

# John Mearsheimer: The Case for a Nuclear Iran

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## #Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined today by Professor John Mearsheimer to discuss what appears to be a pending war against Iran. Thank you, as always, for taking the time. My pleasure, Glenn, always good to be here. The U.S. appears to be in the final stages before an attack on Iran. I guess we can conclude this from the buildup of military capabilities and the stated intentions—they all seem to indicate that. However, on the other side, I don't really see a clear outcome here, or a strategy for how victory should be defined. And also, a lot of things can go wrong. Do you think this attack will actually happen?

## #John Mearsheimer

It's almost impossible to feel confident leaning one way or the other. But I actually think a case can be made that, after last night's State of the Union address, it looks like Trump is looking for an off-ramp here. Let me give you my take on it. And again, I want to be clear, I'm not arguing that Trump has decided not to attack, but I think we're leaning slightly in that direction. First, let me start with the broader context and then talk about what he said last night. With regard to the broader context, it's very important to understand that virtually every country in the world—except Israel—does not want us to attack. It's not like the Saudis and the Gulf states are saying, "Here's a great opportunity to attack Iran."

On the contrary, the Saudis are working with the Iranians, and the Gulf states are working with the Iranians to make it clear that they're opposed to this attack and will not participate. The Chinese and the Russians are opposed. The Europeans are quietly opposed. Only Israel is in favor of it. That's point number one. Point number two is that President Trump's military advisers have basically told him, "We do not have a workable strategy. We do not have a plausible strategy for winning this war." This is really quite remarkable. And by the way, he was told the same thing on January 14th,

when he was thinking of attacking Iran that day. His military advisers—and of course General Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is the key person here—were saying that to him. And nothing has changed. We don't have a viable military option.

Third, it's quite clear from news reports in the United States that his political advisers are telling him this is a really bad idea. He's in deep trouble. And what I'm saying here is that the midterm elections are coming up in November. The economy is not in great shape. His poll ratings are way down. And if the Democrats score a big victory in the fall and capture both the House and the Senate—which is possible—he will probably be impeached, or at least there's a good chance he'll be impeached and then convicted. So, in terms of the political waters he's swimming in these days, those waters are shark-infested—very dangerous. And it's hardly surprising that his political advisers are saying, "Do not do this. Do not do this." And again, you want to think about the consequences of a Democratic-controlled Senate and House.

So again, just in terms of the general context, only one country on the planet—Israel—is pushing for this. Number two, his military advisers are telling him that this is an ill-advised attack. And number three, the politics say, "Don't do it." So that's the context. Then you go to what he said last night and what's going on here. He did not say that nuclear enrichment had to be taken off the table. He did not say that Iran has to get rid of its nuclear ballistic missiles. He did not say that Iran had to stop supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. Those have been three demands that have popped up on numerous occasions over the past month or so, but he did not repeat any of them. All he said was that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon.

And he said that what he needs to hear from them—and he has not heard from them—are what he called, in his phrase, "secret words," right? And what are the secret words that he hasn't heard? "We will never have a nuclear weapon." So it's very important to focus on what he said. He was just dealing with the nuclear weapon issue here—not nuclear enrichment, not ballistic missiles, and not support for the Houthis, Hezbollah, or Hamas. He just said he wants to hear from them, "We will never have a nuclear weapon." Those are exactly President Trump's words in the State of the Union address. Well, slightly before his State of the Union address, the Iranian foreign minister, Arachi, said—and I'm going to quote him—"Our fundamental convictions are crystal clear. I underline the words crystal clear."

Iran will under no circumstances ever develop a nuclear weapon. It seems to me, Glenn, those are the secret words—those are what President Trump wanted to hear. And it's now been heard by him, for sure. So when you think about what President Trump said last night, and what the Iranian foreign minister said slightly before the State of the Union address, it seems to me you have the makings of a deal here. And when you marry that to the broader context, it does look like you're not going to have a war. Now, again, I want to emphasize I'm not saying that Trump won't strike Iran. Nobody ever wants to feel any high level of confidence in predicting what he will do. But this morning, as we talk here in the United States—I guess it's the evening there in Europe—it does look like President Trump is searching for an off-ramp.

## **#Glenn**

That's a great point, though, because I kind of assumed the war was unavoidable if there wasn't any possibility of a peace deal. But of course, that was because I knew the Iranians wouldn't move an inch on the issue of enrichment for civilian purposes, the ballistic missiles, or their regional alliances. However, if it's about nuclear weapons, then there's a possibility for a deal. There used to be a deal called the JCPOA. So that's the reason for optimism—if it suggests Trump is walking some of this back.

## **#John Mearsheimer**

Well, it appears, Glenn, I mean, you know, as you know, with President Trump, things can change minute to minute. But it seems that nuclear enrichment is not the issue. And by the way, when I quoted Araghchi before, he said—after saying that Iran, under no circumstances, would ever develop a nuclear weapon—he said immediately afterward that they would also never give up their nuclear enrichment capability. So Trump knows that nuclear enrichment is not on the table as an issue.

I think there's no question that the two sides can work out a deal that looks like the JCPOA. And if the Iranians are smart—and I think they definitely want to avoid a war—and we move to some sort of agreement that resembles the JCPOA, the Iranians will say it's a better deal for both the United States and Iran than the original JCPOA. In other words, the Iranians really have to help Trump walk this one back. Trump has boxed himself in, and if he's going to strike a deal that looks something like the JCPOA, both Trump and the Iranians have to work together to make it look like this is a better deal for everyone, so we can finally put this one to bed.

## **#Glenn**

Let me ask a broader question, just taking a step back. Why the war to begin with? Is there a misplaced threat perception here? How is Iran a threat to the United States? No one's suggesting it has the capability right now to attack the U.S. No one's suggesting it has nuclear weapons either. So if we look at both the capabilities and the intentions, I don't see either the capability or the intention to strike the United States. So do you think the threat perception has been inflated, or why is there suddenly such an imminent need to attack Iran?

## **#John Mearsheimer**

There's only one explanation for what's going on here, and I can give it to you in one word: Israel. I said before, virtually every country on the planet, except for Israel, is opposed to this war. His military advisers are telling him that we have no military option. As you pointed out quite correctly—and nobody, I believe, can rebut what you said—Iran is not a threat to the United States. And when Steve Witkoff says things like “the Iranians are a week or two away from developing a nuclear

weapon,” everybody at this point recognizes that this is sheer nonsense. We're doing this because of pressure from Israel and the lobby inside the United States.

And very few people will say that explicitly, because in the United States, and in the West more generally, you have to tread lightly when you talk about Israel. The same thing happened with the Iraq War in 2003. If you look at the book that Steve Walt and I wrote on the Israel lobby, we have a whole chapter on the Iraq War. And there is absolutely no question that Israel and the lobby played a central role in pushing the United States into that war. It was not Israel and the lobby alone, but Israel and the lobby played a central role. We document that very clearly. And we didn't even have access to government files at the time, but it was easy to document it.

Of course, when the war went south, Israel and its supporters went to great lengths to say that Israel and the lobby had nothing to do with pushing us into that war. But they did. If you look at the literature on the Iraq War—what's been written since about its causes, in other words, why the United States did this—hardly anybody discusses Israel. And if they do discuss Israel and the lobby, they dismiss those two forces, Israel and the lobby, because they fully understand they'll get into a lot of trouble if they blame Israel and the lobby in any way for causing the Iraq War.

So what we have here in the West is this completely distorted discourse about Middle East politics that leaves Israel out of the story, when it is, in fact, often the key factor driving the train. And that's what's going on here. Just think, Glenn, about all the times Benjamin Netanyahu has come to the White House over the past year to visit President Trump. He hasn't come to talk about European-Israeli relations. He hasn't come to play tiddlywinks. He's come to talk about Iran. And his last visit was prompted by the fact that he thought Trump was getting cold feet about attacking Iran. This just goes to show you that Benjamin Netanyahu is profoundly committed to getting the United States to attack Iran for Israel. That's what's going on here.

## **#Glenn**

It's a bit of what you said. It's also a bit of an indictment of academia these days as well. I've noticed the same thing—it's not about getting the story right, it's about obedience to the narrative. But let me ask one question: even if Iran had the capability to attack the United States, surely much of the discussion should have been organized around deterrence, because anyone planning to attack the United States would be out of their mind. The U.S. is by far the most powerful military force on the planet. So this is madness, and anyone could be deterred—especially the Iranians.

So often the argument is organized around the idea that Iran is simply not a rational actor. And this is kind of the image we have of Iran—these fanatic, irrational mullahs who don't care about their own population, who just want to destroy Israel and America at any cost. But how do you read Iran? Is this just war propaganda, or do you see Iran as a rational actor? And if they are rational, what do you see as the threats they're responding to? And, you know, what's the rational way of responding to those threats?

## #John Mearsheimer

The thing is, Israel and the lobby have gone to enormous lengths to portray Iran as the devil incarnate. And part of that is describing Iran as an irrational actor—a crazed state that mindlessly supports terrorism, that's interested in destroying Israel, and is, in fact, Glenn, trying to develop nuclear weapons. So as soon as it gets those weapons, it can launch a nuclear attack on Israel and wipe it off the map. That's the basic narrative you hear from Israel and its hardline supporters here in the United States. And, of course, what's going on here, Glenn, is that the Middle East is one giant disaster zone at this point in time.

And the question is, who is responsible for this? A lot of people believe Israel is responsible—that Israel is like a rogue elephant. And the Israelis and the lobby understand this. So what they're doing is portraying Israel as the victim, making the argument that Iran is the state responsible for all this chaos. It's not Israel; it's Iran. And furthermore, Glenn, they want you to believe that Iran cannot be deterred, because it's an irrational state. And that means we need regime change. And really, if we can go beyond that and break the country up, that would be even better.

Because then what we would do is take this rogue elephant off the table. It wouldn't matter anymore. So you have this whole, uh, narrative that's been developed over time in very sophisticated ways. It's amazing the extent to which modern governments can propagandize—modern Western governments, uh, including Israel in this case. Their ability to propagandize is just truly amazing. And you and I know that very well from the Ukraine case as well. But the end result is that lots of people out there believe the narrative you were describing, and I'm just trying to elaborate on that here.

But if you're interested in facts, the truth is that the rogue elephant in the Middle East is not Iran. I want somebody to tell me, when was the last time Iran started a war, right? When did Iran start a war? I don't think modern Iran has ever started a war. You know, you'll hear in the media about Iran attacking Israel twice in 2024, and the rhetoric implies that Iran struck Israel out of the blue, twice—in April and October of 2024. But if you look carefully at those cases, those were retaliations for Israeli strikes against Iran. And this just goes on and on. Iran is not a highly aggressive state by any means.

I don't want to make the argument that Iran, or any state, is always well-behaved and a model citizen in the international system. That's not how international politics works. As we all know, states sometimes misbehave—sometimes they're very aggressive, and so on. I'm not arguing that Iran is a model citizen, but it's not a particularly aggressive state. It's been a victim in almost all the wars it's fought in recent years. Remember, it was Iraq that invaded Iran in the early 1980s; Iran did not invade Iraq. And it's been Israel attacking Iran before Iran attacked Israel.

And Iran, as I said before, was retaliating. In terms of rationality, I think all the evidence shows that Iran is a rational state. When you listen to the foreign minister talk, and when you listen to the

Ayatollah talk, they speak in rational, legal terms. What they say usually makes sense. This is not to say I agree with everything they say, but to make the argument that these are raving lunatics—people foaming at the mouth and just looking for an opportunity to start a war and cause great destruction to the United States or to Israel—I just don't see that.

## **#Glenn**

I agree. I think the image of Iran has been severely manipulated. When I was in Tehran, I knew the propaganda was very fierce, but I almost expected another version of the Taliban. So when you just saw people walking outside—women not fully covered, polite people—you realize how much you've been influenced by the media. But on the issue of rationality and nuclear weapons—does Iran have to be irrational to acquire nuclear weapons? Because I would think there's a very rational argument for why Iran might want to get a nuclear weapon. I just want to make it very clear that this is not a normative statement—that they should get it—but rather a rational, security-maximizing argument. Now, I hope they wouldn't, because I think it would be a disaster.

We discourage regional proliferation. However, if I were advising the Iranian government—and again, if I had Iran's security interests at heart as the first priority—I would see a rational argument for why they might want this ultimate deterrent, especially when the most powerful country in the world seems to be seeking to destroy them. I guess what I want to say is that the lesson over the past few decades seems to be that countries that develop these weapons—be it Pakistan or North Korea—are safe, while the countries that abandoned their programs—like Iraq or Libya—were destroyed. So again, just to be clear, this is not a normative argument, but wouldn't there be a rational argument for why Iran would want nuclear weapons?

## **#John Mearsheimer**

I agree completely with what you said—every word. I can't add much to it, but I'll make one or two additional points. First, Israel has nuclear weapons. Does that mean Israel is irrational? No. It was the strategically smart, or rational, thing for Israel to do. If I were David Ben-Gurion, or advising him back in the day, I would have said, "Let's get nuclear weapons." Now, that's not in America's national interest—I'd prefer, as an American, that they not have them. But from Israel's point of view, it made perfect sense.

It was the rational thing to do—to acquire a nuclear deterrent. And what's good for the goose is good for the gander. That same logic applies to Iran, as you laid it out. To take this one step further and go back to Israel, you don't see Israel, the United States, or any other nuclear-armed country, for that matter, moving to get rid of its nuclear weapons. They happen to like their nuclear weapons, and the reason is that nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent. I don't blame the Israelis for wanting to be the only state in the Middle East with nuclear weapons—it makes perfect sense.

My dream is to have an international system where only one country has nuclear weapons—only one country on the planet—and that’s the United States of America. That’s the ideal situation for us. But that doesn’t mean the Russians, the Chinese, or any other country that has nuclear weapons are irrational because they want them too. So I’d just say that the idea that Iran is irrational because it wants nuclear weapons is a laughable argument. But it’s the kind of discourse we have in the West, and I believe, again, that much of that is driven by Israel and the lobby.

## **#Glenn**

You expressed some optimism after Trump’s State of the Union speech that he seems to be walking some of this back. But in the past, it appears he’s been putting himself in a trap—boxing himself in to some extent—because he’s sent all these military capabilities to the Middle East. I think this is the highest concentration since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But there’s also massive pressure coming from Israel. Do you think that walking this whole thing back just depends on hearing the magical words from Iran—that they won’t get nuclear weapons? Because the Iranians have said this consistently over the decades, and they’ve shown a willingness to make these deals with transparency. Do you think that’s enough to defuse the whole situation?

## **#John Mearsheimer**

Uh, it might be. I think that’s the most we can say at this point. I mean, we haven’t talked much about the pressures from the other side, and the story one might tell from that side—the story that leads to war. The truth is that Trump is under tremendous pressure from Israel; there’s no question about that. We just talked about all those Bibi Netanyahu visits to the United States. The Israelis really want us to do this, and we can talk more about that, because I think they see a window of opportunity here—and they see that window closing over the long term.

But I think the Israelis want us to jump through that window now and attack Iran. So Israel and, of course, the lobby—which basically does what Israel wants—will put enormous pressure on Trump. And given Trump’s political troubles, and given the Epstein affair, that will really matter. There will be great pressure on Trump from those quarters to go, and he may feel compelled to go for that reason. Second point I’d make, Glenn, is: do you think there’s a clever story that can be told—a story that a clever briefer can tell—about how you can use military force in a limited way, then declare victory, and, in effect, get out of this box that President Trump has painted himself into?

You know, the idea would be that you tell the Iranians you’re going to launch a limited strike and go to great lengths to minimize the damage. Then you declare victory afterward and walk away. And you want them not to retaliate—certainly not in a massive way, as they’ve promised to do. Then you put this all behind us. So there is a limited military option here, and that goes a long way toward addressing General Kane’s warning that we can’t fight a protracted war. We just don’t have the necessary inventory of missiles and bombs to do that.

Yeah. So the story there is that pressure from Israel and the lobby, coupled with the belief that you have a limited military option, may push him to do this. That would be the story on the other side. I think the biggest problem with that story has to do with the limited military option. I think the Iranians have made it clear that if we attack them, they're going to go full bore against us. They're coming back at us hard. And if they do that, we then have to counter-escalate. We can't launch a limited attack and then let the Iranians slam Israel, hit American bases in the Middle East, and shut the Strait of Hormuz. I mean, once the Iranians have taken you up the escalation ladder that far, we really have to hit back hard—as do the Israelis.

And then you're in a full-scale war, and you didn't achieve your goal of keeping it limited. So it looks almost impossible to have that kind of war. I could tell a story where the Iranians would be fools to agree to let the United States or Israel—or both—launch a limited attack and then do nothing. I think the Iranians should understand, and do understand at this point, that the only way to deal with the United States and Israel is to threaten to hit them hard—to make them pay a significant price if they start a war. Because if they get away with a limited attack, they'll come back and try it again.

And if you're the Iranians, you want the deterrence down the road. So I don't think the limited option is viable. I wouldn't be surprised if General Kane and his military advisors have told him that, you know, we can use limited military force, but it will escalate in all likelihood and we'll be in deep trouble then. So I think that just leaves pressure from Israel and the lobby as the main factor driving Trump toward war. What he does is very hard to say. Although, again, I think if you listened to the State of the Union address last night and looked at the overarching factors that inform this crisis, it does look like he's beginning to back away.

## **#Glenn**

But why is it, though, that Israel would be the only country wanting a war with Iran? Because surely they're seeing the same thing we are. It would be a disaster for them if, like back in June, they had to walk the whole thing back after Iran showed it could make both the Israelis and the Americans back off. And if that happens again—even after a larger war where the Iranians are able to inflict a lot of pain on the Americans too—it wouldn't be good for Israel in any way. And it's not going to be possible for Israel to sit this one out.

The Iranians, I think, have made it clear they're not going to pretend that Israel isn't part of this war. So, given that this is a war which can't be controlled, the U.S. doesn't have escalation dominance in terms of deciding when the war starts, when it ends, or how it should be fought. Why does Israel want this? Because surely U.S. credibility and, well, essentially Trump's ability to put maximum pressure and get countries to comply—all of these things are in Israel's interest. So why would they want to gamble all of that away on a war with such an uncertain chance of success?

## **#John Mearsheimer**

Yeah, this is a great question, and I think it's one of the big puzzles of the day when it comes to Iran. I've thought a lot about it, so let me just tell you what my take on it is. Going back to the 12-day war you were talking about—June 13th to June 25th last year—the Israelis were very interested in ending that war. They were running out of defensive missiles, number one. And number two, the Iranians had become quite sophisticated at figuring out how to penetrate Israel's defenses. They were really pounding Israel, which, as we all know, is a very small country and very vulnerable to ballistic missile attacks.

So the Israelis pushed us—the United States—to end the war on June 25th. Fast forward to January 14th of this year. That morning, I remember very well, it looked like President Trump was going to attack Iran—excuse me, attack Iran shortly. It looked like the bombers were loaded, so to speak. But what happened then was that President Trump decided not to attack. And one of the two reasons he didn't was that Prime Minister Netanyahu asked him not to, because he felt—this is Prime Minister Netanyahu—that Israel was not in a position to defend itself. Fast forward to the present: Israel today is pushing the United States to attack. This is a different approach from what we saw on January 14th, and it's different from what we saw at the end of the 12-day war.

So the question is, what's happened to make the Israelis so enthusiastic about an attack now? Here's my take on that. I think, first of all, the United States has more defensive assets in the region, and we can do a somewhat better job of protecting Israel than we could have on January 14th, or at the end of the 12-day war. So I think we—the United States and Israel—are in a better position to protect Israel from ballistic missiles. But it's hardly a perfect situation; a lot of missiles are still going to get through. Now, why are the Israelis willing to accept that? Israel is profoundly committed to destroying Iran. It wants regime change, but what it really wants is to break Iran apart. It wants to do to Iran what's been done to Syria.

It views Iran as the principal threat—or the principal potential threat—in the region, and it really wants to wreck it. And the Israelis, I believe, understand that the window for doing that is closing. First of all, the Chinese and the Russians are moving in to help the Iranians in a big way. And if you study Geopolitics 101, you know that over time the Chinese especially, but the Russians also, will do more and more to help Iran. Furthermore, Iran has figured out that ballistic missiles are the magic weapon for them. They're going to develop more ballistic missiles; they're going to develop hypersonic ballistic missiles that are first-class.

They're going to be able to really blast Israel in a future war. They can damage Israel significantly now, but it only gets worse with time. So this is a window, right? If you're going to go after Iran, if you're going to push for regime change with American and Israeli military power, now is your only chance. Now, you might say, "Glenn, that's true, John, but it doesn't look like this is going to work. It's a very risky strategy." My view is that states pursue very risky—if not extremely risky—military strategies when the political forces pushing them toward war are really powerful. And I think the Israelis view Iran as an existential threat.

And they believe it's absolutely imperative to deal with this existential threat as soon as possible, because again, the window is closing. So I believe the Israelis have decided that, even though things haven't changed much since January 14th, they've changed enough that we have to pursue this extremely risky strategy. And that tells you, by the way, Glenn, that the Israelis will be pushing us not to launch a limited strike. For Israel to get what it wants—for Israel to get us to wreck Iran—and you understand that's what they want. They want us to wreck Iran. They want regime change, plus to break up the country.

We have to really launch a massive attack, and that attack is going to have to extend not over days, but weeks. And again, to go back to General Keane, what he's saying is that we don't have that capability. But the Israelis, I believe, think that once we get into the war and it begins to escalate, we'll have no choice but to continue. It'll be analogous to what you see in Ukraine—once you get into these big fights, they're hard to get out of. And the Israelis want to get us into the fight. If President Trump says, "The last thing I want is a forever war," it's clear that President Trump does not want a forever war. That's not the Israeli view.

The Israeli view is that if you don't defeat them decisively in the early stages of the war and it turns into a forever war for the United States, that's ideal from Israel's point of view as an alternative to a quick and decisive victory. Because in that forever war, the United States remains committed to destroying Iran, and eventually the United States will do that. So I think the Israelis have become very enthusiastic about a war, even though they understand Israel will be slammed—because there's a window of opportunity here, number one. And number two, you'll get the United States to do the heavy lifting, and the United States will ultimately prevail.

## **#Glenn**

Let me ask a last question, because I'm glad you brought up China and Russia. You and Stephen Walt have written about the U.S. being an offshore balancer, and I was thinking along these lines—that there's an interest for the United States to maintain a balance of power on the Eurasian continent, meaning the Eurasian powers balance each other. A key concern is that if the U.S. establishes a very heavy presence on the Eurasian continent, this will incentivize the Eurasian powers to balance against the U.S. and its hegemonic ambitions, rather than balancing each other. That would exhaust the United States through this collective balancing.

Now, from this perspective, it would be in the interest of the U.S. to reduce its presence a bit more so it could pull back, lick its wounds, restore its strength, deal with the debt issue, build up its military capabilities, and so on. And this is also why the U.S. shouldn't push Russia into the arms of China, because that removes this key balance. But now all of this is also pushing Iran into this China–Russia informal alliance, which must be a strategic nightmare for the United States. Do you see any indications that the U.S. recognizes this or wants to avoid such a Eurasian—uh, I guess—alliance? Or does the U.S. think it can knock out Iran, and that's how it prevents the balancing?

## #John Mearsheimer

Well, the United States is in a position today where it's basically trying to take on the world. I mean, let's just talk about Russia, China, and the United States. As I've said on countless occasions, it's in America's interest to have good relations with the Russians. It's in America's interest to shut down the Ukraine war. In fact, it was in America's interest never to start the Ukraine war. But once it started, the United States has a vested interest in putting an end to it. Why is that the case? Because the Ukraine war has resulted in, first, the Americans being pinned down in Eastern Europe and giving huge amounts of armaments to the Ukrainians that it should keep in its inventory for dealing with China and other contingencies.

And then second, we've driven the Russians into the arms of the Chinese, which is a violation of balance-of-power politics 101. The United States and Russia should have friendly relations because the United States is mainly interested in containing China in East Asia. China is the peer competitor, not Russia. So if you look at how we've behaved on the world stage since we moved into multipolarity, it's quite clear that our behavior vis-à-vis the Chinese and the Russians just makes no sense. Now, you take it down another level and bring the Iranians in, and I think what you say is exactly right.

Not only are we pinned down in Ukraine now, but because of the Middle East and because of Israel, we're also pinned down in the Middle East. Can you imagine what's going to happen if we get involved in a forever war against Iran? What would that mean for our ability to pivot to East Asia? Just think about all those naval and air assets we have dedicated to the Middle East today, as we speak. It's truly amazing. And those assets can't be used in East Asia. It's just not in our interest. And then, as you point out, we've driven the Iranians, the Chinese, and the Russians together—and you can add the North Koreans to the mix. Right.

You see the North Koreans fighting alongside the Russians against Ukraine. You see North Korea having good relations with Russia and China, and none at all with the United States. We can't get to first base with the North Koreans. So you have this situation here—going back to the Middle East—where, as we move forward, the Chinese and the Russians are going to have a vested interest in keeping us pinned down there so we can't pivot to Asia. And furthermore, they'll be working with the Iranians to make sure Iran remains a bulwark against the United States and against Israel. This is not in our interest. We should have good relations with Iran.

As you said earlier in the program, Iran is basically not a threat to the United States. That's correct. We should have good relations with the Iranians. We should be working hard to achieve some sort of rapprochement with them, while at the same time making sure they don't get nuclear weapons—which I think is doable. But we have exactly the opposite approach, and the end result is that the United States is in deep trouble on the foreign policy front, whether you look just at the three great powers—China, Russia, and the United States—or whether you go down another level and bring in countries like Iran, North Korea, Israel, and others in the Gulf as well.

## **#Glenn**

You can extend this logic, I guess, if you also look at how the United States is encouraging India to reduce its ties and economic connectivity with Iran—whether in energy or this transportation corridor. All this does is make Iran more dependent on China, which strengthens China and weakens India, making it less capable of balancing China. So a lot of these policies don't seem to make much sense if you look at them through the prism of adjusting to a multipolar distribution of power. But I guess, yeah, that's another big box to open. And I know you have a flight to catch this morning, so thank you, as always, for being so generous with your time and for sharing your ideas and thoughts on this possible war coming up with Iran.

## **#John Mearsheimer**

It's my pleasure, Glenn. I actually thought it was a great conversation. I think we did a really good job of analyzing the basic outlines of the Iran situation. Let's just hope my gut instinct—that we're not going to have a war—proves to be correct. I'm not very confident that we'll avoid war, but there is some reason for hope this morning here in Chicago. And let's hope that we do avoid the war.

## **#Glenn**

We rarely end on a very optimistic note, so this is a nice change. And, uh, yeah, have a great trip.

## **#John Mearsheimer**

Thank you. Bye.