

Norman Finkelstein: Why the US-Israel Attack Is NOT Another Iraq War

In this interview, political scientist and Middle East scholar Norman Finkelstein discusses the ongoing US-Israeli attack on Iran and explains why the current crisis is fundamentally different from the 2003 Iraq War. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> Finkelstein argues that while the Iraq invasion in 2003 primarily reflected US strategic interests, the current escalation with Iran is driven largely by the interests of Israel, with the United States playing a supporting role. He also reflects on the differences between the massive anti-war mobilization during the Iraq War and the protests emerging today against the Iran war. According to Finkelstein, the 2003 demonstrations were largely activist-driven, while the current protests appear more spontaneous and organic. Topics discussed: Why the Iran war differs from the Iraq War in 2003 Internal military debates within the US establishment Israel's role in shaping the conflict Anti-war protests then and now What this conflict means for the Middle East This conversation offers historical context and political analysis at a critical moment in the escalating confrontation involving the US, Israel, and Iran. 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 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, Professor Norman Finkelstein. Professor Finkelstein is a leading scholar on the Israel–Palestine conflict, and his well-known books include *Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom* and *The Holocaust Industry.* Professor Finkelstein, welcome back to *India and Global Left.*

#Guest

Thank you for having me.

#Mudiar

I wanted to discuss the U.S.–Israeli war on Iran with you. Maybe a good way to start is to hear your thoughts on what's going on, and then I have a few follow-up questions.

#Guest

Well, let me begin with, number one, I am very far from an expert on Iran. Number two, I have no military knowledge whatsoever. So if you're going to ask me about Iranian history, you're barking up the wrong tree. And if you're going to ask me who's going to win, you're not going to get an informed answer—you're going to get a wish list, not an informed answer. As to the situation now, first of all, it was predictable. I said that in an article I wrote probably about a year ago—it was something like **Samson and Cassandra**. I said then what was perfectly predictable at the time, namely that Israel viewed October 7th, yes, as a crisis for sure, and there was probably a moment's lamentation over what happened.

But then they rubbed their palms and hands in glee. Here was a historic opportunity—one that really had no precedent except for the 1948 war. I wouldn't even say the magnitude of October 7th had a precedent. The 1967 war did have its problems. In June 1967, Israel had to pretend at the beginning that Egypt fired the first shot. If you listen to Abba Eban's speech on June 7th, 1967, they were still claiming that Egypt fired the first shot in that war. Secondly, the UN wasn't a passive instrument of Israel in 1967. The head of the UN at the time, Secretary-General U Thant—a very decent guy, very decent guy—he was not in Israel's pocket.

And he wasn't in—first of all, the U.S. and Israel hadn't yet solidified their relationship. So the U.S. wasn't yet in Israel's pocket. There were real problems for Israel in '67. In '48, it looked like the armies were going to destroy Israel—the so-called invading Arab armies. So they had an easier time then, a bigger, let's call it a bigger historic opportunity. But this October 7th opened up vistas for Israel. All of its **desiderata**—I think that's the word—all of its goals, its aspirations, were now on the table. They were a viable possibility. And so there was solving the Gaza question, the annihilation of Gaza, and solving the West Bank question—that's still on the agenda.

And if the war really heats up, and if Israel, quote-unquote, faces an existential threat, they'll use that new opportunity to expel the entire population from the West Bank. There was the possibility—which was realized—of defanging Hezbollah. And then there was the big **magilla**, which I wrote about in the "Samson and Cassandra" article: that they would go after Iran, because that's obviously been on their drawing board for a very long time. The opportunity now availed itself, and Israel took advantage of it. So it wasn't a surprise that Israel would. What was interesting from my point of view was that, as you know, in human rights law—or in the human rights community—the crime of crimes is genocide.

That's what it's called. And as Robert Jackson, the U.S. prosecutor at Nuremberg, said, he described aggression as the supreme international crime. It was a wonder to behold. I would say, if an extraterrestrial being were to alight on our planet, it would be, for that being, a sight to behold—that Israel and its chief enabler, the United States, committed the crime of crimes in Gaza, and not even a blink of an eye, not even the blink of an eye, separated the execution of the crime of crimes from what Robert Jackson called the supreme crime of aggression that Israel and the U.S. undertook.

February 29th or 28th? Well, it had to be the 28th, because there are only 28 days in February. February 28th. The sheer—well, I wish I could call it brazenness.

I wish I could call it audacity. But if you listen to the Security Council, a large number of states went along with it. I was just—my jaw dropped. My jaw dropped when I was listening to the representative of Denmark, which already had a taste of Trump. And not one word, not a syllable, not a character—criticizing, forget condemning—criticizing the U.S. or Israel for launching a brazen war of aggression against Iran. The most outrageous, the most outrageous breach of the UN Charter. France lines up 100% with the U.S. and Israel in the Security Council meeting. The U.K. in the Security Council meeting—the President of the Council—there's a distinction between the President of the Security Council and Guterres as the Secretary-General.

The President of the Security Council is a Brit—the British representative to the U.K. He wouldn't even allow Jeffrey Sachs to speak, even though they usually allow representatives of civil society. And the Russians this time were very forthright, saying that the British are rigging the Security Council. No shame. No shame. So you can't even say what the U.S. did was brazen, because "brazen" implies that the act elicits outrage. But the aggression didn't elicit outrage. You know what it did? The aggression elicited outrage at Iran for daring to defend itself. It elicited outrage at Iran. I agreed with the Russian. Look, I'm not a great fan of Putin. I'm not a great fan of Russia. I recognize its repressiveness and its brutishness.

But the guy—the Russian—he said, it's like the E3, the U.K., France, and Germany. He said it's like they live in a parallel universe. He said it was like "through the looking glass." Do you understand what just happened? The most brazen, outrageous, flagrant breach of Article 2 of the UN Charter—and they're blaming Iran? They're blaming Iran? What did Iran do? It's like nobody has even read the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Article 4 says—of course it says—every country has the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. What was Iran doing in violation of that? Where's the evidence that Iran violated Article 4? You know who's violated the NPT for half a century? Do you know who has violated it for half a century?

#Ayushman

Israel.

#Guest

The U.S., the U.K., France, China, and Russia. Because there was a quid pro quo in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The quid pro quo was that the signatories who were non-nuclear powers would give up their right to develop nuclear weapons in exchange for peaceful development. But there was another article—Article 6. Article 6 says that the nuclear powers have to engage in serious negotiations to eliminate their nuclear weapons. It never said that those who have nuclear weapons have a right to keep them. That's not what the NPT said. It called for the complete elimination of

nuclear weapons for a very simple reason, which is stated in the preamble to the NPT, the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The preamble says that the use of nuclear weapons can cause untold devastation—the end of humankind. So if that's their potential, of course you have to get rid of them.

It never said you get to keep them. Everyone's saying, "We have to make sure, we have to make sure Iran can never have nuclear weapons." Really? First of all, folks, who just committed the genocide in Gaza? Was it Iran, or was it Israel? Second, why do we have to make sure Iran doesn't have nuclear weapons, but we don't have to make sure that Israel doesn't have nuclear weapons? What is that? What is that? That psychotic, lunatic regime—state, society—the whole place is completely bonkers. I have to say, this I don't understand. I'm listening to this Danish representative—are you crazy? Do you not see what just happened? The degree of sheer moral cowardice. You know the famous line by Mark Twain: after God invented sheep, human beings were a redundancy. Yeah. Redundant. After he created sheep. Pitiful. Pitiful.

#Mudiar

On the E3, I think it wasn't surprising, given that a couple of months before they invoked the snapback, saying, "We're imposing sanctions because Iran is violating the terms of the JCPOA." But Iran was negotiating—and, as it was last time, as Al-Busaidi, the foreign minister of Oman, said—Iran was very close to even accepting terms and conditions that went further than the JCPOA. Then in June, they were bombed. And still... what was wrong with the JCPOA?

#Guest

It was working fine.

#Mudiar

Absolutely.

#Guest

It was Trump who arbitrarily suspended it, and then Biden—he refused to renew it. There was no problem with the JCPOA. Nobody said that Iran wasn't abiding by it. For the sake of your listeners, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was negotiated under Obama's administration, and nobody complained about it—except, of course, Israel. Because Israel doesn't want any regional power that has a nuclear deterrent against it; it wants to dominate the region.

#Mudiar

Yeah, but this time around, I think the issue wasn't even about the nuclear question. As the conflict forums noted, based on their reading of the Hebrew press around December, the reports said that

Netanyahu, in a meeting at Mar-a-Lago, told Trump that the mood now isn't about the nuclear issue—we know Iran isn't going to have that—it's about breaking up Iran.

#Guest

Yeah, there sure was the opportunity to rid itself—exactly what it did in '67 when it rid itself of Egypt. And June '67 marked the terminal defeat of what was called, back then, radical Arab nationalism. And now they want to inflict a terminal defeat on what's called radical Islamic fundamentalism. So it was not a nuclear issue. I mean, Iran would have to be—as you can imagine—insane to attack Israel with nuclear weapons. So that's not going to happen. It was simply about not allowing them to finish, or to do with Iran, what they did to Egypt in 1967. Now, it's true that in '67 they weren't trying to disintegrate Egypt.

Now, they don't really care much. It's like when I hear people say, "Well, look at all our policy failures—the disintegration of Libya." Does the U.S. care that Libya has disintegrated? Do they care? That's not a policy failure; it's a matter of indifference to the U.S. So, yeah, the question of Iraq is, I would say, more complicated. The disintegration of Iraq is more complicated than the one in Libya, and so would probably be Iran. But it was the opportunity—the opportunity to finally rid itself of Iran and then have no obstacles to total regional control. I'm beginning not to like the word "hegemony" anymore—total regional domination or control.

#Mudiar

I want to ask you a little bit about the domestic mood, given that some polls suggest the war is extremely unpopular—maybe even with three-fourths of the population. And this was striking. I mean, in one sense, it's not surprising, given it came right after the genocide, which had shifted public opinion massively. So it's probably the first American war that's been unpopular from the start. But given that unpopularity, and given how the ruling elites in Europe, the U.S., and Australia have doubled down on it, what's your assessment of how that divide between the elites and the public at large is going to play out?

#Guest

Well, I think there's some—well, I won't say a lot, but there's some misapprehension about the popularity of the war compared to previous wars and things of that sort. If we go back to 2003, during the buildup to the U.S. attack on Iraq, there were the largest anti-war demonstrations in the history of the world opposing the U.S. attack. You're probably too young to remember, I suppose. So any notion floating around that that was a popular war—it wasn't a popular war at all.

And you'll recall that, unlike in 1991, when the U.S. secured eight consecutive Security Council resolutions—including that critical last one, which basically, though not literally, allowed Israel to attack in what was called the First Gulf War—in 2003 Bush had a very hard time at the UN. He

couldn't get any UN resolution supporting an attack on Iraq. Germany, under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the foreign minister—Yoshka Fischer, who was from the Greens and considered a leftist—openly opposed the attack on Iraq in 2003. My memory is that the French did as well, though I might be mistaken, but I think they also opposed it.

#Mudiar

The French were opposed.

#Guest

Opposing. So it was not a popular war domestically—the largest anti-war demonstrations in U.S. and global history. And there was a large amount of opposition from European countries. So this notion that this is, as it were, an unprecedentedly unpopular war is simply incorrect. There may have been a plurality.

#Mudiar

Can I have a brief comment here? Yeah, I think my sense is that, yes, in 2003 we had massive demonstrations. But this time around, we haven't had that kind of demonstration. I think some of the polls—I don't remember them exactly—but back in about 2003, what they showed was that first there was the question of occupation, which meant that gradually, as the resistance became firmer and firmer, public opinion shifted. But this time around, what we're seeing is, on one hand, we haven't seen the kind of demonstrations that were there in 2003. On the other hand, the polls show that there's a huge negative opinion about the war, probably because of the brazenness with which the U.S. is clamping down on domestic freedom and so on.

So that might be one of the reasons. Or another reason might be that people don't believe they can influence their governments in the West. I mean, there might be cynicism, but I do think there's that divide we're seeing this time—that in the public polls it's highly unpopular, probably even more unpopular than in 2003. But the demonstrations, the activists, are not as active as they were in 2003.

#Guest

I think that's correct. I think Americans are tired of war—that I'm sure of. But I think there's a notion about 2003 that's mistaken. The left in 2003, its position was—and you can go back, I've studied it and I also lived through it; I was active at the time—the position was: it's going to be an easy war but an impossible occupation. And that proved to be exactly correct. The left was very good at predicting what would happen in Iraq. As you know, Obama famously opposed the war. Well, that's kind of BS—like everything Obama is, you know, it's complete, total BS. Obama, first of all, the senior senator from Illinois at the time, Dick Durbin, he opposed the war, he opposed the attack. Secondly, Obama came from a liberal district, Hyde Park, and they opposed it.

Third of all, his biggest fundraiser, Penny Pritzker—her brother, I think it's her brother—is now the mayor of Chicago. She was one of his big money people. Actually, it wasn't Pritzker, it was somebody else, and I've forgotten her name. They were opposed to it. So it took no courage at all. And actually, David Axelrod, who was his campaign manager, said, "You should come out against it." He thought politically it would help him to oppose the attack. So it was a popular position to be against it; it didn't take any particular political courage. Second of all, it all depends on what happens. If the U.S. wins in another week, all the opposition will vanish. Trump will be gloating, and everybody else will be hiding.

So where public opinion ends up will depend on how this thing unfolds. I wouldn't attach too much importance to public opinion opposing it until and unless we see how people react if it turns out that the U.S. and Israel successfully decapitate Iran. There's another comparison, which I think is important, with 2003—and that's this whole issue of the tail wagging the dog. Who's in charge here? Now, 2003 was very different. Very different. I don't think people, in my opinion, fully understand the difference between 2003 and today. Dick Cheney, the Vice President, and Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense—they were very smart guys. They were very competent guys. They were very hardworking guys.

They had long experience in government. Each of them—believe it or not—their experience stretched back fifty years. They were like Clinton. Clinton was already active; he was working on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in his twenties. When you're into politics, it's almost always the case that you start very young, in your twenties. They had it in their blood, in their bones. So you had two hyper-competent people at the senior level—namely, the Secretary of Defense and the Vice President. And then you had staffing across all the bureaucracies—very hyper-competent neoconservatives. People like Douglas Feith. Okay, I don't like them. I think, you know, they certainly deserve to be hung from the highest lamppost—maybe from the Eiffel Tower.

But one can't doubt their sheer intellectual competence and their conscientiousness. They worked hard, okay? So that's where I disagreed with them. Now, my friend John Mearsheimer—I strongly disagreed with the book **The Israel Lobby**. It had a very neutral-sounding title; I can't remember exactly now. I strongly disagreed with it because I found its premise completely absurd. The premise was that Israel managed to dupe the U.S. ruling elites into a war that was not in the U.S. national interest. Well, as I said in my critique of them, nobody dupes Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. They were wrong about being able to win the war, for sure.

They had a very specific notion of our national interests, which was not necessarily shared by all the ruling elites—that's for sure. There were members of the ruling elites who opposed the war. Okay, so they were smart, but not as smart as they thought they were. They believed they were acting in the U.S. national interest, but others, calculating that same interest, reached entirely different conclusions about the wisdom and prudence of going to war with Iraq. But duped? Tricked? No.

Nobody tricks or dupes Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld. Doesn't happen. Now we're in a very different situation—very different. The person currently occupying the Oval Office is an ape. He's an ape. He looks like an ape. He talks like an ape.

His syntactic structures—to use a phrase from Professor Chomsky's *Magnum Opus*—are those of an ape. He is not the missing link. No, that would be an insult to the missing link. He is an ape. There's no evidence that he reads anything. Whenever he's awake, he devotes his entire time to Truth Social or watching Fox News. I very much doubt—every morning the president has on his desk the briefing book from the major intelligence agencies about what's going on—I very much doubt he reads it. The only thing Obama did when he wasn't watching basketball was read the intelligence briefings. He did—every morning he read them, no question about that. He was like a good fourth grader, a studious fourth grader, you know.

People like Clinton—you know, Clinton was always perusing the presidential library, always digging up stuff. He was very intellectually curious, for sure. Obama read the briefings. Trump—nothing. Nothing. Trump is, it won't come as any surprise to your listeners, a stupendous megalomaniac. He carries himself—the ape in the overcoat—like he's a cross between Caesar and Napoleon. No, you're not Caesar. You're not Napoleon. You're an ape. Who has he surrounded himself with? Well, there's Marco Rubio. Marco Rubio—when he goes to the toilet, he brings along his GPS to find his anal cavity. You know, Marco... Marco Rubio, Secretary of State. Secretary of Defense—Hegseth—he must spend half his day under a blow dryer. This is the Secretary of War. Are there any knowledgeable people actually advising him?

If you look at the females occupying high office, they all look like they just came out of Hooters. I've never seen a collection of—I've never seen a sight like this. The people he's chosen around him. And even if they had a scratch of intelligence, a jot—even if they had a jot of intelligence—would they dare criticize the great leader? I mean, do you listen to the guy, the UN rep? Oh, I forgot Witkoff. Oh, I forgot Witkoff. And Kushner. Kushner—Kushner, I think he should lay off the puberty blockers and grow some facial hair. His face looks like porcelain. It does. He's overdoing it with the puberty blockers. And then Witkoff—okay, if I needed somebody, and I don't know anything about golf, so if I were on the golf course and needed to know whether to use an iron or a wood, I would ask Witkoff, not about nuclear negotiations.

#Guest

I think it's quite possible, in this particular case, that along comes Mr. Netanyahu. He says Iran is on the precipice—just a little terror bombing, a few strategic assassinations, and the whole place will crack. And Trump, you know, Trump is a good used-car salesman. He could convince himself—or be convinced—because the kinds of Looney Tunes cartoons Netanyahu used to hold up at the UN, you know what Looney Tunes are, that old cartoon series—those sorts of illustrations probably would work with apes like Trump. They probably would work with him.

So there's a possibility here that when Trump made his decision—born of megalomania and ignorance—he wasn't calculating any U.S. national interest. I think that's possible. I mean, you have to remember what should be obvious: at the end of the day, even national interest is mediated by human beings. It doesn't just snap into place. It's not like you have AI saying, "What is the U.S. national interest on March 8th?" You don't have that. It's all mediated by human beings. And that guy, the way he operates, the way he occupies the Oval Office—it's quite something. First of all, he doesn't care, except for the fact that he thinks he is the national interest. We had an expression in the late 1950s: "What's good for General Motors is good for the country."

It was assumed that what's good for the corporations is good for the U.S. In this case, Trump is more along the lines of Louis XIV—"I am the state." So to that extent, you could say, look, Trump comes from the billionaire class, so he's going to express the billionaire interest. That's true. But then there are all these idiosyncratic, eccentric sides to Trump, and the stupendous megalomania, and the fact that he's not surrounded by anybody with even marginal competence. And the fact that they treat him like Kim Il-sung, the Great Leader. As I said, if you watched the U.N. rep for the U.S.—"President Trump said yesterday, President Trump said..."

Does anybody care what President Trump says about anything? He's an ape. So, in my opinion, it's different from 2003 in the sense that it's plausible Israel played a deciding role in what unfolded. Because Netanyahu, being a good used-car salesman and holding up diagrams fitted to Trump's mental capacities, may have persuaded him. So here I'm willing to say that, whereas I was most skeptical in 2003 of this notion that Israel managed to lure the U.S. into waging a war that wasn't in its interest—which struck me as most implausible—I'd say this time, yeah, I think Israel could have played a decisive role in what happened.

#Mudiar

Yeah, this is very convincing. Back in 2003, the U.S. had much bigger, more grandiose aims. They went into Afghanistan. It was also a unipolar moment, when the U.S. had much larger ambitions. And the amount of resources they poured into the region was way, way higher than what they were typically giving.

#Guest

The U.S. was very clear: the goal was Iraq, Syria, Iran. So there was a difference of opinion between the U.S. and Israel at the time. Israel wanted to go after Iran first, and the U.S. wanted to go after Iraq first. But they all had in mind Iraq, Syria, Iran. Obviously, it didn't work out that way because Iraq didn't unfold into Iran as they had hoped. So I think that difference does stand out to me. The usual, quote-unquote, leftist position is that it's the U.S. that's the dog wagging the tail here. I think, you know what, Israel does play a bigger role than I would normally have ascribed to it.

I would have been curious, if Professor Chomsky were among us, whether he would have been as dogmatic in his position that this was a U.S. operation. No—in terms of enabling the attack, of course it's the U.S. I mean, Israel couldn't blink an eye without U.S. military backing. So as the enabler, yes, of course it's the U.S., but as the architect, I think it's probably closer to Israel. It's a kind of, you know, as I say, in the case of Trump, a combination of stupendous megalomania. And there were two sets of circumstances: there were the many "successes" he enjoyed, from the U.N. granting him the deed to Gaza, to then Venezuela.

So it looked like it might be another easy victory for him. But then you have to remember, there was a negative side to his balance sheet. Greenland did not go as he expected. Minnesota turned into a disaster. He had to withdraw. And then there was the U.S. Supreme Court decision on the tariffs. So it was a combination of two sets of circumstances: the many victories he'd chalked up—he thought it would be the same, or he'd been convinced by Netanyahu it would be a walkover in Iran—but also, he needed to divert attention from the succession of defeats: the Greenland debacle, the Minnesota debacle.

#Mudiar

China debacle. China? Yeah, he said he could win the tariff war—but he lost.

#Guest

Right. The tariff debacle. And then, I don't know where it's going to rank in the history books—the Kristi Noem debacle. So he needed something to change the subject, a nice victory to change the subject. When you combine those two, yes, he had a significant incentive to attack Iran. But of course, he had to know the variables, the unknowns, the dangers that lurked. And there he had no domestic advisors—none. And it's quite possible that under Cheney and Rumsfeld, the U.S. would never have deferred to Israeli intelligence. They knew Israeli intelligence works for Israel and would provide information that's good for Israel. They weren't going to defer to U.S. intelligence. It wasn't going to happen.

#Mudiar

Just for our viewers, I wanted to mention—excuse me—the U.S. National Intelligence Council, which compiles reports from 18 different intelligence agencies, had published a report saying that any kind of attack, including a so-called decapitating strike on the Supreme Leader, would not lead to a "regime change." I'm sure he never read it.

#Guest

He totally ignored it—ignored it. He never read it.

#Mudiar

He never read it. Yeah.

#Guest

He's incapable. I mean, just remember, Trump is 78. And he wasn't the brightest light in the circuit, the sharpest tool in the shed, when he was 28. I don't believe he reads anything. Reading—believe it or not, I know this will come as a shock to many of your viewers—but reading takes time. And it takes mental energy. And he has the mental energy and the discipline to read a tweet. That's it.

#Mudiar

And in 2000...

#Guest

I know. Why people would be shocked at me saying that. You know, Cheney and Rumsfeld, they worked so hard. I had a friend—he's now deceased—who was the head of the computer system in the White House. A brilliant guy. He was the chief technology officer for Unisys—U-N-I-S-Y-S—which is the largest defense computer company in the U.S. It's in Washington. And he was a childhood friend, brilliant guy, brilliant guy, no question. And he once said to me—he knew we were on opposite sides in this whole thing called U.S. power.

And he once said to me, "Norm, I want you to know"—because he was in the White House every day, in charge of the computer system—"I want you to know, they work very hard," meaning Cheney, Rumsfeld, the whole bunch of them. And I said, "Of course they work very hard. They're defending their interests—the system of which they're the beneficiaries and to which they're deeply committed. They're defending their interests. So of course they work very hard." Trump worked very hard? No. No. Hegseth? Yeah, he works very hard combing his hair. I'll give him that.

#Guest

Rubio? Rubio? No, so there was a void there—a mental void. In the most literal sense, there was a vacuum. And the Israelis filled it. They filled it. So I do think that in this case, it's fair to say it was, in large part, an Israeli war—though, of course, we have to make distinctions in terms of the architecture. But in terms of enabling it, you know, Israel couldn't do anything were it not for the United States. You know, like that idiotic thing Rubio said: "We have to go in because Israel said it was going to attack." Oh, really? Trump could have just turned and said, "It's all BS." But even if it were true—let's just say, hypothetically—he just turns to him and says, "OK, you do what you like. You're a sovereign country, but you're not getting any U.S. weapons. We're not going to protect you at the United Nations. We're going to support Iran in the UN."

#Mudiar

It's over. It's over. In 2003, the intelligence was at least correct about the unpopularity of Saddam Hussein. Of course, they cooked up things about weapons of mass destruction, links with Al-Qaeda, and the whole democracy business. All of those things were completely misunderstood—or they just made them up. But at least the intelligence was right that the entry of U.S. troops would be easy, given Saddam Hussein's unpopularity. But this time, they were completely wrong.

#Guest

Everybody expected that. There was an assumption on the left that the U.S. would easily defeat Iraq on the battlefield. The question was the occupation, which they said was going to be protracted—and the disaster, they were right about that. Now, Obama, in his memoir, wants to take credit for predicting that. No, Mr. Obama. He was in the hip Hyde Park crowd—what we now call “woke,” I'll call it back then “hip.” And he knew what the leftist arguments were, and that's what they were saying. I documented it in the book I wrote, **Burn That Bridge**. He didn't say anything that anybody else on the left wasn't saying at the time. Now he wants to take credit for predicting that the occupation would be a disaster in Iraq.

We all predicted that. That was a given. What will happen now? I have no idea. Look, I listened to your program with Charles Freeman—I watched it last night. I actually watched all 46 minutes. He's obviously an extremely knowledgeable guy, for sure. And he's a serious guy, and he knows the region. He was the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, so he knows the region. At one point, he says you have to take what Trump says—not with a grain of salt, but with a boulder of salt. And yeah, that's obviously wise counsel. The only thing is, as I said to my friend Sana Qasim today—my friend, my comrade, my webmaster, my everything—I said to her, well, these are the same people who were saying that Hamas was defeating Israel in Gaza. So I have to take them with a grain of salt.

Because that was all wrong. That was all wrong. I noticed the Israelis are now saying it's going to take a few weeks in Iran, and that was interesting to me. You know why? Because they never said it would take a few weeks in Gaza. They knew it would take a very long time. You know why? Because Iran is a war; Gaza was a genocide. And they knew that to execute the genocide would take time. But they think they can just decapitate—you know, a few more weeks. Probably this week will begin the intense terror bombing. Because usually the conventional—what they call, you know, the expression they use—the “target bank.” Iran is a very big place, so they must have a very large target bank. The problem—“target bank” meaning military sites to take out in order to win on the battlefield.

The problem is, that would normally take some time for a place as big as Iran to exhaust the target bank, as it's called. The thing is, Trump doesn't want to wait. He's very impatient. He's on his social media saying this war is getting a bad rap, and he wants to win. So his instinct is, no, it's not going to be a few weeks—he wants to go right to the terror bombing. He wants to go right there. It's so

funny—you read the headlines in the New York Times, and it just can't overcome its hack impulses. It refers to Israel targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon. Really? No. Israel's engaged in what everyone calls the Dahiya Doctrine. It's supposed to be some brilliant new doctrine, like not since Sun Tzu and—what's the... oh, gosh—the famous military manual in the West. Not Sun Tzu.

#Mudiar

The Art of War.

#Guest

That's Sun Tzu, but there's another one in the West. As if they've invented some new concept—the Dahiya Doctrine. The Dahiya Doctrine is as old as the hills. It's terror bombing a civilian population to turn it against the reigning power. In the case of South Lebanon, that's Hezbollah. They're not targeting Hezbollah; they're targeting the civilian population. It's just old-fashioned terror bombing, just like what they did before. Even now, the morons keep talking about the "Israel-Hamas war." There's no war against Hamas. There were no battles—not even one. Not one Israeli was killed per day. Not one.

Not even one. It was like one every two days, or one and a half. It was just—it was a genocide. No, the genocide wasn't to exterminate the people, that's correct. The genocide was designed to expel the population. But in order to expel it, they realized they had to destroy a significant part of the population, because people didn't want to move. They didn't want to leave Gaza, and also they couldn't leave Gaza. So they were trying not just to resort to genocide to get them to leave, but also to persuade—quote, unquote—the international community to take them in. As in, "They're committing a genocide; we should take them in." And there was an argument there.

I mean, that was a moral quandary—whether you should be advocating that the borders of Gaza be opened so they can go to Egypt. It was a moral quandary. But it was a genocide. And here, it's what I would describe—and it's not unusual—as a conventional war aimed at destroying Iraq's defensive capacities. Forget "offensive," because it never really had offensive capacities—its defensive capacities. But it also has a terror component, namely the use of terror bombing to turn the population against the government. But it's not a genocide, because ultimately the U.S. and Israel want to prevail on the battlefield. They want to defeat it militarily. And so, ultimately, it's a conflict between armies.

Now, it has a terroristic component, but at the end of the day, it's what Trump said—what the aides said. He wants unconditional surrender. They did not want unconditional surrender in Gaza. Absolutely not. They wanted to keep Hamas, at least in the media imagination. They wanted to keep Hamas alive. They didn't want surrender; they wanted expulsion. Very different. There was no military to speak of—no real military component in Gaza. It was annihilation, not aimed at militarily defeating Gaza, but at expelling the population by systematically exterminating it. As I said, I already

told you, I won't comment on the military matters. I mean, Charles Friedman was extremely knowledgeable.

I've heard many very knowledgeable people speak on the topic, but I'm of the Tolstoy opinion. Tolstoy said in his great novel *War and Peace* that there are too many unpredictable factors in war to know who's going to win—too many variables. It's impossible to predict with any certainty. Who would have ever thought the Vietnamese would hold out for 30 years? Who would have ever thought that? I mean, that was terror bombing on a monthly scale. By '68, they were dropping the equivalent of two atomic bombs on Vietnam every month. And they held out. The Russian example is an interesting one—the Soviet Union. When the Nazis invaded Russia, or the Soviet Union, it was a walkover for the first few months.

They just took over everything. And part of it, plausibly, I would say, was due to Stalin's lack of preparation. I'm not sure how large a factor that was, but the main factor was very obvious. Stalin had carried out a very brutal collectivization, and the regime was extremely unpopular by the 1930s—unpopular because it was so brutal. So it was a walkover for the Nazis. The problem was, the Nazis were waging a war of extermination in the East. In the West, it was a fairly conventional war—you know, prisoner-of-war camps, pretty standard. But in the East, it was a war of extermination. They wanted *Lebensraum*, and *Lebensraum* meant you had to get rid of the people living there.

You had to get rid of the indigenous population. So, between the Nazi goal and Stalin's response, he recast the war—he dropped all the communism. It became the Great Patriotic War, recalling the War of 1812. They revived the Russian Orthodox Church, and it was all about defending the motherland. What will happen with Iran is hard to say. One question is whether the brutality of the terror bombing reaches such a magnitude that it turns the population in support of the regime and against the U.S. and Israel. That's one possibility. Another is whether the Iranian leadership can successfully cast this as a great patriotic war.

And for a large number of people to forget that it was a pretty miserable place under the regime that's currently in power—that's hard to imagine. Those are all imponderables. I know from Vietnam—once I asked someone pretty high up in what was then the National Liberation Front of Vietnam—I asked, "How did they do it? I just can't understand this. How did you manage to hold out?" And his answer was very simple. He said to me, "The party. The party was so dedicated, so committed—an iron fist. Those people were real revolutionaries." And that nucleus, with their organizing and their total commitment, was able to hold out.

What the Russians had, what the Iranians have—that level of commitment, that capacity. And of course, in the case of Vietnam, they had carried out major land reform, which won over large numbers of people to support the regime. As I said, look, I could go on with this for an hour. There are just so many variables that I agree with Tolstoy—ultimately, there are too many variables; you can't predict. So I grant the knowledge, and I learn from people. There are many commentators now, but Freeman definitely has a firm grasp. But as I said, I believe they all got it wrong on Gaza,

number one. So that causes me to wonder. And number two, there are just too many variables to make any firm predictions. Too many variables. I hope they hold up. You know, I'm not afraid to say it.

#Mudiar

Just on the Tolstoy vein—Marc Bloch, who was killed during the Second World War—he wrote great books, a historian. He wrote a book called *The Historian's Craft*. And in that book, he said that during wars, one thing you don't need to trust is the sources. He was writing about sources and what historians do.

#Guest

Oh, I'm in trouble—really in trouble. It's already two o'clock, and I had an appointment. I'm going to have to cut you short.

#Mudiar

We'll leave it there. He just said, don't believe the press on anything—any military matters that are coming out—because it's just propaganda. So it's hard to believe anything in the press on the military front. But the analyses are helpful. Okay, we'll leave it there, Professor Finkelstein. Thank you so much for your time and analysis. Have a wonderful rest of the day. Bye.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Mudiar Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. So far, we've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists. 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.