

Col. Wilkerson Warns: Invading Iran Would End US Empire

We interviewed former U.S. Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson on the escalating US-Israel war with Iran and the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in West Asia. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> Col. Wilkerson gives a blunt assessment of the war, warning that both the United States and Israel are not in a good military position because of Iran's smart tactics and growing military capabilities, including technologies developed with support from Russia and China. He also discusses the consequences of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which is sending global oil prices soaring and threatening energy security in Europe. In this interview we ask: • What is the current military balance between Iran, Israel, and the United States? • Could Turkey be drawn into the conflict after reports of missile interceptions? • Is Israel trying to trigger a wider war that could pull NATO into the conflict? • How will Europe deal with the energy crisis if it refuses rapprochement with Russia? • Are there plans in Washington to destabilize Iran using insurgent groups similar to past wars in Syria and Iraq? • What could the future relationship between Arab states and Iran look like after this war? Wilkerson argues that Iran can afford to take a long strategic view, while the United States lacks a coherent long-term strategy. He warns that a full invasion of Iran would be catastrophic and could severely weaken U.S. global power. This interview examines the risk of regional escalation, the global oil shock, NATO dynamics, and the shifting balance of power in West Asia. Topics Covered US-Iran war Israel-Iran conflict Strait of Hormuz crisis Turkey and NATO escalation Middle East geopolitics Global oil prices US foreign policy Follow us on Substack: <https://substack.com/@indiagloballeft> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Indiagloballeft> Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/indiagloballeft/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559411353392> Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/69Y9iCWUv8ha3ATsPWtWk0?si=ee1f0de3de094f17> Telegram: <https://t.me/+WNIqoiv1Rhg5NjEx>

#Mudiar

Hello, and welcome to another episode of **India and the Global Left.** If you're new to the show, please hit that subscribe button. Also, consider becoming a YouTube member, a Patreon, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Without further ado, let me welcome our guest tonight, Colonel Wilkerson. Colonel Wilkerson is a retired U.S. Army colonel and former chief of staff to the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Colonel Wilkerson, welcome back to **India and the Global Left.**

#Guest

Thank you. Good to be with you again.

#Mudiar

I wanted to start with the conflict. What's your assessment of the conflict between the U.S., Israel, and Iran?

#Guest

I think they didn't read their Carl on Clausewitz. The very first thing Clausewitz lays down—not necessarily as a principle, but as a reality—is that anytime you think about extending politics, which is his conception, of course, by violent means, you need to know the nature of what you're going to create, the nature of the conflict. It's crystal clear to me that neither Netanyahu—although he probably comes closer to understanding what he's doing—nor Trump, Hegseth, Rubio, and others in the administration here in Washington understand that nature. It's so clear that it's painful to watch them.

Rubio last night, for example, was confusing—himself and certainly the press crowd around him. Trump is all over the map; his objectives have shifted dramatically just in the past 96 hours, especially the last 48. They do not understand what they've embarked upon. And as Clausewitz goes on to write, if you don't understand the nature of the conflict, you're doomed from the start. So let's look at what the nature of this conflict is. I think it may develop along several different lines, but the essence of it is that one side—a 3,000-year-old people, if you will—is determined to fight to the death, virtually all 90 million of them.

The other side is a pipsqueak in terms of ancient nature, barely been here 250 years, yet it has nonetheless amassed a great deal of power—a lot of it through luck and fortune—but still, a great deal of power. And it doesn't understand the other side's motivations. It thinks it can just prick them here, there, and everywhere—kill children, decapitate them, take out one of the most revered men in the Shia world, at least. I suspect, from what we're seeing around Arab capitals where the Sunni population is higher, we're seeing similar attitudes on their part—partly because they detest their leaders, but also because Islam is Islam, whether you're Shia, Sunni, or whatever. And they don't like it. They just don't like it.

If you saw the contrast—and we propagandize this in this country; our news propagandizes this—but if you saw other news, if you saw the contrast between the people who turned out to honor Islam and those who turned out to protest the regime, it was astronomically different. So that's a huge component of this, I think, that's going to wear down Donald Trump and his administration significantly over the next few days. And I haven't even talked about other implications, like energy, for example. I was reading this morning in the **Daily Telegraph**—I think it was the **Telegraph**—

India has about, your country has about 25 days of what you might call raw crude, refinable crude, and refined products. About 60% or more of India's oil comes through the Strait of Hormuz. That strait's going to be closed.

And Trump only now realizes that, and has ordered the Fifth Fleet—and the Navy in general—to keep it open. I've got news for him: I've been there, I've done that. We tried that many years ago in El Dorado Canyon, re-flagging Kuwaiti tankers and escorting them through the Gulf. One thing we got was a warship torn up so badly by a mine that she had to limp back to America. It took her days and days to get back. No wonder we didn't lose her. And an oil tanker, the *Bridgeton*, whose skipper was ready to shoot us because he hit a mine too. Now, that was a long time ago, though. We ultimately managed to get the Strait open and ships moving through it as we escorted them with our warships. But Iran has learned a lot since then. You've got, in the Strait itself, maybe seventeen nautical miles of water—maybe seventeen miles.

But when you take the depth into consideration, and the channel necessary to satisfy the depth for a big tanker and all that, it's much, much narrower. I've been told it's as narrow as three miles, and we used three miles when we ran an exercise in Beijing in 2009 where we simulated this very thing. So, you've got a real possibility of al-Ansar, the Houthis, closing the Red Sea again to all traffic except that which they support—like China, or Iran, or Russia—but closing it to all others, particularly those supporting Israel and the Persian Gulf too. So we're talking about a huge amount of world economic power not being able to flow the way it should, except at vastly increased expense.

And by the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb, I don't mean just oil. It's all kinds of goods that flow through the Suez Canal, of course. So we're looking at an enormous impact on the world economy that people like Modi, for example—who hates Muslims, so he's on Bibi Netanyahu's side—aren't taking into consideration either. And if I were Putin—well, Putin's going to make a windfall off this, an absolute windfall. The prices of Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, the benchmarks, are already heading up. When we did the exercise in Beijing in 2009, they wound up at \$200 a barrel. That's catastrophic for most people in the world. And I've got news for Trump again: everybody in the world—the only commodity that's this essential—needs it, has got to have it.

And let me tell you something else about what Trump did. He promised—promised throughout his campaign—and then once he became president, he said he would fulfill his promise to refill the U.S. Petroleum Reserve. That reserve has a national security critical factor of 500 billion barrels—500 million barrels, I guess it is. No, maybe it's a billion, I don't know. I'm an old man, but it's 500-something. It's right now at 415. I suspect it's a billion. So that means it's dangerously low by our own criterion. And, oh, by the way, are you going to refill it with this very expensive oil that's going to be out there making your cronies a lot of money for sure—making Putin a lot of money for sure?

But where are you going to get it, and how fast are you going to get it? Because you're in a war now—a war that has every prospect of being eternal, of lasting and lasting and lasting until you kill the last Persian in the last mountain in Iran. And let me tell you, that's going to be really tough, because you don't have any soldiers or Marines to do it with. You do not. And if you declare a draft and mobilize America, three-quarters of America's youth will go to Canada and Mexico overnight. Guaranteed. Absolutely guaranteed. So those are just a few of the things I'm truly worried about—the most significant of which is that they don't understand what they're in. They simply do not understand what they've started.

#Mudiar

According to one report in the New York Times, only two or three ships have passed through the Strait of Hormuz, while on average about 80 ships go through daily. And the crude oil price is already up 15% to 20%. Last time I checked, it was \$85 per barrel. I guess it's soon going to cross \$100—and who knows where it'll go after that.

#Guest

And, importantly, insurance companies and shippers have already said informally—and one insurance company formally—they've published their new rates. They're astronomical.

#Mudiar

Absolutely. And yeah, I do think about Global South countries like India, which happens to be very susceptible to inflation. Crude oil is one of the very, very important markers of inflation. India probably has access to Russian oil, even though the US has done everything it could to dissuade India from buying. But I also wonder what Europe would do, given that it has no intention of making peace with Russia, and now they're participating in this war.

#Guest

They're going to have to make some really hard decisions, if I'm right, about the nature of this war as it goes on. Because you're right—they're going to be in trouble. They're going to be in trouble because they're not willing to take oil. Putin has offered them several times during this conflict to resume shipments of oil, even though we blew up one of his pipelines. But they don't want to do it. It would have helped immeasurably six months ago, a year ago even—two years ago—because one of the reasons Germany's economy is floundering is that it lost so much when energy prices went up so high. People left. They're not going to stay around and pay those energy prices. Europe's got a hard decision to make here.

And Iran has made it even harder by attacking their assets in Cyprus and showing that they have no qualms about extending this campaign to people who are helping the genocide in Gaza and the other efforts of the United States to corner the region. I think we're hearing the truth from Naftali Bennett and others since he made his statements about Israel's "Greater Israel" goals. I think he was telling the truth when he said the next target is Turkey. So Israel had pulled Erdogan in—for whatever reason, not a substantive one on Erdogan's part. He's just playing politics again, looking for help for his economy, which he thought Israel could give him—into its orbit, into Netanyahu's orbit.

But I'm not so sure he's going to stay there now, because he's got a real problem too, in terms of what's developing. And what's developing is—they covet you. They want your country too. And I don't doubt that for a minute. I don't doubt that for a minute. These Greater Zionists are, in my view, unbelievably stupid people. They think that this pipsqueak state on the eastern end of the Mediterranean, which is supported almost wholly—both in its atrocities and in its economy—with one or two exceptions, by the United States... and they think those one or two exceptions, I guess, which are mostly involved with the arms industry, or ancillary to the arms industry, or the AI or whatever that powers that industry—that's where they're headed.

They think that's enough to make them a great economy. I've got news for them. The reason they've been fairly economically successful is because we've gone out of our way—like the war in Iraq, supporting, what was the name of the oil company that Mark Rich ran? I forget now—but supporting Mark Rich as he stole oil from Saddam Hussein's UN Oil-for-Food program and shipped it to Israel at discounted prices. Supporting the Kurds in northern Iraq as they clandestinely shipped oil to Israel at discounted prices, in defiance of Baghdad's policy. I mean, we have made Israel what it is. No question about it. Yes, is there some genius there? Some capitalist genius? Some entrepreneurial genius?

Yes. But you know what? Of the thousand—no, what am I saying—of the million Jewish Israelis who have already left and might not come back, the number one reason for them was a safe haven. And Israel is anything but a safe haven right now. That's going to cripple Israel too. And I suspect they're going to lose another million over the next six months, if not more. So I don't get the dreams of these Zionists, and I don't see how they're going to fulfill them. I, of course, don't want them to fulfill them. And I don't think anyone in the region wants them to fulfill them. Look at Doha. Look at Abu Dhabi. Look at any Arab state. Look at Egypt. I know it's questionable whether that's an Arab state or not, among those who do that sort of parsing, but they're sitting on powder kegs too.

Their people don't like them. And I think this is rather astute. At first, I thought it was a mistake by Iran, but then I got to thinking about it after I talked to a couple of my friends in Tehran. One of the reasons they're hitting the Arab states right now, in a cursory fashion—though they have killed some people and done some property damage—is because they're targeting what supports the autocratic regimes, whether it's oil or whatever. They're hoping that in Saudi Arabia, for example, where only

about 20% of the population is Shia, that distinction will go by the wayside if people, already angry about Palestine, decide to rise up and overthrow their own rulers in the countries where they live.

So Iran has given them more incentive to do that, I think, because Iran is essentially saying, "Hey, we're hitting the people who are oppressing you." I looked at the photographs our media wouldn't show. They came out of India, I think—India, Iran itself, and maybe one other country—showing the Bahrainis, for example, celebrating as our Fifth Fleet headquarters was burning, our headquarters building was burning. And, oh, by the way, I have good reports from there—or what I mean is, I think reliable reports—that the strike actually hit the vertical launch missile reloading facility.

It's a very sophisticated apparatus, and to reload these vertical launch missiles in the DDGs and the DDs in particular—the naval warships—it's a very delicate operation. You have to lower them right down into their encasings in the ship, and you have to do it very carefully. It takes people on deck, and it takes this sophisticated crane. Well, they destroyed that in Bahrain, apparently. So that means they've got to go all the way to Diego Garcia to do that, where the next one is available. That's a long transit. So Iran did some significant damage there, if that's the case. Again, there are so many ramifications of this war that we think is simple and short, but that are going to make it long and not simple.

#Mudiar

What do you make of the news about Turkey intercepting missiles? Some people say it's actually Iran that sees the Mediterranean as a threat. For instance, the U.S.S. *Errol Horn* is loitering somewhere in the Mediterranean after coming back from participating in the kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, so that might be a target. We've covered one program about Cyprus and the Akrotiri and Dhekelia bases—the British and NATO bases—and their importance for West Asia with Matt Cunard. Those are all targets. But there are also some who say these may be false-flag operations by Israel to drag Turkey or NATO into the conflict. I wonder what your sense is.

#Guest

I'd vote for the latter, and I'll tell you something else, too. You probably know it, but I'll tell your listeners in case you or they don't. Israel is in Cyprus and southern Greece right now, starting the campaign against the Turks. They're already working to make sure they have intelligence conduits. They have people on their payroll, Cypriots in particular, who will be part of the policy of overthrowing Ankara—and they're already at it. They're working much the way they did in Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, which later spun off into what happened when so many agents emerged at the moment of the U.S. attack—that first attack with the B-2s flying over and everything—and went around killing a lot of Iranians and destroying much of Iran's air defense capability and power. It really destroyed it.

Well, what the Iranians did in that instance was ferret all these people out, and they either put them in prison for life or they killed them. What Israel is doing in southern Greece and Cyprus right now is recruiting all these people, because they're going to need that sort of fifth column as they go after Turkey. That's the only thing I know for sure is going on right now with regard to Israel and Turkey, and maybe the potential for a false-flag operation. And I don't put any of that past them, Pat. This is very dangerous. I don't know why we're doing it. But if I'm reading the maps correctly—the ones that were shown, I think, by Danny Davis and Doug McGregor the other day—we have combatants in the northern end of the Persian Gulf.

When I was at U.S. Pacific Command—which at that time, in the '80s and early '90s, was the force provider for Central Command—Central Command was just a little pipsqueak command. We were the big force provider. We had a sort of standing rule: you would never put a U.S. warship in the Persian Gulf. If you did, you'd do it very, very carefully and only for a short, selected period of time. You'd never put a carrier in—never—because its turning radius is too wide. It's too difficult to maneuver. The reason that F-18 fell off that carrier and we lost it in the Red Sea was because the skipper panicked. He was getting shot at, after all, and turned too fast. The crew didn't have a chance to get over to the side and say, "Oh, we need to spot these planes differently."

One of them went in, losing a million-dollar fighter jet. So I don't know why we're doing that, but Iran could sink those ships at any moment. Here's the reality of it: you could take a single individual, have him swim out to the ship with a magnetic mine, and sink that ship. It's that simple, because it's not very deep and the ships can't fight, if you will, the way they would on the open sea or even in the Sea of Oman or the North Arabian Sea. There've been lots of exercises. I know all about this as a student of the Navy at the Naval War College and elsewhere. So I don't know why we're doing that. We're asking for it—we're asking for a false flag by Israel, for example, to pull us deeper into the war, or for Iran to simply take one or both of them out. I have no idea why we've got them positioned there.

#Mudiar

I want to come back to your important point about understanding the nature of the conflict. And just to be a little more specific, Colonel Wilkerson, could you give us a sense of the military strengths and weaknesses of the two sides? The entire Western mainstream media has been giving pretty one-sided coverage of that—practically repeating what's coming out of the mouths of Biden, Trump, Netanyahu, and others, and, more importantly, Israeli officials.

They're repeating and packaging them as if these are verified news. On the other hand, there are some outlets that seem more trustworthy, giving us a probably more balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses of the missiles, and the difficulties the NATO side—or let's say the U.S.-Israel side—has in intercepting them, and how expensive that is. So, for our viewers, could you share your thoughts on how both sides are positioned militarily?

#Guest

First, we were hearing—almost unbelievable, I know—that's hard to accept for those people who've been listening to Trump now for over a year or even longer. We're hearing some just incredible lies from Donald Trump. I don't know if he knows he's lying because the military is lying to him, or if he's just doing what he normally does—speaking off the top of his head and saying, "This is great, that's great, we've got a million of these, we've got two million of those." When you parse it closely, with experts out there and with people who I think are telling me the truth, we are not in good shape—nor is Israel, ultimately—for a number of reasons that are operationally smart by Iran.

And you would think that after being deceived majorly several times—particularly the last time, with the B-2s flying and so forth—they would have grown smarter. They're not stupid people. So what they're doing right now is very carefully using their least expensive weapons, of which they have thousands, if not hundreds of thousands. They're using the least expensive ones to do what they did in the "beautiful war," if you will—the 12- or 13-day "beautiful war"—to test Israeli, but also regional U.S. and U.S. partners' air defenses, and to see if what they confirmed that first time around, several months ago, is still valid, and if anything new has developed.

Now, on their side, there's a lot that's new—new radars from Russia and China, new missiles from Russia and China, new technicians from Russia and China—all of whom are basically operating underground. Even the new squadrons, as I understand it, of the latest Russian planes are underground. So you don't know exactly what they have, but I'm hearing from reliable sources that, in terms of missiles, it's vast. It really is a lot. And they're underground. The only time they're vulnerable is when they come up to shoot, and we don't have enough coverage to catch all of that all the time. It's impossible. Let me give you a little indicator of why that is.

If you're flying off the Lincoln, she's a thousand miles away—and rightfully so, because Iran has missiles that could sink her. I'm waiting to see if they'll do that, because I know they have high-velocity missiles that could take out the Lincoln. That's 5,000 American sailors in the water, probably 2,000 to 3,000 dead immediately. So if you're flying from a thousand nautical miles away, you need tanking. Those fighters don't have that range—particularly the F-35. And we've sent, God knows how many, squadrons of F-35s over there. Hopefully, we're counting on them having a better mission operational rate than 30%.

Or, you know, maybe they approach 50%, because in all versions, what they were making was fully mission-capable about 50% of the time at best. So that's half your fleet gone right there. But you've got to tank them, and you've got to have very expensive big tankers overhead, or you've got to use the tankers indigenous to the ship—and they won't tank very much at all, because they're not much bigger than the fighter that's taking the fuel on. So, real complications here in getting these ballistic missiles. And Trump is saying every day that we're killing them all—we're killing them all. Well, I know that can't possibly be true, because we can't target them. They're very ephemeral in the way

they operate: they come up, they shoot, and they go back down again. I'm sure we're getting some—no question about that.

But some is not a lot, out of what I hear are just tens of thousands of missiles. So Iran is being very circumspect about what it's doing, and it's testing the system with the first wave. Some of them, we've seen, got through. One of the little drones killed 22 people, wounded 70, and six are still missing in Israel. So some of those are getting through. And once the Israelis, the U.S., and our allies have expended the Patriots and other things that we're shooting—and we will, we will expend them—then they're going to send the better missiles in. They're not going to risk them against air defense assets. And the last category of missiles they're going to send in, if my information is correct, are the ones that move at Mach 3, Mach 4, maybe even Mach 5. We can't hit them with anything.

Nothing we have in our inventory will stop them. I suspect that's the kind they're going to save for the Lincoln and maybe even the Ford. They could hit the Ford in the Mediterranean, sink both aircraft carriers, and Donald Trump would not even have a prospect of being reelected. I suspect Donald Trump would be headed for impeachment if Congress had any sense. But that's the kind of potential that exists here. That's the nature of the conflict that exists. And the Iranians seem willing to be very patient and take advantage of it. They seem to have the munitions to do it. I think Bibi knows this. So I would be very surprised—very surprised—and I was there during the 1973 war. I would be very surprised if he hasn't already uploaded several nuclear weapons. Very surprised. And that worries me. That's very dangerous.

#Mudiar

I guess I needed to ask you also about the strategy of attacking civilians, because we've all read about the attack on the elementary girls' school in Minab, in Hormozgan Province in southern Iran. There are also reports about the attack on Gandhi Hospital in Tehran. And now CNN has given us detailed coverage about Trump speaking to Turkish leaders in western Iran and other areas bordering Iraq. They're trying to use them to, uh, do something similar to what they tried in Iraq and Syria—arming rebel groups, destabilizing them. We know, of course, that Iran is internally very vigilant. The Basij, the IRGC wing, is extremely vigilant. But I wonder what your thoughts are on these developments, particularly given that in Syria the Turkish side kind of abdicated, if you like, in exchange for Al-Qaeda and ISIS. And Turkey would be very, very nervous about the U.S. siding with or even trying to prop up that kind of effort again in Iran. What are your thoughts on all these developments?

#Guest

I think it's very dangerous, and I think it smells strongly of Bibi Netanyahu, whose goal is not Trump's goal. Trump has said what his goal is, and I think this is one thing I believe: his goal is essentially to get a better regime in Tehran, or something like that. Bibi Netanyahu's goal is not that. He doesn't want a regime in Tehran. He wants utter confusion all across the breadth of Iran—which

is a pretty considerable breadth. Utter confusion. And he wants that confusion to look a lot like Syria, in terms of what Syria looked like for a couple of years there, when Assad was holding on by his bare hands and being beaten back into Damascus. By the way, Israel wants Damascus and Syria too.

So watch this ground movement into Lebanon expand if it's successful. I don't know if Hezbollah has the power left—the munitions, the leadership—to withstand them in any significant way. But if they don't, watch them move to take most of Syria too, because that's part of their agenda. They want Syria as well. And they want Lebanon. They've wanted Lebanon for a long time. We're the power that's kept them from consolidating control over Lebanon. You may recall in '82 and '83, I think it was, when they really got themselves in a trick bag, we had to bail them out. And as they were bailed out, they committed atrocities in the refugee camps as they came out. Ariel Sharon was the guy in charge of that war—later prime minister.

They don't change. These people don't change. Their goal is what they're doing. And to your point, those are two very different objectives: to have an Iran with a good government that's stable and in the U.S. orbit, versus having a completely chaotic country of 90 million people as big as Iran—which is what Bibi wants. So stand by while they reconcile their objectives, but I don't think Donald even understands that that's what Bibi wants. So we're looking at, as you suggested, Erdogan having different interests here and maybe surprising everyone by suddenly entering the fight in a place where people didn't think he would—people being Bibi Netanyahu.

And he's got to be aware. He's got to be. I know Bibi went and wined and dined him and, you know, gave his full pitch about all the economic help he'd get from Israel and so forth and so on. And Erdogan apparently fell for the whole thing. But that's not going to stop him from realizing what Bibi's real intentions are if they suddenly manifest themselves. So your point is well taken. You might bring Turkey into this fray, not just because of the Kurds, but because they see what Israel is doing and realize it's inimical to their interests. So, as I said before, this has all kinds of ramifications that we just haven't thought out.

We could put the entire region into a war situation, and that has a very bad tendency to spread, too. I mean, just think about Ukraine and the Levant merging in terms of hostility. And we're right there in Azerbaijan, we're right there in Armenia, we're right there in Georgia trying to stir things up against Putin. We haven't stopped. We're still trying to overthrow the government that got elected by the skin of its teeth—but got elected because its policy was a balanced one between Moscow, Europe, Washington, and Georgia, in Tbilisi. We're still trying to overthrow that government. And Putin knows it.

#Mudiar

I was struck by something very interesting you said about the gap between the objectives of Trump and Netanyahu. In other words, Trump wants friendly governments in the region, while Netanyahu wants statelessness there—so that there's just one state, a Zionist and colonial state, that can keep expanding. That was an interesting framework.

#Guest

Yeah, I think Trump is going to come to realize that—and Hegseth and Rubio too. I don't know how fast they're going to arrive at that realization, but it may take action on the ground that contradicts what Trump wants to do, visibly and physically, for him to realize that he's got a partner that—while Miriam Adelson's money may be burning a hole in his ass—he still has a partner that may end his presidency. And that's going to be a decisive moment within the allied framework, if you will. I don't dare call it that. I hate to say “allied framework” with Israel and the United States, but that's what it is, of course. Still, there's a reason why we never called them a formal ally. We never have, not really. Trump has done it to an extent, but we've never really formally identified Israel as an ally of the United States—major non-NATO ally, all kinds of characterizations, but not a formal ally in the sense of Japan, Korea, or other countries. There's a reason.

#Mudiar

What's your sense of the future of the Gulf or GCC countries and Iran? I mean, a lot of that will be determined by the outcome or the trajectory of this conflict. I'm very curious whether you think they've begun to see the vulnerabilities of being a vessel at this stage of the empire—given how unpredictable and even how vulnerable the empire itself is—because many are abandoning embassies and, reportedly, even bases to hide in hotels in the Gulf countries that Iran has hit.

And on the other hand, Iran seems to me—at least, and tell me if you agree or not—to be very, very cautious so far in discriminating their attacks on the Gulf states. They're trying very hard, at least in their official statements, to say, “We are only attacking U.S. military assets, and even the few hotels and buildings we've hit were because U.S. personnel had retreated to those places,” effectively signaling to the world and the region that they're not out here for chaos. Even though, if they're forced, there will be no red lines, as Abbas Araghchi said. You're reading on the future of the Gulf states' relationship with Iran?

#Guest

First of all, I think I went through this, and Dr. Rice—of all the things we dealt with her on, as National Security Advisor for George W. Bush—was adamant about this for a time and even made the president angry, which is why she dropped it. But I'm of the mind that the Arab Spring should have succeeded, and so was she, to a certain extent. When it didn't, a lot of us were concerned, and we began to analyze why. A lot of reasons came out, of course—part of which was the fecklessness

of the leadership of those who were opposing people like Mubarak, and even in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi and elsewhere.

But the biggest reason, as one of the experts on the policy planning staff at State said at the time, was the malaise of the people. They just don't have the guts to get up and challenge their leadership, even though that leadership, more often than not, acts against the collective interests of the majority. We saw that in Iraq to a certain extent, too. We saw it with the Shia, for example—the majority being oppressed by the Sunnis and the Shia not doing anything about it, or even when we tried to help them, still not doing anything about it. So it's hard to say that these folks are ever going to find the gumption, the leadership, the determination to overthrow these autocrats.

But let me say, and be on the record here, they should. That being said, I think Mohammed bin Salman—maybe not Mohammed bin Zayed and others—but I think MBS actually understands that he's sitting on top of a powder keg. He knows he has to kill a lot of people periodically to convince them they don't want to light the fuse to that powder keg. So what's happening right now—once again, not in the way the Arab Spring promised, but in a very different, Clausewitzian way—the nature of the war could expand and change very quickly. This has the potential, once again, to unseat some of these people. And I think Iran is being very circumspect, for the reasons you stated, clearly.

It doesn't want more enemies than it can handle. Conservation of enemies is the number one principle of war. But at the same time, it may be exploring what the possibilities are—especially if you get that kind of reaction like you did in Bahrain, or in Karachi, where they're beating on our consulate, trying to break the windows down and kill us. I watched that. I helped put those windows in because we knew that consulate was very vulnerable and very close to the street. I'm watching them hit these windows with pitchforks, axes, and sledgehammers—and they're bouncing off the windows. Of course, they're very expensive, safety windows.

But that was rage. That was pure rage. We haven't even talked about Pakistan's role in this—a nuclear power, a nuclear power that has promised Iran and promised Riyadh, both of them, that should they need a nuclear weapon, they have it. At their beck and call, they have it. And I believe that. I believe that one hundred percent, because I was in the AQ Khan network breakup, and I saw how AQ Khan was revered by much of the Islamic world, from one end to the other, as the father of the Islamic atomic bomb. And I saw how many people really hated our guts for having taken him out, virtually. So this is all.

The warp and move for the region that was incandescent during the Arab Spring may now be made incandescent again by this war. And the Iranians, I think, have the long view. We don't. We've never had the long view. We don't do strategy. But they do. They can stand out for a long time. They can recruit for a long time. They can hit selected targets for a long time. We're not going to stop them from doing that unless we invade. And if we invade, we're finished. We're finished. That would make Iraq and Afghanistan look like child's play compared to doing Iran—ninety million people in a vast

country with mountains and everything. That would be the end of the empire's ability to influence the Middle East.

#Mudiar

Do you think they might actually make the mistake of invading? Or do they at least have enough sense to know they can't do that?

#Guest

Trump has talked about it. Trump has talked about it publicly. He's written about it. I hope what's left of the Pentagon leadership—and I mean that—Hegseth has been carefully picking them apart. He's been carefully setting aside two-stars, three-stars, even a couple of four-stars. And he's been carefully packing the ranks with Christian nationalists, with people who believe in Armageddon—preachers who are talking to them about Armageddon and the necessity for this war. Turn on YouTube and look at John Hagee—yesterday, I think it was, or maybe two days ago—John Hagee, head of Christians United for Israel.

And he is inciting the military to see it as Armageddon—to see themselves as crusaders, to see this as the end times being brought about by their actions. I'm not kidding. This is happening right now in this country, in my country. This is going on. So it's a moment that has the potential to flare up into a much more serious conflict on so many different fronts and in so many different dimensions—not least of which is getting a whole lot of, well, how many Arabs are there? Last time I looked, it was about 400 million. We're talking about a mess. If Modi thinks he has a mess with the Muslims in India, wait until he's got a mess on his border with this business.

#Mudiar

We're coming to an end. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the domestic sentiment and situation in the United States regarding this war. Not very often in the past have we seen opposition to U.S. imperial wars right from the start. I mean, it often starts to increase only once the U.S. begins losing, because people don't want to lose or be on the losing side. But we've seen from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan that Americans tend to rally behind the flag, at least at first. This time, it struck me that it's completely the opposite, if you go by many of these polls. On the military side, I had Scott Ritter on a couple of days ago, and he said exactly what you said about the politicization of the military, which is leading to very serious conflict within the ranks—between those who are professionals, let's say, and those who are more politicized and ideologically motivated. What is the implication of this war on U.S. domestic politics—or vice versa?

#Guest

Let me take your last point first, because it's potentially the most dangerous. What this is doing is amplifying what Pete Heggseth was ordered to do—and has been doing very carefully—within the Pentagon and within the ranks of the military. You saw him start this process at Quantico, when he gathered all the flag officers together, along with most of their enlisted assistants, and spoke to them. The president showed up and spoke to them too. What he's doing is preparing the military for what it was not on January 6th, under the previous administration. It was absolutely opposed to a coup, and at worst, it would have stood aside and said, "No, Mr. President," which is essentially what Milley, the then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later insinuated.

Today, Hegseth is almost at the point of getting enough of the military to support a coup that he could go ahead and confidently tell the president, "Don't worry, it won't happen again. It will not happen again." But what that's doing—and you put your finger on it—is exposing that there are still some professionals, some people who feel differently. People who believe the Constitution is what they swear their oath to, not the man in the Oval Office, and certainly not some preacher. Not Jesus Christ. That really riles these people—that they should be swearing an oath to Jesus Christ, which is what some of these guys, like that Texas preacher, say they should be swearing allegiance to: Jesus Christ, not the Constitution. So we've got the potential in this war—this war, and what you just described about our looking like we might be losing it, or at least not gaining any ground very quickly—feeds into that in a major way.

Because if that's the case, then Trump has got to move fast—maybe even faster. During the midterms, if not before them, he's got to settle this very quickly, or he's going to be in a position where they're mounted up and riding their horses toward impeachment. And the American people are going to be behind. And you're absolutely right—getting to your bigger point—the polls right now are showing less than a third, some as low as 27 or 28 percent, of the American people are for this war, for different reasons. But nonetheless, that's a percentage that's working within the MAGA crowd too. So this is a dangerous moment, both domestically and internationally. They could feed each other in a way that aids Trump in being the authoritarian, the tyrant that he wants to be, and ultimately being successful.

#Mudiar

We'll leave it there, Colonel Wilkerson. This was a very, very interesting conversation. I'll end with what you said right at the beginning, before the recording—that perhaps we could meet under different circumstances. But that's for the future, I suppose. Until then, thank you so much, and have a wonderful rest of the day.

#Guest

You too, and thank you for having me on.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Mudiari Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you've liked our content and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please consider donating to the cause—the link is in the description below. And if you're not able to, don't feel bad; you can always like and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.