

Yanis Varoufakis: Iran War Collapses U.S. Neoliberal Economy

Yanis Varoufakis is an economist, the former Finance Minister of Greece, and the author of numerous bestselling books. Yanis Varoufakis discusses the historical mistake of attacking Iran (again). Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the channel: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/Diesen79> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined today by Yanis Varoufakis, a professor, former finance minister of Greece, and founder of DiEM25, the Democracy in Europe Movement. Thank you, it's good to see you again. The world has gotten a lot more dangerous since the last time we spoke.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Yes, indeed. Thank you, Glenn. It's always good to be back. Your podcasts are a ray of sanity in this dark environment that we're increasingly descending into.

#Glenn

Well, thank you, I appreciate that. But I do see that this war in Iran, besides being dangerous, is also very interesting because it's asymmetric warfare. The U.S. is obviously much more powerful, which is probably why there's been a significant amount of hubris. It entered this war with a lot of confidence and the assumption of escalation dominance. We see the Iranians being forced to fight with other means, including the ability to shut down the energy trade. And given that they also see this as an existential threat—not just an effort to liberate women or something—they seem willing, or at least prepared, to shut down the global economy in order to avoid defeat. So where do you see this war heading? Because it seems like everyone is betting everything on it, and there's not much room left for anyone.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Well, we must remember that this is not new. The United States has engaged in a series of asymmetric conflicts where it entered with immense confidence and exited, sometimes many, many years later, with its wings clipped. So, you know, Afghanistan—they invaded Afghanistan. It took them 20 years to be defeated, but they were defeated, and they left with the Taliban, whom they

had initially intended to eradicate with the original invasion. They left the Taliban stronger than ever. Iraq—you know, shock and awe. George W. Bush walks in there, effectively takes Iraq in a day or two, declares victory on the aircraft carrier—if you recall, I'm sure you recall—and then the attrition began until, again, the United States was defeated.

I think the difference here is that the United States, if anything, is facing a lot more opposition than it did in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or Syria—countries it devastated with ill intent from the beginning. The Iranian regime has been preparing for this, and it's quite interesting, isn't it, that they're still capable of striking Tel Aviv and American military bases in the Gulf area? In the end, within a week or so, we now see that the U.S. government's pain threshold seems to be much lower than that of the Iranian regime.

#Glenn

Well, it also seems that if you look at the economics of this war, much like in Ukraine, you see that industrial might is important—that you can't rely on these international supply chains anymore. In the past, we just assumed that if everyone practiced free trade, we'd all follow our comparative advantage. But the lessons from both Ukraine and Iran show that great powers need technological sovereignty, some supply chain security, and, of course, industrial strength. Does this change our entire ideology now? Because over the past decades, everything had to be about free trade. If someone else could make your weapons, then you were supposed to outsource it. But how do you think this is going to change, especially globally? Because this lesson seems to be slowly sinking in.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Yes, well, you make a good point that the difference with the Vietnam War was that everything that followed after the early '70s and the demise of Bretton Woods—the era of financialization and neoliberalism, as you indicated—was an era during which the industrial foundations of the West were given away by Western elites, by the Western ruling classes. They were shipped out, and essentially they leveraged their financial sector. Now they're leveraging their big tech sector. They thought they could get away without having an industry. In the case of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher actually led the neoliberal movement's assault on industry in order to eradicate the trade unions—essentially to defeat the working class in a very nasty class war.

She was the first to pave the way for this deindustrialization process and the shifting out of industrial capacity to places like China, Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and so on. So, you know, the chickens are coming home to roost. But I'm particularly surprised, Glenn, that Donald Trump fell for it. I would have thought that before the foolish decision to start a war against Iran, without any exit strategy whatsoever, he would try to do what he did in Venezuela—which is, you know, come in, do something really against international law, like abduct Maduro; in the case of Iran, kill Khamenei—then declare victory and go home.

Because if he had done just that, then he would have been okay—you know, in the same way that Venezuela, in the end, was just a very brief moment during which he could claim to have toppled a dictator, in inverted commas. To use Roosevelt's terms, a bastard that he considers to be his own bastard—or not to be his own bastard, as in the case of Trump. But he didn't do it, and I think the reason he fell into this trap of entering a war that is now sucking him in, with devastating political effects on him, is Israel.

Netanyahu proved yet again perfectly capable of dragging the United States government into a never-ending war—a permanent war—which is Israel's strategy for creating permanent insecurity in the minds of Israelis, so they constantly pursue another war in the region. Whether it's Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, or now Iran, it's all for one reason: to create a lot of noise, to keep all Israelis hooked on warmongering and on this false notion that they're fighting for their lives and survival. That false notion is necessary to continue the one thing Netanyahu cares about—the annexation of the West Bank, the steady, permanent ethnic cleansing until there's no Palestinian life left in Palestine. And of course, that goes hand in hand, since the days of Ariel Sharon, with the conversion of Gaza into first a concentration camp and now a genocide site.

#Glenn

But you mentioned Iraq and Afghanistan. Well, I guess what was different there is that the U.S. had more escalation dominance—it was able to control the war to a greater degree. This time, of course, they're not answering the questions of why go in, what can be achieved, and how do we get out. It seems that the Americans didn't really consider—I mean, they considered the possibility of Iran shutting down the Strait of Hormuz as unlikely. So it wasn't factored in as something they assumed would happen, which is very strange, because that should be the first thing Iran would do if it faced such an existential threat: deny America that escalation control, put Iran on the slow burner. Why do you think the miscalculation was so radical?

Because we see this not just as poor war planning, but even poor narrative planning in advance. They haven't even come together with a shared story about why they attacked. Once they try to come up with one, they end up making it sound like Israel chose this war for them—and they can't say that. So you saw them flipping back and forth. You know, is this about liberating women, liberating Iran? And then the next day Trump is saying our goal is to make sure the Iranian nation won't be able to rebuild again. I mean, there doesn't seem to be any cohesive narrative either. How do you explain not just the miscalculation, but the poor planning? Is this just hubris, or what? Because this is kind of spectacular.

#Yanis Varoufakis

I'll be controversial and brief in my answer, just because none of this makes sense to me. I just didn't think that Trump—who, let's not forget, in his first term successfully resisted Israel's drive to co-opt him into a war against Iran—would change course. There was immense pressure on Trump, as there

was on Obama and other American presidents, coming from Tel Aviv, coming from Israel, to unleash a war against Iran. And Trump 1.0 resisted that, and very successfully. So the question—your question—is, how did he fall into the trap he’s now dwelling in? Because I don’t see how he’ll be able to escape from that trap. And the only answer I can come up with, Glenn, and this is the controversial part, is that there’s absolutely no sense of why he’s doing what he’s doing.

It seems to me that the only rational explanation is that Netanyahu had something on him—that Israel had some hold over Trump 2.0 that it didn’t have over Trump 1.0. And this explains why he got in there, because there can be no other explanation. You put it brilliantly when you said, what were they thinking? Did they think the Strait of Hormuz would remain open if they waged a never-ending bombardment campaign against Iran? So, in the absence of any other rational explanation for why they did this, the only conclusion I can reach is that Netanyahu had something on him, which Trump feared more than the quagmire he’s now landed in, just before the November congressional elections.

But this is one very crucial point that you’ve raised twice in our conversation so far, and I need to address it. You mentioned the excuse that they are trying to liberate women, and this is a question I think we have a duty to answer—I feel I have a duty to answer—when liberal imperialists say to me, whether now or years ago when it came to Afghanistan, “But what about the women, Janice? You are condemning American imperialism, but that was a solution for women, wasn’t it?” Well, no, it wasn’t. The women of Iran, Glenn, do not need bombs coming out of F-35s, being dropped on them by—let’s not forget—a misogynistic, misanthropic, racist Washington administration, or indeed by the genocidal supremacists of Tel Aviv. To evoke the wonderful slogan of women and men demonstrators, especially after the murder of Amini, the young 17-year-old girl who died in custody in Iran for not wearing her hijab: “Woman, life, freedom,” right?

That movement—well, the path to “woman, life, freedom” does not run through the smoking ruins of Tehran. The idea, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the feminist political philosopher, put it beautifully, is that the notion that white racist men will liberate brown women by bombing them, their children, and their brown men—and that this somehow leads to their liberation from brown men—is absurd. She’s absolutely right. The liberation of women in Iran, as in Afghanistan and Iraq before that, runs through the defeat of the very powers that have spent seventy years ensuring that Iran can never know peace or democracy.

Remember the 1953 coup d’état that overthrew the democratically elected government of Mossadegh? That was the CIA. So my point is that the people of Iran must first be liberated from the clutches of the hideous choice between the current regime and a fate worse than Iraq, Libya, and Syria combined. Because this is what Netanyahu wants for Iran, and he’s the driving force behind it. It’s not Trump. Trump has been co-opted, for reasons we’ll find out in five, ten, twenty years. Netanyahu’s plan is to turn Iran into a failed state—like Libya, like Syria. That is not going to be the liberation of the women of Iran. We have to be very clear on this. This is a feminist point, I believe.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I saw the CPAC president. He was making the point that those 160 young girls—they dying—might be better than them having to wear burqas. But, you know, they don't wear burqas in Iran. He didn't seem to know that. And I was in Iran last year as well, in May, right before the Israelis began to bomb. And even across the streets, there are many, many women who choose not to wear the hijab either. So I think the impression one almost gets is that it's like the Shia version of the Taliban, but that doesn't mean the government there is liberal or tolerant in every way. It just seems like it's been demonized a bit beyond what seems reasonable.

But I like your idea—the whole concept of liberating other peoples. You saw this after the French Revolution: it was supposed to be a liberal ideal, and then, of course, they moved on—"we're going to liberate other peoples as well." Or after the Bolshevik Revolution: "we're now free from the capitalist class; we're going to bring freedom to others." So it's always dangerous when these values of freedom get mixed with domination abroad. But I... how do you see the government of Iran—what their objectives are now? Well, first, I think many people in the U.S. miss that the theocracy they have in Iran today is also linked to that '53 coup, though.

That is, after the Americans installed a very brutal Shah and his SAVAK, which was essentially the Iranian SS at the time. You know, the only places where you could have some open speech were in the mosques. So it kind of made sense that political discourse merged with religion. But again, a lot of this seems to be something of their own creation. But the way Iran is today—how do you assess their objectives, their goals? What do they want to achieve in this war? I know they didn't choose the war, but now that they're in it, I mean, if you were advising them, or someone else was advising them, what advice do you think they're getting?

#Yanis Varoufakis

Well, before I answer your question—which is a very important question—let me say that, in the end, the United States doesn't really change much today. Do you remember after My Lai in Vietnam, that American general who came out and justified the massacre of Vietnamese civilians by saying, "Oh, well, we had to destroy their village to save them from communism"? It's very much the same argument—that we had to kill those young girls in their school, bomb them to smithereens, turn them into a human pulp of flesh and bone and blood—in order to save women. You know, there's a continuity in the misanthropy of United States imperialism.

Now, coming to your question about the Iranian regime itself and whether it's been demonized or not—of course it's been demonized. And, you know, I'm saying this as an opponent of theocracy. I'm saying this as a libertarian Marxist, as I call myself, to confuse people—and as a feminist. But, you know, compare and contrast Saudi Arabia with Iran. Now, in which country do you think women are

more oppressed? I would say it's Saudi Arabia. Nobody's thinking of bombing Saudi Arabia into smithereens. Indeed, Mr. Trump and his sons are doing brisk business in Saudi Arabia, and they're considered to be very faithful allies.

So, let's dispense with all this nonsense. Now, regarding the regime—look, here I'm going to speak to you as a left-winger, because the left in the West needs to be reminded of what this regime is like. In 1979, Glenn, when the people of Iran rose up against, as you put it, the fascist dictatorship of the Shah and his Gestapo that the CIA had helped him build up—the SAVAK, an intelligence and suppression agency that became synonymous with torture in Iran. So first, you have the 1953 overthrow of democracy by the CIA and British intelligence services. They imposed this ruthless fascist dictatorship.

So, you know, that's when they lost all moral right to talk about democracy in Iran. And that created the spontaneous revolution of 1979, which was not just an Islamic revolution. There were progressives, socialists, communists—and they all recognized the importance of the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini, and they supported him. When the United States realized, under President Carter at that time—who was supposed to be the most liberal and the nicest of the postwar presidents—that the Iranian revolution was going to succeed in toppling the Shah, the CIA, the Pentagon, and the State Department immediately took the side of the most virulent Islamists within that movement. And, lo and behold, once the Islamists took over that revolution, the first thing they did, Glenn, was murder the left.

They took the entire central committee of the Communist Party—a party that had participated in the 1979 revolution and had supported Khomeini—and murdered them. Moreover, from the beginning, while being less plutocratic than the Gulf states, than Saudi Arabia, and despite having more of a social conscience than those Sunni regimes in the Gulf, nevertheless, very soon after 1979–1980, the Iranian regime adopted—remember, this was the time when neoliberalism was beginning to establish itself in the West with Thatcher, with Reagan, and so on—they started adopting neoliberal policies. Especially in the 1990s, there was a wave of privatizations, subsidy removals, and effective austerity—real austerity that was being imposed by the Islamic Republic upon the majority of Iranians.

And, you know, if you go to 2017, 2018—the first rebellions—and then again in 2022, when Mahsa Amini was murdered in police custody, as I mentioned before, there was this uprising again. The undercurrent of that uprising was a social response, an upheaval, a rebellion against the neoliberal policies of the regime. Anybody who has been watching Western coverage of Iranian politics for the last 20 or 30 years will have noticed that, in the West, we talk about the reformists and the conservatives. You know, these are indeed two factions within the Islamic Republic, the regime, and they have differences. But their differences are not really about being right-wing or left-wing. No.

#Yanis Varoufakis

The difference is that the so-called reformists are keener to integrate the private enterprises they control—the result of the privatization drive. They want those private enterprises to be connected, integrated particularly with the European Union and the United Kingdom, and, if possible, the United States, though they understand that this is difficult. They were the ones who were so gung-ho about the Obama plan because Obama—you know, he actually said this to me personally when he was still president, in the White House in April 2015—that his number one priority before leaving office back then was to reintegrate Iran into the international capitalist financial circuits. And, you know, he had signed the agreement; he had the European Union on board.

Then Trump comes in and tears this up. The conservatives were not keen to see their own enterprises, which they had appropriated through privatization, be integrated with the West. They didn't trust that the West would allow them to be integrated without abandoning their project of creating an Islamic golden age. So they were more oriented toward China and Russia. That's the split. Now, ever since the Israelis turned their long-standing campaign of ethnically cleansing Palestine into a pure and undiluted genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, and following the bombardments last June of Iran by Trump and Netanyahu, the conservatives within the regime and the so-called reformists, I think, realized that there's no room anymore for them to be at odds with one another.

And they entered a new phase of survival. You know, they've been preparing for 30 years for that. They apparently have very large stocks of drones and missiles. And in any case, let's not forget that they sustained a hideous eight-year war that the United States unleashed against them via their stooge in the area—Saddam Hussein—whom the United States controlled and directed to invade Iran in 1980 in order to topple the regime, funded by Kuwait and the other Gulf states. They suffered more than 600,000 dead.

They suffered chemical weapons attacks provided by the United States. So it's important to remind ourselves of that because, you know, the bombs that Israel and the United States are now unleashing from the sky just above the heads of the Iranians—both the people and the regime—I don't think they have the capacity to achieve what Saddam Hussein failed to achieve using chemical weapons. So, to put it bluntly and to answer your question, I think that in terms of survival and maintaining their regime, they owe a debt of gratitude to Donald Trump.

#Glenn

Well, no, definitely. This is a common feature—nothing creates more internal solidarity than an external power attacking you. But they're also able, beyond the government, to hold on to control and maintain enough public support. They seem able to absorb the pain, in terms of the attacks on military facilities, economic sites, and other civilian infrastructure. So, given that they can take this level of punishment—and since Trump more or less confirmed that they've run out of military targets to hit—who do you think will win this war? And what would such a victory actually look like?

#Yanis Varoufakis

Well, I know certainly who's going to lose this war—it depends. The people who are losing every day are the people of Iran, the women of Iran that the West supposedly claims to be liberating, and the people of the United States, the working class of the United States. So the working classes of Iran and the United States are losing. If you're a MAGA supporter who voted Trump into office, you're driving, on average, a hundred miles a day to get to work and back. You're driving a very thirsty SUV, you're hardly making ends meet, and now you have double petrol prices. So you are the great loser.

You're a great loser if you're an Iranian who isn't connected to the crony capitalism of the regime, if you're a human being. These are the people who lose. So the vast majority of Americans, Europeans, Iranians, and people in the Global South now see increases in the price of food because fertilizers are going up, because oil is going up, because natural gas is going up. So, you know, the workers of the world are united in being the losers of this war. And who is winning? I think, if anyone is winning, it's the leaders of the regime. Think of Khamenei, the younger one, who is now the Supreme Leader of Iran.

From his perspective, he's occupying the high moral ground. You know, his father was killed, his wife was killed, his mother was killed, his sister was killed, his son was killed. And he remains—at least for now, to the extent that he's still alive—embedded within Iran, where there is still very high support for the regime, because that regime was not imposed from abroad. It rose up organically, whatever one may think about it. And as I said, I'm an opponent of that regime. But nevertheless, it's one that has popular support—maybe minority support, but a large minority. And the most important thing is what I said earlier. I'm going to repeat this, Glenn.

I hope you forgive me. Among the rational, sensible dissidents—the Iranians who, on the one hand, loathe this regime but, on the other hand, have the capacity to think things through—they can see that they don't have a choice between democracy and theocracy. That's not the choice they're being offered. If that were their choice, they would have chosen democracy, normality. But that's not the choice. The choice that the Trump–Netanyahu illegal war is forcing upon them is between theocracy—the current regime—and a failed state, a Libya, a Syria. And they're reluctant to choose the latter just to get rid of the theocracy. And that is a great success story for the regime.

#Glenn

Yeah, I find it strange that Trump actually tweeted that rising oil prices are good—America's an energy exporter, we're getting rich. But as you said, it's important to look at the classes, because I assume the oligarchy will gain some money from this, while the average person isn't going to see anything good—just higher prices at the pump. It's odd, because he ran not just on being anti-war,

but also on populism, arguing that the elites were too detached from the public. It seems like his tweets make him the worst populist ever. He doesn't seem to appreciate how this affects the man on the street.

Instead, it's only about how the large corporations will do. Um, how do you see that warfare has changed? Because, uh, when I watched the Ukraine war over the past few years, you know, one couldn't help but notice that the West was able to set up a nice firing position in Ukraine—essentially, they could shoot at Russia, and Russia couldn't really hit them back. They could attack and destroy Ukraine, but for the West, there was kind of a sense of immunity—you could strike Russia. But now we see Russia sharing intelligence with Iran, allegedly, and it seems very, very likely.

And China also has great surveillance in the region. I assume they'd be sharing with Iran as well. We see Iran holding the Gulf states responsible for allowing their territory to be used. There's even some talk that they should receive compensation after this war. So the rules of war appear to be becoming more complex. Do you see this as a stable situation, or does it have the potential to expand into a larger great-power war?

#Yanis Varoufakis

Well, I hope it doesn't expand into a great-power war, because then, you know, a nuclear winter would consume us all. Look, I'm not in the business of prediction, but what I can say is that the major change compared to past wars is drone technology—the way drones have changed the political economy of war and the balance. I'm not going to say anything you or our audience don't already know, but it's important to bring this in. So when you have a five- or six-thousand-dollar drone being shot down by the Americans using a 1.6-million-dollar Patriot missile, the political economy is operating in a way that's inimical to the interests of, to the project of, Donald Trump. In Ukraine, the drone wars have, I think, alerted us to a very serious danger that we're facing as a species—as humanity.

I think the war in Iran is now confirming that. If you look at the Russian-Ukrainian war, it's a war between—well, in particular, it's a war between the technicians trying to jam the enemy's drone signals. That means we're moving very quickly toward a situation where the winners will be those who manage to create autonomous drones based on AI, so there's no need for a human to direct the drone wirelessly. That's important because once we rely on machines that we send out into the ether and they operate autonomously—point number one. Point number two: when you have so many of them that all the other conventional weapons are rendered useless—like Leopard tanks, conventional cannons, and all that—you essentially have a swarm of AI-driven machines that kill each other and kill people.

And there's no human in the chain of command where decisions are made every fraction of a second about who's going to be shot and who's going to be killed. Then suddenly we're in a techno-feudal kind of war game—or, you know, a battlefield or killing field—where the president of the United

States, the general of the American army, or indeed the other side as well, still have the capacity to make a decision. They can decide, "Okay, let's go to war." In other words, we're moving toward a very serious risk we're facing as humanity, as a species—that we're going to slip into a state of permanent war, where war is the default and peace is a system error. And, you know, we're not there yet.

But, you know, with the war in Ukraine, the way Palantir, Anthropic, Amazon, Google, and others trained their programs in Gaza was in order to sell software to militaries around the world, but also for civilian use. Palantir developed a program for managing difficult moments in British hospitals—difficult moments like, say, a pileup where lots of injured people arrive at the hospital doors. How do you manage the nurses and doctors to minimize panic? Well, Palantir trained its models, AI bots, and software in Gaza to sell for millions and millions, if not billions, to the British National Health Service. So if you bring all this together, I think we need to re-examine everything concerning war and peace.

#Glenn

That's also interesting. The competition wouldn't just be about more advanced technologies, but also more reckless decisions. That is, whoever lowers, I guess, the threshold for autonomous drones making kill decisions would have a competitive advantage on the battlefield. So it becomes a very ruthless weapon. The whole idea that we'll have moral guidelines—that's something that would hold you back, essentially. So it creates a very dangerous incentive system. But also, you know, with technologies, we often see this leapfrog effect. The NATO countries have had this military advantage for many years now.

But with the introduction of drones, suddenly, of course, after the Ukraine war, the Russians will have the most battle-hardened, well-trained army in terms of knowing how to use this on the battlefield. Meanwhile, the Chinese would have, I guess, from a technological standpoint, very advanced weaponry—also given that they have proper supply chain dominance. They're actually getting the rare earth minerals, the antimony, all these things they need to build those weapons. It looks as if the shift in power is not just economic; it's also in military technology. Russia and China will look very different than they did only ten years ago. Yeah, that's correct. That's correct. Yeah. But if we're going down that path, it looks like we're going.

That is, the U.S.—Iran is able to absorb all the pain. Yes, they'll suffer a lot of death and destruction, but they're able to take it and essentially start weakening America's position in the region—continuing to shut down the Strait of Hormuz, wrecking the economy. Well, what do you think—where do the U.S. and Israel go from here? Because, you know, these are both deeply militarized states. Israel bases its security on regional dominance; the U.S. on global dominance. Neither of them can just pack up and go home and say, "Well, you know, we achieved some superficial victory," unless they actually have one—and the Strait of Hormuz is open, for example. So where do they go from here, in terms of...

#Yanis Varoufakis

I think the important thing to note is that Israel and the United States, even though they're completely united in this series of war crimes they're carrying out, are very different when it comes to what their administrations want to maintain. Netanyahu wants permanent war. He wants to keep expanding the killing fields around Israel. He doesn't mind a few ballistic missiles falling on Tel Aviv if it keeps Israelis feeling insecure. That's his game.

Maximum Israeli insecurity—to justify his permanent war—so that he creates a lot of noise under the cover of which he can continue, with the secularists that are part of his coalition, with the IDF, with other agencies, to throw Palestinians out of their homes, to burn down their olive trees—which is happening as we speak—until the West Bank is totally annexed, against the prohibition that even the United States, under Trump, has issued sanctions toward: the notion of annexing the West Bank. So, you know, Netanyahu ideally would like to continue this bombardment of Iran and the engagement with Iran, the murders ad infinitum. But that's not the Trump administration. The Trump administration would like to end it as soon as possible.

The problem he has is that, just like Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s or Richard Nixon after that, he needs to declare victory. Now, of course, Donald Trump has what it takes—unlike other American presidents—to do what Roman emperors used to do when they sent legions to what is today Germany and got their backsides kicked by the Goths. Some of those Roman emperors just said, "Okay, fine, we can't defeat those Germans, these Goths, so what we're going to do is declare victory, have a triumph in Rome, and throw a party—eat, drink, and enjoy ourselves." He could do that, but he's got the midterm elections.

This is not a popular war in the United States—unlike other murderous wars by the United States, illegitimate wars, illegal wars, which were popular in the United States. This is not a popular war. So he needs to be able to say, "Look, here's something that I achieved." He can't do that if he removes his troops—his aircraft and aircraft carriers—and the Iranian regime continues to close down the Strait of Hormuz and says, "You know what, this is not over for us. You killed our supreme leader. You murdered so many people."

You murdered those girls in the school. We are going to decide when this war is over. You're not deciding when this war is over—that's what they're saying now. That puts Trump in an awful situation because he can't even claim, with any degree of credibility, that he achieved something. So unless he proves audacious and, you know, gives it a spin and says, "Oh, I killed Khamenei. I killed so many of them. I've taken out so many targets," he has no compunction. He could say that. Remember, in June he said that he took out the nuclear program of Iran. Well, now that he's started this war, what was his excuse?

That he wants to take out the nuclear program of Iran. Well, mate, you know, you told us in June that you took it out. He doesn't care about being caught in a lie. That's the best hope we have—that

he'd do one of those, you know, Roman triumphs. And, you know, who cares whether people believe that he won or not? That's the best-case scenario. But if he wants to open the Strait of Hormuz and show the American people something that will convince enough of them to re-elect Republicans in mid-November, then I think we may be there for the long haul.

#Glenn

Yeah, because there's nothing you can do, really, to open the Strait of Hormuz in this era. I mean, he keeps bragging about destroying the Navy, but I don't think they need that big of a Navy to target—you just need a drone.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Sorry? You just need a \$5,000 drone. Yeah. And Iran has an endless capacity to produce those—just like Russia and Ukraine do. Because, you know, you mentioned Russia having a panoply of drones. So does Ukraine.

#Glenn

Yeah. But they can build a set of apartment buildings, so there's no need for massive military factories. I guess that's what makes this war so dangerous. Everyone's locked in a position they can't withdraw from, and the stakes just keep rising. But can I say something on a personal note?

#Yanis Varoufakis

Yes, please. Glenn, I'm tired. I'm speaking personally. You know, once again, I find myself caught in the conundrum of opposing an illegal war unleashed by the United States on a country whose regime I vehemently oppose. And let me just remind our viewers, because maybe some of them—or many of them—will have a similar feeling or experience. In 1999, having previously campaigned against Milosevic in Yugoslavia, I was forced to denounce NATO's and America's bombing of Yugoslavia. In 2003, after two decades of campaigning against Saddam Hussein—I was even arrested once in London for opposing Saddam Hussein, when he was the blue-eyed boy of the West, remember?—I demonstrated after that against the American coalition's invasion of Iraq. In 2011, I was indignant with Gaddafi's regime in Libya, and I opposed the American-led bombings of Libya that turned that country into a quagmire.

Last year, I always called Bashar al-Assad a ruthless dictator, and yet I was lamenting the American-Israeli machinations that turned Syria—well, in fact, turned it over to an al-Qaeda operative. And now, after having celebrated the Women, Life, Freedom rebellion, I find myself in a situation where I have no alternative but to condemn the American-Israeli plan to devastate Iran. There are many people who accuse me of being both a stooge of the Iranian regime and, you know, a stooge of the United States. They say, "Oh, you're trying to be neutral, Yanis? What is this—both sides? We're

taking both sides?" No. What I'm saying—and I felt the need to finish with this statement—is that my duty as a Western leftist is very simple.

When the gang ruling our neighborhood—because that's what we have now, our leadership operates like a gang, both in the United States and in Europe—launches an utterly unprovoked attack on a faraway gang that I also don't approve of, killing innocent bystanders, I refuse to stay neutral. And at the same time, I refuse to pick sides. What I do is try to call out both. But I also recognize a special, overriding duty we have in the West to stop our gang. Because, Glenn, it's our taxes funding their bombs. It's our silence that grants them consent. It's our governments doing the killing in our name. So we need to stop our governments from dropping bombs on Iran. That's our number one priority right now.

#Glenn

I agree. Well, it doesn't have to be a contradiction. One can take a position on human rights and responsible governments without diminishing sovereignty. That is, I think, about being critical of governments using human rights as an instrument for great power politics. I think that's where many people often make the mistake. I just find it fascinating that for 20 years they were able to tell people we occupied Afghanistan so little girls could go to school, or we invaded Iraq because of weapons of mass destruction, or that the destruction of Libya and Syria was because the U.S. and NATO really cared about human rights. Or in Iran, that we just wanted to help girls or promote democracy. Or Ukraine, for that matter—the idea that it's about democracy or freedom or sovereignty. You know, great powers don't fight wars for altruism.

They have a power interest, and you dress it up. So I think it's often easy to take advantage of higher values, if you will. It doesn't mean that people shouldn't have some higher values, but... no, it's a shame as well, because democracy has now become almost—well, human rights have become an ugly word almost. That is, when you hear governments speak of human rights, you can hear the bombs being loaded onto the plane already, which is not what it was supposed to be. Human rights were supposed to restrain what you do in wars, not enable wars. But this is the path we've gone down. Indeed, indeed.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Can you imagine if, back then, when some of us were participating in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa—that was solidarity, that was international solidarity—you know, "Free Nelson Mandela." Let's work toward having sanctions against that regime in South Africa. Let's not allow the rugby team to participate in international games and all that. I was part of that. Now, if somebody had said, "Let's bomb the population of South Africa," I'd say, what? Are you confusing solidarity with imperialism? That would have been absurd back then. So, you know, I'm saddened sometimes by progressives and imperialists who say, "Oh, if you're not with the Khomeini regime, that means you're with the United States bombers."

#Glenn

No, not in the slightest. I don't think we have to pick sides. Whenever people ask, "Are you with A or B?" they're really asking you to stop thinking, because you shouldn't have to take the position of either side.

#Yanis Varoufakis

That's right.

#Glenn

We're with international law. How about that? I like that. That's one thing we should have discussed—it's fading very quickly—but perhaps next time. Next time. Thank you very much for taking the time.

#Yanis Varoufakis

Thank you, Glenn. Thank you.