

Hidden cost of Iran war - Max Blumenthal on the Judge

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#Max

Undeclared wars are commonplace. Tragically, our government engages in preemptive war—otherwise known as aggression—with hardly any complaints from the American people. Sadly, we’ve become accustomed to living with the illegitimate use of force by the government. To build a truly free society, the issue of initiating force must be understood and rejected.

#Speaker 1

What if, sometimes, to love your country, you had to alter or abolish the government? What if Jefferson was right? What if the government that governs least is best? What if it’s dangerous to be right when the government is wrong? What if it’s better to perish fighting for freedom than to live as a slave? What if freedom’s greatest hour of danger is now?

#Andrew Napolitano

Hi everyone, Judge Andrew Napolitano here for *Judging Freedom.* Today is Thursday, March 12th, 2026. My dear friend and colleague Max Blumenthal joins us now. Max, thank you very much. I know you’ve been fascinated with this, and I have as well—and that is the government’s attempt, Trump’s personal attempt, to worm out of responsibility for the slaughter of 170, the incineration of 170 little girls. I don’t usually start with a clip, but it’s brief and very telling. Chris, number 32.

#News reporter

A new report says the military investigation found that the United States struck the school in Iran. As commander-in-chief, do you take responsibility for that?

#Donald Trump

What is that?

#News reporter

As commander-in-chief, do you— For what? For the strike on the school in Iran. A new report says the military investigation found it was the United States that struck the school. I don't know, though.

#Andrew Napolitano

How could he not know about it?

#Max

Well, in a press conference, Trump claimed that Iran had somehow acquired a U.S. Tomahawk missile and used it to bomb its own school for unspecified reasons. That's the level he's operating at—it's completely implausible. Trump is now contradicting the U.S. military, which, through its own investigation, has confirmed that the U.S. struck this school. The *Washington Post* is reporting, citing military sources, that the school in Minab—a girls' school—was on the U.S. target list, which raises further questions: how did it get on that list?

Through the AI targeting system—Palantir's Maven system—which is being combined with Anthropic's Claude to generate targets and track them through pattern-of-life analysis and other AI capabilities. In other words, was this target generated by a computer and then carried out by U.S. troops who were just following orders to commit one of the great atrocities of our time? I think the answer is yes, and I'll tell you why. If you look at many of the other targets being generated, they don't make any sense. There's a park in Tehran called Police Park—and it was bombed.

And it suggests that when the U.S. military and the national security apparatus decided, "We're going to bomb police stations in Tehran, because when we do that there will be disorder, and the people will rise up, and then they'll bring regime change, and we'll get the Persian Delcy Rodríguez to hand over the oil"—once they made that decision, they just told the AI Skynet system, "Generate targets." Do-do-do-do—Police Park. And then they bomb a public park simply because it says "police." So they're doing exactly what the Israelis did during the Gaza genocide, when they used this so-called Gospel system, including an element known as "Where's Daddy," to determine whether families were affiliated with Hamas.

And then they would liquidate the entire family—sometimes 30 people at a time—bombing their homes when the father was there. They're just replicating that model, the Israeli genocide model, in Iran. The Iranian Committee of the Red Cross has now declared that over 17,000 residential buildings have been hit, and that accounts for the vast majority of targets attacked by the Israeli-U.S. coalition. So this is a war of terror on the Iranian people, directed by AI systems and carried out by U.S. service members who are just following Trump's orders. And Donald Trump is evading responsibility for one of the great crimes of the century.

#Andrew Napolitano

I don't know how much longer he can evade responsibility. Sooner or later, this will catch up with him. We'll talk about other harm here in the United States caused by this. But Palantir—hasn't this been used by the Israelis? Isn't Palantir the company that physically threw you out of a conference that was either on AI or security systems? Refresh my memory on that. And if this was Palantir, and it's checking lifestyles, didn't they see little girls going into that building before they told Hegseth's people to bomb it?

#Max

Yes, yes. And Pete Hegseth proceeded to boast that the U.S. military would rain death and destruction all day long on the people of Iran, even after this assault. To your question about Palantir—Palantir was absolutely, directly involved in establishing the "Gospel" system that Israel used for AI targeting, where it would generate targets so fast there was no way any human intelligence officer could verify that these were actual military targets or anything they wanted to hit. Palantir is taking credit. Palantir CEO Alex Karp proudly expressed not just his support for the Israeli assault on Gaza, but his direct involvement in it. He said, "We're just killing terrorists. We're killing lots of terrorists."

This maniac and his business partner, Peter Thiel, have refused to answer questions about Gaza when asked in public. I guess this is blood on Alex Karp's hands—the blood of the schoolgirls in Minab. It's also on the hands of Peter Thiel, who might only be disappointed that their blood wasn't injected into his transhumanist veins as he seeks to live forever. This is a sick class of AI warlords guiding the U.S. military into one crime after another. And the ultimate responsibility will be on Bradley Cooper and Dan Raison-Kane, who initially voiced or leaked opposition to the war. I was kicked out of the 2025 AI Expo here in D.C., where all the major AI companies were hawking their wares, including autonomous drones. Palantir had a booth set up.

I was kicked out not because I asked any uncomfortable questions of Palantir, but because I had filmed a French reporter grilling Palantir about another system used to surveil Americans. Simply for filming that, I was kicked out. Then I was let back in. Then I was kicked out again for asking the former head of Israeli military intelligence, who was on stage, how he helped set the stage for the Gaza genocide by authoring a military doctrine that deliberately disregarded the Geneva Conventions and the concept of the civilian—replacing it with a concept he wrote: the terrorist's non-dangerous neighbor. That's the concept being applied now in Tehran, where most of the people dying are civilians. It's an Israeli concept.

#Andrew Napolitano

You pointed out to me yesterday—and even though I love you and believe everything you tell me—seeing it was startling, because the number is mind-boggling. They're charging \$8.21 a gallon for

gas in Los Angeles, California, USA. Do you think the American public has any idea what will befall us in terms of supply chain problems today? Fuel problems, computer chip non-delivery, fertilizer, and other things that can't get here because of all these shortages caused by Netanyahu and Trump's war.

#Max

Trump is waging a war for Israel, and that's the most important fact—beyond debate—that every American needs to understand. Trump has allowed himself to become a vehicle for foreign influence from a tiny, faraway apartheid colony, and he has sacrificed the ambitions and aspirations of working-class Americans for Israel. Gas prices, as you point out, at one station in the Los Angeles area are over \$8 for a gallon of regular. The average across the Los Angeles area is over \$5 per gallon. It's rising nationally—it's well above \$3.50. Crude oil is \$100 a barrel and could go up to \$200 a barrel.

#Max

Jim Cramer, the financial flim-flam man on CNBC who's duped millions of Americans into bad trades day after day, has called for a genocidal war—terrorist attacks on Iranian energy and electrical infrastructure—in order to save Wall Street. That's how panicked he is. And at the same time, while Americans are suffering, while fertilizer prices are up about 30%, hammering American producers, and Uber drivers are struggling, making a pittance because of the Trump War for Israel tax—or TWIT—Donald Trump and his cronies are making money. Chris Wright, the energy secretary who comes from the oil industry—he headed an oil services company before he was energy secretary—will go back through the revolving door. He declared a few days ago, I think four days ago, that a ship had been able to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

And he brought Brent crude from \$100 a barrel down to \$80. It stands to reason that Chris Wright, or someone close to him, had placed a put on the price of Brent crude, because they're moving markets with these statements. Then, a few hours later, he deletes the tweet, and the price goes back up again. It looks like he's just moving markets to make money. And then today, Donald Trump comes out—you can put this tweet on screen—and declares, "The United States is the largest oil producer in the world by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money." Who is "we"? "We" is not the American people. It's not the working class. It's not American soldiers who are going off to die for Israel. It's Donald Trump and his cronies. It's the Epstein class. And this is proof that this is the most corrupt administration in American history. They make Hunter Biden look like Ralph Nader.

#Andrew Napolitano

Trump should say this to the average blue-collar guy trying to fill up his pickup truck, paying \$4.99 a gallon for diesel.

#Andrew Napolitano

Chris came across a clip from somebody I'd never heard of, but it's fascinating. It's Richard Engel of NBC News grilling someone named Ophir Falk, who is Netanyahu's top security advisor. I mean, this is just incredible. I'd like your understanding of it, and if you can, maybe some background on this character. Sounds like he's from New York—but here he is. Chris, cut number one.

#News 1

What information did you have indicating that Iran was about to carry out an imminent attack?

#News 2

One good indication was that for 47 years they've been saying, "Death to America, death to Israel." Believe it. That's 47 years—but why that day? They were ramping up their capabilities with ballistic missiles. They were stringing along the negotiations. They always lie. Listen to your negotiators; they'll tell you the truth. They're stringing them along. They always lie. And it was an imminent threat—and we removed that imminent threat.

#News 1

I still don't understand what the imminent threat was. Were they going to attack Israel, attack American bases, attack the U.S.? An imminent threat of what?

#News 2

All of the above. All of the above. They were threatening their neighbors. Look at what they're doing now—they're shooting at all their immediate neighbors. You know, the mask is off. These guys, it's a death cult. They've been calling for the death of Americans and Israelis for 47 years, and now they're killing their neighbors.

#Andrew Napolitano

Is this the stuff that Netanyahu and the Mossad fed to Trump, with no specificity whatsoever?

#Max

Yes. And Steve Witkoff.

#Andrew Napolitano

Yes.

#Max

Who said Iran was one week away from a nuclear weapon when Iran was offering zero enrichment? Witkoff has played a seminal role in this war. But I don't even know who that character was—I've never seen him before. Netanyahu is advised by many Americans who claim Israeli citizenship, like Ron Dermer. Never seen that guy before. But he's unable to provide any concrete evidence of a threat by Iran to strike preemptively. Iran understands that a preemptive strike on the U.S.—while it would absolutely have been preemptive had they struck U.S. bases or a U.S. aircraft carrier, as Trump was massing a show of force unprecedented at any time since Iran—would have been unprecedented, but they would have lost their strategic and political advantage, which they can now claim.

And so, unfortunately for Iran, they had to withstand the assassination of top IRGC commanders as well as their leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei, which was a historic tragedy for millions of Iranians, in order not to preempt the U.S. attack they all knew was coming. If Iran was going to stage a preemptive attack, why hadn't they followed the Al-Aqsa Flood attack by Hamas on October 7th with an attack of their own to overwhelm Israel at its weakest point? They didn't do it. It's not part of their doctrine. Their doctrine is not to invade other countries. That's the U.S. doctrine. The U.S. doctrine is preemption, and it comes from Israeli influence on the U.S. national security sphere and the war on terror. So this is part of how Trump was plied. Benjamin Netanyahu told Donald Trump, "I am going to strike."

There was this meeting of the Ayatollah with his advisors and family on February 28th, and they said, "You must come with me, or we'll do it without you—and it'll look horrible if you don't." And Trump—Netanyahu finally found someone stupid enough to do it. Marco Rubio confirmed that this is what took place in his briefing with the Gang of Eight in the Senate. He came out and said that to the press, then tried to walk back his comments because he realized he'd screwed up. But now we have proof: the U.S. went to war with Israel. Tony Blinken, one of the most pro-Israel secretaries of state in history—Biden's secretary of state—said in an interview last week that Netanyahu had threatened Barack Obama in the same way, saying he was going to attack Iran and the U.S. had to follow him. Except the Obama administration was wise enough to say no.

And now, a lot of Iranians who weren't supporters of the Islamic Republic are realizing why more hardcore supporters have been calling the U.S. the Great Satan, as they watch not just their leadership being assassinated, but schoolgirls being slaughtered, an oil depot that feeds Tehran with energy blown up and shrouding the city in toxic smoke—one of the worst chemical attacks in their history. And the Trump administration evades responsibility for these crimes. I think this war is so disastrous that not only has it failed in its original objective of regime change, but the objective now might be simply to cling to maintaining U.S. bases in the region as Iran methodically and clinically winkles them out.

#Andrew Napolitano

Right, right. We're hearing from the military guys who appear on the show that Iran is, as you say, methodically destroying them. The huge base in Saudi Arabia is now useless and no longer has any military defenses. Are you able, because of your knowledge of Israel, to pierce the censors and tell us how badly Israel is being damaged by the Iranian counterattack? Or is it too early to assess that? Have they not yet seriously attacked?

#Max

Official Israel is saying they've achieved tactical gains in Iran that are better than expected, and that the situation on the home front is as expected. They expected to be hit immediately, to take ballistic missile strikes, and for the population to be in shelters. I do think it's worse inside Israel than we're being told. Official censorship is unprecedented. Israeli citizens are afraid to take footage for fear of being punished. Bahrain, of course, is threatening the death penalty for any citizen who films the massive hits Bahrain has taken. Bahrain's airspace is effectively dominated by Iranian Shahed drones. But in Israel, the problem is that Iran had a very clear strategy—one that could have been predicted by anyone with a three-digit IQ—which was to take out U.S. radar systems and deny Israel early warning.

So the sirens they used to hear during the 12-day war for ballistic missile and drone barrages from Iran—where they'd get maybe five or ten minutes of warning—now give only a one-minute warning. There was even a ballistic missile strike in Herzliya yesterday with no warning at all. The U.S. is being blinded in the region. They've lost their radar at the Al Udeid base in Kuwait, and they've lost THAAD systems in the UAE and in Jordan. I think they've lost three radars in Kuwait. This is very psychologically damaging for the average Israeli citizen. And I just heard today—this is obviously anecdotal—from a friend who works in finance. He's at a company that consults for banks, and they have an affiliate in Israel.

He said that the majority of Israeli employees at that affiliate have quit—over 40 of them, all today. These aren't recent immigrants to Israel; they're long-term Israelis, and they're planning to leave the country. People are terrified. Even though the Iranian ballistic missile barrages aren't as intense as they were during the 12-day war or at the start of this one, a single missile can send the entire population of a region—Central Israel, Northern Israel, Be'er Sheva, Eilat—rushing into shelters, because there's no early warning system left. No one even knows when to go into the bunker. And Iranian precision is increasing.

#Andrew Napolitano

Where's Netanyahu? Do we know?

#Max

I haven't seen him recently. We used to see him more often in the rubble, trying to project strength and endurance—resilience—during the 12-day war. I've only seen him appear maybe once since then, but I don't want to speculate on what's happening with him. I would be concerned if I were an Israeli official like him, given the reconnaissance and intelligence capabilities Iran has demonstrated in the Gulf states—where they're striking residential towers, as well as U.S. consulates and diplomatic facilities in Iraq—with unusual precision. They clearly know where U.S. service members and CIA officials are stationed and positioned, and they're able to penetrate air defenses and hit them fairly accurately. As we saw with the attack on the Ali al-Salem base in Kuwait, a drone strike killed something like seven U.S. soldiers. Dozens more were injured—over 140, I think. That was all covered up initially, so I don't think we know the true toll. But that would be ominous to me if I were an Israeli official who has presided over the assassination of so many Iranians.

#Andrew Napolitano

Have the Republicans—I'm going to play a little clip for you first before you answer—finally started calling this a war? Chris, cut number three. Okay, questions, Peter?

#News 3

Yes. You just said it's a little excursion, and then you said it's a war. So which one is it?

#Donald Trump

Well, it's both. It's an excursion that will keep us out of a war—and the war is going to be for them. It's a war for us, and it's turned out to be easier than we thought.

#Max

Trump's in a real pickle. He called it, I think, a "special military operation" initially, because he didn't want the American public to understand that he's just waded into a potential quagmire—an economically disastrous, politically disastrous one—in which many American troops could be killed. A ground invasion is being proposed as the only way to dislodge the IRGC presence from the Strait of Hormuz or to destroy Iran's economic production base by invading Kharg Island. So what's really dictating Trump's timeline here? He keeps suggesting he wants an off-ramp, that the war will be over soon.

Two days ago, he said they've essentially hit everything and there's nothing left to hit in Iran, that they're continuing to kill civilians. What will determine his timeline? You'd think, based on an objective political analysis and a material analysis of the economic conditions Donald Trump has created with this folly, that once the strategic reserve runs out—he's just released the largest

amount of U.S. strategic petroleum reserves in history to lower oil prices—and if the Strait of Hormuz is still closed, which it very likely will be, that would be the time to wrap it up. There's nothing militarily—I can't really see anything militarily—as long as he's waging an air war.

Right. Alter the dynamics on the ground. So that would seem to be what the end point would be. But for the Israelis, this would be a disaster. For Netanyahu, if Trump leaves the battlefield, Israel is still in this fight. Iran understands that if they sign a ceasefire with Israel, as during the 12-day war, Israel will come back—if not in a few months, then in a few years. Israeli military intelligence officials are saying this openly. So Iran needs to absolutely pulverize Israel. It needs to consolidate a new relationship with the Sunni Arab family dictatorships in the Gulf, where they pay Iran reparations for this war and agree not to host U.S. military bases.

For Iran, this is an existential war, and Israel therefore cannot allow the U.S. to leave the battlefield. That means Donald Trump faces certain threats and a precarious situation. It makes me think back to the gift that Netanyahu gave him—a golden pager—and wonder whether that was meant as a gift or a threat. How will Israel keep Donald Trump and the U.S. military, which is spending 1.8 billion dollars a day of U.S. taxpayer money to maintain this war, on the battlefield for as long as possible with pure gifts, inducements, and enticements, without actually leveling threats against the U.S. president?

#Andrew Napolitano

He's the guy who told Tucker Carlson—not Mike Huckabee, the other one—that the Israelis are entitled to all the land in the Middle East. He's also a senator from Texas. You'll know in a second.

#Andrew Napolitano

Cut number 11. The threat of a terrorist attack is higher now than it has been in decades. And there are two causes for that. Number one, we've had four years under Joe Biden of open borders. We've had 12 million people flood across the border—basically an open invitation to every terrorist, every Hamas, Hezbollah, and IRGC operative to come to America.

#News 3

Have you been briefed on how many Iranian sleeper cells might be inside the U.S. right now?

#Donald Trump

I have been. And a lot of people came in under Biden with this stupid open border. But we know where most of them are. We've got our eye on all of them, I think.

#News 3

Is it dozens?

#Donald Trump

They came in through the open-border policies of Sleepy Joe Biden, and we've got our eyes on all of them.

#Andrew Napolitano

The questioner is Peter Doocy from Fox. The whole thing was a setup so the president could say what he wanted to say. So, Max, I don't know where this goes. Josh Hawley—I don't agree with anything he says—also said on Fox that Trump should just declare victory and go home. As you pointed out, if he does that, Netanyahu is left naked before his enemies.

#Max

Yeah. Yeah, I don't think Trump understands how screwed he is, because Iran has control over this war politically, strategically, and economically. It has successfully attacked the two biggest vulnerabilities of the U.S. empire—U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf region and in Iraq and Jordan—which are getting hammered day after day. And it has attacked the global economy, which the U.S. has controlled for decades, by exercising its chokehold over the Strait of Hormuz. And Energy Secretary Chris Wright said, "Oh, we'll have it open in two to three weeks." Well, in two to three weeks, what will the price of oil be, and how will they open it? What if Donald Trump decides—and we've seen these comments by the Iranian foreign ministry—that Steve Witkoff has been reaching out to them to ask about the possibility of a ceasefire?

What if Donald Trump personally goes to the Iranians and says, "We want to end this. Please let us end this." And he can't go any further up the escalation ladder without, I don't know, dropping a nuclear weapon. And the Iranians say, "No, we're in control of this war, and we know you're just going to keep coming back for us unless we negotiate an entirely new strategic security arrangement for the region, and your bases are out of there." That is increasingly possible. And if I were a realist U.S. imperialist, I'd be more furious than I am now, because that's all the U.S. is fighting for at this point—to maintain its foothold in the region. And they're clinging to it by their nails.

#Andrew Napolitano

I don't know what the Sunday talk shows will bring, but Lindsey Graham and that crowd have been mysteriously quiet for the past five days. They may very well, in their moments of intellectual honesty, recognize the accuracy and truthfulness of what you've just described for us, Max.

#Max

Well, I want to bring my sons and daughters from South Carolina—sons and daughters that I don't have—to go from South Carolina to fight for Israel. I mean, let's get this guy on the Sunday shows. I want more Lindsey Graham. I can't get enough of Lindsey Graham. He's the perfect salesman for this war because he's selling it on behalf of Israel, where he advised the prime minister on how to get Trump into this war.

#Andrew Napolitano

Yes, Max, thank you very much. Great, great, over-the-top, granular and big-picture analysis. We're deeply indebted to you, my dear friend. I know you have a busy day—thank you for finding the time for us. All my best to you. We'll see you next week.

#Max

Thanks a lot, Judge. Great seeing you.

#Andrew Napolitano

Sure. Brilliant and fearless person, as you well know. Tomorrow—Thursday, end of the week, end of the day—4 o'clock in the afternoon: the Intelligence Community Roundtable with Larry Johnson and Ray McGovern. Thank you for watching. Judge Napolitano for *Judging Freedom.*