

Larry Johnson: The U.S. Will Exhaust Itself & Lose War Against Iran

Larry Johnson is a former intelligence analyst at the CIA who also worked at the US State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. Johnson discusses why the US will lose the war against Iran. Read Larry Johnson's Sonar21: <https://sonar21.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined by Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst, to discuss the war that's been launched against Iran. Thank you for coming on. As an analyst, how solid do you think Trump's intelligence has been on Iran—in terms of Iran's capabilities, how they're prepared to use those capabilities, and, I guess, the likelihood of succeeding in this war? Is it one of two things?

#Larry Johnson

Either the CIA lied to Trump about Iran's capabilities and Trump believed it, or it's possible the CIA actually told Trump the truth and he ignored it. Unfortunately, I'm not privy to what the current real-world briefings are. I would note that a primary source for U.S. human intelligence comes out of Israel through what's known as liaison reporting. I'm basing one of my conclusions on a recent article by Seymour Hersh regarding Iran. I mean, it was just rife with nonsense—but he was accurately reporting what he was being told. One of the things he was told was that Iran's ballistic missile capability had been virtually wiped out. And I'm going, you know, absolutely not. I've maintained all along that I think Iran's ballistic missile capability right now exceeds 10,000 missiles.

You know, they've had 18 different varieties. And these are, you know, underground shelters. They're mobile launchers—mobile launchers are very, very difficult to find and destroy. The storage units are way below ground, so the United States hasn't unleashed the kind of bunker busters that would be required to try to seal up those tunnels. My understanding is there's not just one entry and exit point; there are multiple entry and exit points. So the United States miscalculated what Iran's response would be. Part of the U.S. impression, or belief, was that there was a simmering sea of disagreement with the Ayatollah—that 80% of the population opposed the Islamic regime—and that all we had to do was give it a slight push and the regime would collapse.

Well, we neglected to learn the lesson that some of us learned after the attacks of 9/11. That was viewed as an external attack, a surprise attack, an illegal attack—and it united the American people, at least temporarily. Partisan differences largely disappeared for a period of time. And then, you know, George W. Bush pissed that opportunity away by starting a war with Iraq. So what's happened now in Iran is that it's unified the population in a way it hasn't been unified since the attacks of last June. This is another area of miscalculation. A third area of miscalculation was the belief that the United States would be able to quickly eliminate the Iranian threat and bring military pressure that would force Iran to surrender—like, "Oh, please stop, we give up."

They didn't pay attention to what Iran did with Iraq. You know, Iraq attacked Iran back in 1980—a nine-year war, ten-year war—resulting in hundreds of thousands of dead Iranians. They didn't give up; they kept fighting until there was a negotiated settlement. That's what they're going to do again this time. Only now, they've got some powerful leverage. They've closed the Strait of Hormuz—good luck trying to get that open. We've already seen the limits of U.S. naval power. They've got ships bottled up in the Persian Gulf that can't get out, and their main port in Bahrain has been destroyed or significantly damaged.

So this is, you know, Iran right now controlling—keeping—about 21 percent of the world's oil from going out. And that's going to have economic repercussions. China, you know, I think really anticipated this. They've been buying up significant stores of oil over the last month. But I still don't think anybody anticipated that the United States and Israel would be so crazy as to start this war with Iran sitting on a significant stash of ballistic missiles and drones. And, you know, they're fighting in their own backyard. The United States has to depend on foreign bases, and when they put these planes in Saudi Arabia or Jordan, they're quite vulnerable.

And that's where we are right now. Over the last twenty—well, you know, this has been going on for about twelve hours. I mean, think about that. It's not like it's been a week already. And in those twelve hours, Iran has done significant damage to the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf—to the point that now Saudi Arabia is declaring war, Syria is declaring war. This is really rich. This so-called terrorist and murderer, al-Shada, who's now dressed up in a Brooks Brothers suit—I mean, he's literally killed civilians, chopped their heads off—is decrying the aggression of Iran. I mean, all he is is another pawn of the West.

#Glenn

But it's been a hell of a first day, as you said. The attacks began early this morning, and of course Iran has been hit pretty hard. But Iran is also retaliating in a big way. There were hits in Jordan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar—Bahrain has been hit a lot, especially this evening—and Israel as well. They've closed, as you said, the Strait of Hormuz. Again, it's too early to say, but how do you see the war going so far? I mean, just as a first-day summary.

#Larry Johnson

Well, it's going to go like it did in June. Iran will continue to fire missiles and drones. They'll use the older stuff first—the less effective ones—to draw out Israeli and U.S. air defense systems. Because the one vulnerability both Israel and the United States face is that, for systems like the Iron Dome, the Patriot missile battery, or THAAD, they have to fire at least two missiles to bring down one incoming missile or even one drone. The problem is, they only produce about 800 of those a year. I've heard the number 700, but let's just say it's 800. So if they're firing two at every missile inbound, once Iran fires 400 missiles and drones—which they're quite capable of doing—you've now exhausted a year's supply of Patriot or THAAD missiles.

There are even fewer. I think they only produce about 150 THAADs on average. So for the U.S. and Israel, if this goes beyond this week—and the only thing that would stop it from going beyond this week is if Israel and the United States surrendered, said, "Okay, we give up, let's stop the war, we're suffering too many losses"—well, that's not going to happen. So the war will continue. The reserves, the stores of the U.S. and Israel, will be depleted, and this will turn into a war of attrition. At that point, Trump's going to have to either stick with it or break his promise.

No new wars, no endless wars in the Middle East. Or he's going to have to figure out some way to, quote, declare victory and pull out—which will leave Israel completely exposed. And deservedly so. So, you know, there's a possibility for a negotiated settlement, but again, Iran's going to dictate the terms. Iran's terms will be that all sanctions have to be lifted. Lift the sanctions, and then we've got something to talk about. But, you know, closing down the Strait of Hormuz is a power play. They didn't wait ten hours to do it—they just immediately declared it shut.

#Glenn

Yeah, I was a bit surprised by how quickly this was done. I mean, we heard from the Iranians that this is how they would respond if there were attacks. So, in terms of striking all the U.S. bases in the region and shutting down the Strait of Hormuz—well, this is exactly what they said they would do. So I guess we shouldn't be too surprised. Where can the escalation go from here, on both sides? What would the Iranians look for? Could they start targeting the U.S. Navy, or is that too far away? How about economic targets, like oil refineries in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere? Or would they hold off on those targets depending on how the Gulf states respond to the attacks?

#Larry Johnson

If the United States and Israel attack oil terminals in Iran, Iran will take out oil terminals in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain—all of them. They won't wait, because they're not going to let you destroy theirs while leaving the others intact, which would serve you. Oh no, no, no. The United States actually has limited ability to escalate without creating greater risk. Right now, it's got two aircraft carriers there. One—the *Gerald Ford*—is well overdue to return to home port.

And they've got major morale problems on board, apart from the sewage problems they've had. Their role right now is basically defensive. The one that's potentially most vulnerable is the *Abraham Lincoln*, which is in the Arabian Sea. I don't know its precise location, but there are reports that Iran has already targeted it with missiles. What's curious is that we're about 12 or 13 hours into this, and there have surely been U.S. casualties, but the Trump administration is trying to keep a lid on those.

#Glenn

I'm also surprised they decided to take this step, because it seems very unlikely to succeed given how confusing the battlefield is. So many variables are outside their control. But where do you think the U.S. will go from here? I don't think this is what they planned for. Obviously, a lot of the Iranian missiles seem to have gone through with some ease. I've seen videos posted online of Patriot missiles just firing everywhere—into nothingness, missing their targets. So something isn't going as it should. What does this leave the United States with? If this turns out to be a real failure, what can the U.S. do? There aren't many pathways to escalate, but it can't just capitulate either. Well...

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, I mean, you're going to have to find a way to declare victory and leave. So let's step back and ask: does the United States have the industrial capability to start mass-producing air defense missiles to keep the Patriot batteries and THAAD systems supplied? The answer to that is no, absolutely not. Because another element here is the Chinese restrictions on rare earth minerals—some of those go into these missile systems as well. So you've got a deficit there. Can they deploy more combat aircraft? They could. To do what? To try to carry out more strikes inside Iran and give Iran a greater chance to shoot them down?

Look, what we know from history—and far be it from me to tell a history professor like yourself this—but we don't have a single instance where air power alone was able to, quote, "win a war." You always had to put troops on the ground. Some would say, well, what about Hiroshima and Nagasaki? You could argue that war was coming to an end anyway; there were other signs the Japanese were willing to surrender. But apart from that—Vietnam, North Korea, Japan, World War II, Iraq War I, Iraq War II, Syria—there's a limit to air power. And, well, Gaza too. Look at Gaza. I mean, Israel has literally leveled the place.

And yet it still can't get in there and control the ground, because Hamas is still fighting, along with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the PIJ. So what about deploying troops? Well, that's a non-starter. For one, I can't even begin to imagine how they could carry out a ground invasion, and the lines of communication that would be required to sustain a ground force of, say, half a million men invading Iran. Plus, we don't really have that many right now. The total Army strength is around 472,000 worldwide. So there are, you know, the ultimate extremes—launching a nuclear attack—but I don't

see Russia and China standing by and saying, "Oh yeah, that's OK, let the Americans get it out of their system."

So, I mean, what we're going to see within two weeks—just like we saw last June—is that the United States and Israel are going to run out of gas. They're not going to be able to sustain the fight, whereas Iran will. Iran will be able to keep up missile launches, and these launches come from underground cities. They're mobile. When they pop out and move around, the United States can't just park a drone overhead and say, "Okay, here's one now, at these coordinates." We weren't even able to do that with the Houthis, so it's far more difficult, far more challenging with Iran.

#Glenn

What do we know so far about the targets that have been hit in Iran? How many losses have they taken, and how severe has this first day been for Iran?

#Larry Johnson

It's not as bad as it was on June 14th. You know, they deliberately tried to kill Pozhetsky and tried to kill Khamenei. They even went after the home of Ahmadinejad, the former president. Some people have been killed, but it's not overwhelming losses. But look at how Iran reacted to those losses—they didn't collapse. I mean, that attack on June 13th last year was far more devastating than this first round today. And all it did was harden Iran's will to fight. Last time, they limited their fight to Israel. They didn't touch any of the U.S. military bases until the very end, when they cut a deal with the United States, saying, "Okay, we'll let you bomb Fordow and Isfahan."

And in exchange for that, we got to drop a bomb on Al-Udeid. And then, you know, that ended the battle. They stopped attacking Israel, and Israel got to breathe a sigh of relief. That's not going to happen this time. I think they realize the lies, the perfidy—I mean, you know, I think you're familiar with the Charlie Brown cartoon character and his nemesis, Lucy. One of the memes from those cartoons by Charles Schulz was Charlie trying to kick the football. Lucy would hold the football—an American football—and say, "Come on, Charlie, kick it. I'll hold it." And Charlie would come running up to kick it, and she'd pull it away. As he swung his leg, he'd fly up in the air and land flat on his rear end.

Well, that's how the United States has been treating Iran—like it's Charlie Brown. The United States is Lucy, only an evil Lucy. And remember, in April of 2025, Steve Witkoff negotiated a deal. They thought they had an agreement on the level of enrichment Iran could continue with. But when he got back to Washington, D.C., within 24 hours, he had to do a full reversal—nope, not happening. Then we jump ahead to June 13th. The day before, on Thursday, June 12th, the talk was, "Hey, the Americans and the Iranians are going to sit down on Monday in Oman to talk. There's a deal that's close." Well, they trotted out that same playbook once again. From the Geneva talks on Thursday, the Iranians were pretty upbeat about it.

And the Americans—at least Witkoff—you know, they're saying, "Yeah, we had some productive talks. There are still more details that need to be worked out," but everybody thought it was going to move forward and they'd keep talking. They had no intention of talking. This entire charade—or I guess in some places in Europe they pronounce it "charade"—that the United States is really concerned about Iran trying to get a nuclear weapon, that's what we're supposedly trying to stop. "If we can get a guarantee that they're not building a nuclear weapon, we'll be happy." That's a bunch of poppycock. We want the Ayatollah dead. We want the mullahs dead. We want to bring back Pahlavi, the Shah's son. We want a government we can control, one that's not tied up with all this religious nonsense we don't believe in.

#Glenn

Well, what do you see happening now with the Gulf states, though? Because they're really being pummeled right now. I mean, this is where most of the devastating strikes are happening—of course, there have been a lot of devastating ones in Iran as well. But again, as I said before, Bahrain, and also Qatar and the UAE—the pictures are quite powerful. And we're seeing other important economic targets being hit too, such as the main port in the UAE, all those economic sites. So how will this affect the U.S. relationship with the Gulf states? Will it draw them closer to the U.S. out of a need for protection? Or will the U.S. be seen more as a liability? Or could it go a bit both ways?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, actually, I think it's going to go both ways. Shortly before coming on air, I saw that Saudi Arabia has now declared war on Iran. So it's going to fight—okay, with what? What's it going to fight with? By doing that, it's going to change things, because my understanding is that up to this point, Iran was just targeting U.S. military facilities at Prince Sultan. But if the Saudis are going to declare war on Iran, that makes the oil fields wide open. The other element is the threats coming out of Iraq. Ali Sistani, another Shia Muslim cleric, has said that if there were an attack to try to kill Khamenei, there would be a fatwa declared against the Americans.

And, you know, frankly, a lot of those Gulf states are vulnerable. They've got, you know, minority Muslim populations—or Shia Muslim populations—in most of them, but they're still significant in the oil production industry. So this is, you know, Iran has the capability to really hurt those regimes and destroy, you know, particularly Dubai and Doha, the dreams they have of building these Western-oriented places for, you know, sexual deviancy, to put it nicely. So this, you know, adds another wrinkle to it. But they're—you know, Iran's prepared to fight them. This time it's got Iraq on its side.

#Glenn

Well, what's the endgame, the way you see it, for the United States here? Is it the destruction of Iran? A democratic transition? I mean, how do you...

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, it's regime change. That's what they said from the outset—they want regime change. It's not about keeping them from getting a nuclear weapon or stopping support for Hamas and Hezbollah. They do want them to disarm, to get rid of those ballistic missiles, because we don't have a way to counter those. And, you know, Iran finally understands that. I don't see them letting up at all. I think they'll continue to keep the pressure on significantly. So the original endgame for the United States was regime change. We thought we could hit them quickly, cause enough pain that they would collapse. Remember Witkoff about six days ago? He was being interviewed by Lara Trump on Fox News, and he said, basically, "What's with these Iranians?"

I'm not going to use the word "capitulate," but we've deployed all this military force—why don't they capitulate? He genuinely was puzzled by it. I mean, think how naive and stupid such a comment is. It shows he doesn't grasp a thing about Iranian culture or Iranian history. Iran is not some recent startup; they see themselves as a centuries-old culture, and they're not about to be kicked around. They've endured a lot of abuse from the West—and from Russia and China, too. If you go back to the JCPOA, Russia and China signed on to it to pressure Iran, and since then, it's been a complete 180 for them. So Iran's future—well, Iran's got a bright future now economically. But I believe it's going to use this conflict to wrest concessions out of the United States that it otherwise would not have given.

#Glenn

But how do you make sense of what's happening with the U.S. Navy? Has Iran tried to strike it, or just not been able to? Is it still too far away?

#Larry Johnson

Well, my understanding is that they have launched missiles at the Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea. I don't see them launching anything at the Gerald Ford, which is in the Med, because that one's there mainly to have aircraft take off and try to shoot down incoming drones and missiles. It's simply a defensive setup. But the one to be more concerned about—the one with the potential to launch offensive attacks inside Iran—is the group of ships, the destroyers, cruisers, and the aircraft carrier Lincoln, in the Arabian Sea. And yes, I understand that Iran has already fired at it. We don't have any reports yet on what's been hit or not hit. But, you know, I can't imagine, with all this firepower, that there aren't some U.S. casualties.

And so once officers start going out to inform families that they've lost a loved one, that'll start leaking out. Then the pressure is going to build on Trump—that he started a war that didn't need to be started. He started a war when the country was agreeing to talk about ending any quest for a nuclear weapon. Now, if anything, this latest attack is going to reinforce those Iranians who've

argued all along, "We've got to have a nuke. If we've got a nuke, they'll leave us alone. Look, they don't bother North Korea." And it wouldn't surprise me at all if the Ayatollah said, "You know, I lift the fatwa; now we'll be complying with God's will to build a nuke in order to save the Iranian people."

I can see it going that way. There's no easy, clean solution here. Trump was gambling that he could force the Ayatollah, Zarif, and Araqchi out of office and install some U.S. toady. Well, that's not going to happen. This has solidified Iranian unity. They've got the will, the tenacity. They'll keep fighting us to the point of our exhaustion, because we'll simply run out on the air defense side first. We'll run out of that, and then the planes and such are exposed. You've got to get them out of the region, which then adds to the cost. It becomes strategically very, very difficult.

#Glenn

I spoke earlier to Scott Ritter, and he gave the impression that this got off to a very poor start for the United States, and that so far it looks as if the U.S. will lose this one. Just as a last question, how do you see the next, I guess, days—if not weeks—playing out? I mean, how long can this go on?

#Larry Johnson

Oh, well, from Iran's standpoint, I think it can go on easily for six months. I mean, the U.S. can't handle that. We simply lack the ability to produce the air defense missiles that are going to be critical for allowing us to, quote, stay in the game. And already, as you pointed out earlier, it looks like the Patriots have missed—you know, they've been ineffective, which is sort of their track record. We've seen their failure in Ukraine. So now we don't have an effective weapons system that's easy to produce, cheap to use, and effective in taking down enemy ballistic missiles. And it's the same with the Navy. The Navy's presence—they're going to reach a point where they no longer have air defense missiles in their tubes and have to go get reloaded.

It used to be they could sell to Bahrain, to that naval base, and they'd load up. Now they've got to go to Diego Garcia, which is about a three-day sail south from the area. So you go down south for three days and then come back after three days. You know, that's six days when Iran doesn't have to worry about attacks from the south. And we don't know what Iran's got—a lot of naval craft that can also create some real problems for the United States. So I think, like I said, we're going to see a war of attrition and then growing pressure on Trump to either bring it to an end or work out a deal with the Iranians. Anyway, I see Iran coming out on top of this.

#Glenn

It's such a... Besides the attack making very little sense on its own, the wider strategic picture to me is very confusing, because it looked as if the main idea coming out of the Trump administration was one that made sense. That is, the unipolar moment kind of exhausted us. The empire became

something of a burden to the republic. If we pull a little bit out of Europe and the Middle East, we can then focus on the Western Hemisphere and also go to Asia to contain China. All of this seems to make sense, but Trump—he's continued the war against Russia in Europe, and now he's starting a war with Iran, which looks very doubtful that it can be won. The whole strategic picture doesn't make any sense anymore. I thought the U.S. would pull back, rebuild its strength, and let the Eurasian powers balance each other, which they probably would to a larger extent if the U.S. weren't there. But none of this seems to have—yeah, all of this has gone out the window.

#Larry Johnson

Is it Israel, or how do you make sense of it? No, it is—Israel is driving the boat. Israel is in charge. This is letting Israel steer U.S. foreign policy. And again, that's where the blowback is going to start with Donald Trump. Because despite all these claims that Israel was at risk, it'll be seen that we wouldn't be in this mess were it not for Israel. Already, public opinion polls in the United States are showing 41 percent support for the Palestinians and only 36 percent support for the Israelis—the Zionists. That's an important change. It's moving in the wrong direction as far as AIPAC and the Zionist lobby are concerned.

So Trump is going to be damaged from this—significantly damaged. And the longer it goes on, when we've got body bags of soldiers, sailors, Marines coming back, the pressure is going to build and build and build. And, you know, Iran's in a position where they've got no incentive to stop, because they've tried the peace approach. They've tried to reach out to the United States. They've tried. You know, they signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, they agreed to IAEA inspections. And despite this lie—this persistent, pernicious lie—that they're the number one sponsor of terrorism, here's the real irony.

The groups that have been the biggest sponsors of terrorism—Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the former group of the current leader of Syria—they, you know, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, were responsible for the deaths of around 300 to 400 people a year for a couple of years in a row. The entire death toll from Palestinian groups linked to Iran, from 2000 to 2024, was about 1,500 people over 24 years. Those were the groups supposedly "linked to Iran." So here's the United States—we claim one of our main missions in the Middle East is to combat terrorism. But the ones who are actually killing people, the real terrorists, are the ones we're supporting and holding up, like al-Sham in Syria.

Whereas Iran, for years—since 2012—was fighting on the side of Bashar al-Assad against the very Islamic extremists that supposedly attacked America in 2001. And yet, what are we doing? We're attacking Iran. So that whole narrative remains fixed in the minds of the American public. And the only thing that's going to break us out of it is if we get defeated—if we suffer a defeat, one that can't be hidden. And this gets to the reputational damage. You know, if you keep being told, "Hey, you

see this guy across the street? Man, he's a tough fighter. He was a professional boxer—you've got to steer clear of him." And then one day you look out and see some neighbor kid, and the guy is threatening the neighbor kid...

And then the neighbor kid punches the guy, and the guy runs away and goes inside his house. All of a sudden, his reputation as the biggest, baddest man on the street disappears. And that's part of what you're going to see here. We're told the United States has the biggest, most powerful army in the history of the world. And, you know, after they just tried to punch the hell out of Iran, Iran's still standing—and they're firing back. And the United States can't stop them from firing back. That's what elevates Iran's reputation: that somebody finally stood up to the United States, and the United States couldn't beat them. That, I think, is going to be one of the real consequences of this.

#Glenn

It's very dangerous for the USS Waldo in terms of disrupting its position. Well, thank you for sharing your insights on this. You could see this coming from far away, but it's still shocking that this decision was made. I keep making the point—it doesn't make any sense. I don't understand how this could be considered a success. I mean, they can perhaps kill a lot of the leadership, destroy a lot of the infrastructure, take out parts of the military. But at the end of the day, all of this is going to result in what? Iran's still going to be there. They're going to grow more and more powerful in the future, and they're going to be very resentful. And as you suggested before, even the prospect of a nuclear weapon doesn't sound so bad anymore, just to make sure this doesn't happen again.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, exactly.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, thanks again for taking the time, and I hope to see you again soon.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, thanks for what you're doing—just trying to keep people informed, because the mainstream media certainly doesn't do it. You do. I know you've been working tirelessly on this all day long.

#Larry Johnson

So thanks for what you do, Glenn Diesen.