and the veterans, you know, suicide is at an all-time high. Which, I mean, for the veterans, it's mostly PTSD. For the people in active duty, he told me it's other things. I mean, some people just want to get out of this thing, and the last resort is getting out of your life in order to get out of what you've signed up to for at least four years, and some people much longer. So it seems to be quite—also the state of the forces seems to be rather dramatic at the moment. Would you agree? Yeah.

#Larry Johnson

Oh, yeah. Give Andrei Martyanov credit. His book, 2017, *Losing Military Supremacy*. He spelled it out in detail then. So just as an example, the Navy, U.S. Navy, used to have four ships. Let's call them fast resupply ships, so that they could travel at a high speed and they were able to resupply ships like aircraft carriers, destroyers, etc. Well, they got rid of two of them. So now they're down to just two. And now they've got this extended presence out there. And they used to be able to run into Bahrain, reload, or run into Fujairah, reload, and back. They can't do that anymore. They've got to go 2,000 miles south to Diego Garcia. So the aircraft carrier, it goes about 30 miles an hour, 33 knots. So, you know, you figure 24 hours, 600. So it's got about a three-, four-day sail just to get to Diego Garcia to reload, refurbish.

You know, this reflected a complete lack of planning, but also how the decisions that were made 10 years ago—I mean, that decision to cut those ships was made 10 years ago—and nobody foresaw that, you know, we might need four of these. So that already limits what they can do to keep those ships at sea for an extended period of time. They can't keep them properly supplied. And then I described the aircraft carrier as a 20th-century weapon in the same way that a horse and horse cavalry was a 19th-century weapon. The problem was they still tried to use horse cavalry in World

War I. Didn't work out well for the damn horses or riders because there was this thing called machine guns and tanks, which had a decided advantage over those horses.

And it wasn't until, like, 1940 that the United States finally disbanded its cavalry units. Well, here we've got these aircraft carriers. They used to be able to go anywhere. They didn't have to be afraid. They're very difficult to sink. Now they've got to come up against hypersonic missiles. And Iran's got hypersonic missiles. The Chinese have hypersonic missiles. The Russians have hypersonic missiles. Hell, it looks like the Houthis even have some. So now, all of a sudden, the aircraft carrier is no longer safe and secure. And it depends upon really an out-of-date, outmoded air defense system. Yeah. So, yeah, it can't really sustain a presence, or it can't get in, like, close enough to shore to be effective.

#Pascal

No, but the people making the decisions at the moment in Washington, or at least influencing the decisions, seem still to operate under the assumption that anything can be done; you just need to throw enough money at it. I mean, the idea of having a 1.5 trillion U.S. dollar defense budget is that idea, right? Let's throw more money; it will solve the problem. Where will this lead to, especially in these two conflicts, which both at the moment seem to go against the trajectory that the hawks that started it had assumed it would take? But as Alex Christoforou keeps pointing out, the neocons, they don't have a reverse gear, so they keep doubling down. Where do you think this will lead us to? Well, we're in what I call the Wizard of Oz problem.

#Larry Johnson

So if you ever saw that movie, at the end of the movie, Dorothy, her little dog Toto, and her three companions—the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow—they come into the throne room with the great and powerful Oz. And there's this giant orb of a head up front with this booming voice. You know, "I am the great and powerful Oz." Well, the dog runs over and pulls back the curtain, and there's this little old man back there working the levers. And it turns out the great and powerful Oz was not great and powerful. He was just sort of an ordinary guy with a lot of fancy equipment. That's what the U.S. military has become.

The Houthis exposed that most dramatically during, well, during the 18 months, I guess it was, that Operation Prosperity Guardian was in effect. But then Trump changed it to Operation Rough Rider, started it like the last week of March or middle of March. It went through March, all of April, and then they called a halt to it the first of May. Why? Because the Houthis were shooting down an MQ-9 Reaper every week, one a week. Previously, they'd been shooting down one a month. And the role that the MQ-9 Reaper played was it would go out, it would spot a mobile launcher, a Houthi mobile launcher, and then carried HARM missiles and could fire immediately at the launcher.

And the U.S. thought, man, we got a solution to these Houthis. Well, the Houthis figured it out, and they started putting dummy launchers out. So here would come the MQ-9 Reaper, man, it would be blasting the hell out of this dummy launcher. And then the Houthis set up an ambush that would take out the MQ-9 Reaper. And at \$60 million, \$65 million apiece, after you lose seven, that gets pretty expensive. That's almost half a billion dollars of Reapers down the toilet. And then it's gotten worse now during the war with Iran. Iran's been shot down even more. So this is a case where the U.S. relied upon a military capability that it thought was invulnerable and turned out to be very vulnerable.

And then it ends up limiting what it can do. So now we have to keep our ships far enough offshore that they can't be hit by missiles anymore. But by doing that, you then limit the range. You know, like an F-35 on board a carrier deck, if it's 250 miles offshore, well, it only has a combat radius of about 500 to 600 miles. That means it can fly to the shoreline, and then it's either got to get refueled—who's going to bring an aerial refueler over Iranian territory? It could get shot down—or it has to turn around and go back. So it limits what it can drop or launch from the shore, which limits its penetration into Iran.

So these problems add up, and it turns out the United States has spent trillions on these aircraft carriers that are now really big white elephants. They're not the magic solution that they used to be. They're vulnerable. They're expensive. And then the destroyers that accompany them to protect them, they're carrying these vertical launch system tubes. Once they fire those tubes, they're out. They can't reload at sea because somebody else thought it was a great idea: "Oh, we'll just put ports around the world and sail into those ports and reload." Well, now the closest reloading spot is Diego Garcia, again, 2,000 miles away.

#Pascal

And the entire state of what you just described depends on the Iranians and the Ansar Allah and so on not developing missiles with a longer range. The longer the range, the further it will push away the Americans. And if I had to guess, I would say this is probably what they're currently working on.

#Larry Johnson

Well, not just them. The Chinese reportedly have provided the Iranians with some weapons systems they'd like to test—anti-ship missiles. And China also was critical in supplying the BeiDou system, which is a Chinese version of GPS. And that dramatically improved the accuracy of Iranian missiles, because what they didn't realize previously, they were using Western GPS, and the West had built a backdoor into it so they could go in, manipulate the data so that the Iranian missiles were actually not on target.

#Pascal

You know, this is another area that we need to look at because I think it went under the radar, like the capabilities of these different states in outer space. Okay, we all know about Starlink. But I recently found out the Japanese also developed a system that a lot of the airplanes—actually civilian airplanes—are using now in order to get decent-speed internet on these airplanes. On my way back from Turkey, for the first time ever, I uploaded a YouTube video to YouTube on the airplane. It was fast enough for that. But you know what was fascinating? On the way down, this system worked perfectly until, because it was Turkish Airways, we entered Russian airspace. And the whole signal got butchered and, you know, it became super spotty and super slow, to the point where it broke down for minutes and for quite a while.

And I cannot... And this was, you know, precisely when we entered Russia. And as we went out of it, I think we came out of Uzbekistan or something like that, and then over the Caspian, right? And then it recovered. So it was clearly, clearly a successful kind of satellite interference from the Russian side without actually... electronic warfare. Yeah, but on a very sophisticated level, because the airplane could fly, right? None of the other systems was impacted. It was just a data connection to the satellites from one of the other systems. And that kind of jamming, for obvious reasons, is now necessary in Russia, and they're able to do that. So it's fascinating how far this now is going. Yeah, no, it is.

#Larry Johnson

The one thing the West, again, the West has miscalculated with respect to Iran. I think Bessent and Trump genuinely believe that they're putting enough economic pressure on Iran that it's going to have to cave. But they're forgetting that, unlike—that might have been the case four years ago because Iran did not have these agreements in place with Russia and China. They do now. And four years ago, Russia and China were still sort of tied to JCPOA, where they were willing to uphold the sanctions. Not now. They both came out and said, "Enough of that. We're not doing that anymore." And then on top of it, Pakistan has stepped up with Iran and said, "Hey, we got you covered." You know, they're coming into our ports, and it goes through our ports and goes straight into Iran over six different routes.

#Pascal

But Pakistan, Pakistan is playing such an interesting role right now because, on the one hand, yes, it seems to have the back of Iran in certain respects. On the other hand, it's also part of the deal with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, a kind of Sunni alliance, which, I mean, is stillborn, but still they did that. How do you evaluate the Pakistan situation? Because Pakistan is actually also a good ally of the United States. I mean... yeah.

#Larry Johnson

They're trying to stay friends with everybody. And they're not going to succeed in that. You know, they announced today in Saudi Arabia that Turkey and Pakistan are coming to provide military assistance to deal with the Houthis. I just laughed. You know, Pakistan and Turkey are not going to send—let's put it this way: Are they going to send ground forces? If they do, it's going to take—the only way they can do it is by air. And to send troops with combat loads, if you do it on a C-17, you can carry 123. Well, the Houthis got like a 350,000-man army, so you're going to need more than 4,000 guys on the ground.

So my point is, it would take quite a while to get in Saudi and Pakistani troops that might have any chance of making a difference on the ground. The problem is the Houthis are moving so fast. They're hitting so many targets. They've taken out the East-West Pipeline. The West says, "Oh no, they've repaired it. They're pumping oil." No, they're not. I got it from someone who's involved with that pipeline. It's dead. They've taken out four pumping stations. There are a total of 13 pumping stations along that line. You take out two, you curtail its ability to push oil through. You take out four, you've got an even bigger problem. We saw tonight that the Houthis hit in Jeddah.

They hit King Khalid Air Base. They hit it in Riyadh. So the Houthis—and then on the ground, you know, there was this, in the morning, the PLC was touting, "Oh, we've made these major advances in the south." That lasted about six hours. And then the Houthis mounted their counteroffensive, swept them back off the field of battle. They have closed the cauldron around Taiz. There was another area just south of Taiz that was still an open path. They surrounded and captured that. The PLC members are now surrendering. So the Houthis are in a position where they can do—they very well may completely destabilize the Saudi regime. We could see the Saudis lose control of their country.

#Pascal

The question I had was, why would the Saudis restart the kinetic phase of that war? I mean, they never went to peace with Ansar Allah, but they did that on themselves. And Leith Marouf told me, look, this was not the Saudi decision. This was the United States telling them, attack. And then we keep pretending that we're neutral and that we're not going to intervene and so on, because that's the modus operandi. He interprets the entire Arabian Peninsula as one large colonial war against the indigenous people, basically. Do you see it like that too, that this is the regime, Saudi Arabia, that just carries out the orders from the United States, but it seems to be on the losing end, and the U.S. keeps pushing, pushing, pushing until they're basically used up?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, there's nobody thinking this through. Again, this one analyst I'm relying on for his analysis of the energy sector, he was writing me in mid-June, okay, about what was going to happen in Yemen. I mean, he called it. What we've seen unfold in Yemen, he was telling me in June, keep an eye on

Yemen. This is going to erupt, and it's going to go into war, et cetera. So I fully—I think Laith is right. This was not a Saudi, you know, they were sitting around bored one night, MBS playing some, you know, video game and said, "Hey, I've got a great idea. Let's go and attack Sanaa, and let's try to knock out a plane coming back from the Ayatollah's funeral." Now, I think he had some outside encouragement, and foolishly, because I'm not sure he's a really smart guy.

I know nothing about his mental faculties, but somebody who was smart would have thought, okay, what are the possible repercussions of this? If I do this, what's the likely blowback? But, you know, when you put Yemen next to Saudi Arabia and say, okay, we're going to use air power, we're going to cripple all the infrastructure in Yemen, you don't got a lot of infrastructure to cripple. Whereas Saudi is a big, fat, ripe target. There's all sorts of infrastructure to cripple. And the Yemenis, Ansar Allah, have been doing it in spades. And it is hurting Saudis severely. And it's affecting their cash flow. They don't get the oil money coming in that they once had. And they're going to be in a position where they're going to have to start selling U.S. Treasury bills, which is going to create another nightmare for Scott Bessent.

#Pascal

Well, I don't wish him, you know, quiet sleep, to be honest, but let's see where this is going. Larry, we're nearing the time because you've still got a lot of interviews ahead of you. People want to follow you. Where's the best place to find you? I mean, you're running the very important Sonar 21 homepage, but you've got more places by now, don't you?

#Larry Johnson

Well, yeah, sonar21.com, you know, the mothership. I've got a Substack, LarryCJohnsonSubstack.com. I also do a Patreon page. It's all the same material. I publish it on Sonar 21. I put it on other platforms just as insurance in case one gets shut down. I've got some backups. I also have a YouTube channel, Counter Currents. I do about a video interview a week. I'll be interviewing John Mearsheimer on Wednesday. John and I got to spend some great time together. Wonderful man. We went through the Hermitage together.

#Pascal

That must have been a fascinating time. I've been trying to get through to him, but I can't. I mean, he must be a busy man. It's just like you. I mean, the amount of things to do is crazy right now.

#Larry Johnson

He's like the beautiful woman on a desert island with a hundred guys that want to date her.

#Pascal

I'm somewhere down number 56 or something. Anyhow, my greetings to him. And Larry, thank you so much for your time today.

#Larry Johnson

Hey, Pascal. I enjoyed it and look forward to seeing you in November. See you in November. Thank you. Okay. All right, my friend. Thanks.