

Iran War Update With Prof Michael Rossi

A Live Stream with Prof. Michael Rossi.

#Pascal

And we are live. Hello to everybody around the world who is watching—or not watching yet. My name is Pascal Lottaz. I'm an associate professor at Kyoto University, and I'm joined today again by Dr. Michael Rossi. That's, of course, Michael Rossi from the YouTube channel PoliSci. Michael, welcome back.

#Michael Rossi

Pascal, good to see you once again. Good evening on the Tokyo side—it's morning here in New York. I'm actually at my office at Fordham University up in the Bronx. So, good to see you once again. And I guess we're leading off with some news hot off the wire, right?

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, because we just got, about two hours ago, the news that Israel claims it has killed Ali Larijani, the head of Iran's security service. One of the offices responsible—I mean, it's a main coordinating office—and he's one of the leading figures now after the death of Ayatollah Khamenei. And what... what do you know about this affair so far? Do we have any confirmation from Iran? Nothing yet.

#Michael Rossi

Nothing yet. However, you know, when we spoke maybe about two weeks ago with Ambassador Chas Freeman, we were also leading the conversation with the rumors that Khamenei was killed. And I had said that, unless there was confirmation from Iran, I'd take everything with a grain of salt. The thing we realized is that Khamenei was killed, and it was denied by the Iranian government for at least 24 hours. So, in this case, we also have to proceed with caution. But if Israel is going to claim that Larijani is dead—like before with Khamenei—that is a very, very bold statement to make if it's not true. So at this point, if they're going to release this information, unless things change, we're simply waiting for Iran to confirm it. But if that is the case, then that's a major blow against the IRGC—the group that really runs the country. Not the theocrats, not the clerics, not any ayatollahs, but really the Revolutionary Guard Council. So this would be a significant piece of information.

#Pascal

Yeah, so this is what the Guardian is putting out, and I just want to give you a few clippings of how this is being portrayed. Here they're quoting Mr. Israel Katz, right? The commander, the general commander of the Israeli forces, is saying that Larijani and Basij—so another person—were eliminated overnight and have joined the head of the annihilation program, Khamenei, and all the eliminated members of the "Axis of Evil" in the depths of hell. I mean, obviously a very spiteful and horrible comment to make, but again, they're aiming for the head—for the leadership, right?

And apparently Israel is still pursuing decapitation strikes, still thinking this will get them somewhere. Although, if Iran has shown one thing over the last two or three weeks, it's that even if you kill their leadership, the next ranks keep coming through. But they're still going after the leadership. What are your thoughts on that? Because the strategy—well, obviously, the Iranians, sorry to jump in, but the Iranians are trying to make the point that decapitation strikes against them don't work. The missiles won't stop flying because the system has been set up to cope with exactly that.

#Michael Rossi

Yes, this is effective. Well, one thing is that, you know, we may very well see an AI-generated video of Larijani buying coffee in some Tehran coffee shop as well.

#Pascal

You know, can you expand on that reference a little bit? Because it's about the rumor that Netanyahu is dead, right? Yes.

#Michael Rossi

So, I mean, we still haven't confirmed where he is. In all likelihood, he's either in a bunker—either in Israel or, more likely, in Germany. If you remember, his plane was circling over the eastern Mediterranean for about four hours until it found safe haven in Germany. No surprise there. But, you know, to get back to this idea of trying to gain leverage in the war by decapitating its leadership—Iran has proven itself to be incredibly durable in this. They know it. They've prepared for it. If Israel has been gearing up for a major conflict with Iran for years, if not decades, Iran knows that. And they've especially learned from the twelve-day war last year.

So that is, you get rid of the leader at the top, and there will be somebody to immediately replace them from below. It's also not going to sit well with the Iranian people. Remember, the United States and Israel still say that they stand with the Iranian people—while they're bombing children's homes, schools, apartments, civilian targets, and other places like that. So, in this regard, I think that if Israel has the ability to take out the commanders—whether it's Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, or wherever—they're going to do that. But none of these organizations, none of these governments, crack. None of them capitulate. In fact, all it does is drag the country further into conflict.

But one thing we talked about last time—and this is something I’m now absolutely certain of—is that Israel and the United States are not going to suddenly give up and go home. They’re not. They’re in it. They’ve been dragged into this, and they’re going to pursue a scorched-earth policy before they realize they’ve overplayed their hand. And I think this is really the second thing we can talk about now that we’re, what, two or three weeks into this conflict. Both the United States and Israel grossly underestimated the will involved in engaging with a country like Iran. This is not Lebanon. This is not Syria. This is not a country where you can just lob a missile, the country cries uncle, and suddenly you get your way.

#Pascal

And I just want to point out one thing. One of our viewers wrote a comment saying, “Oh, Iranian here, I’m afraid I disagree—Professor Ali Larijani was never an official part of the IRGC.” So, just for everybody: Iran is a highly complex political construct. And if that’s the case, apologies that we misspoke, because Iran is highly complex. But Larijani is one of the major political figures who was also, I’m pretty sure this is true, the chief negotiator during the JCPOA—the nuclear deal negotiations and so on. He’s been in the Iranian top leadership for a while, just to put that out there.

And, you know, he’s also a man who, just like Ayatollah Khamenei, was not afraid of dying. One of the last appearances we know of was at the Quds Day march in Tehran. He was in the crowd with people, and they even broadcast that. It was clear—Khamenei actually said, “I’m going to stay in my house. I’m not going to hide in a bunker.” People on my channel have pointed that out before, that the leadership expects to be targeted and deals with that not as something to fear, but as something to work with. And this, of course, completely changes the calculation.

And of course, in my view, our media is getting that quite wrong at the moment, because, I mean, here in this article from The Guardian, they’re writing that, oh, if Larijani is actually dead, it would be a devastating blow to the regime and to the entire war-making capacity of Iran. And I just don’t think that’s the case. This is wishful thinking again from the West. And this is not to downplay the—uh—the seriousness of a potential strike on another one of the leaders of Iran, but just to say that the entire system is built in a way to actually absorb this. Because it was utterly clear that they would do this, and in a sense, it might even be more of a sign of desperation—that, in order to have something to show, to have achieved, you just kill individuals instead of going after real military targets.

#Michael Rossi

This is actually one way of looking at it as well. I don't want to say that they just came up with killing Larijani off the cuff here. I would imagine this has been part of the main military strategy for both the United States and Israel. But leading into this—and, you know, waking up this morning and reading the news that's coming in—not from Western sources, because they want you to believe that Iran is about ready to crack—but it's been a couple of embarrassing days for the United States

and Israel. Tel Aviv continues to be hammered by Iranian missiles and drones, so the Iron Dome has been completely shattered. Netanyahu has now missed two of his national security briefings, which kind of drives the idea that if he's not dead, he's either in hiding or significantly injured. And we've also heard stories.

They haven't been confirmed yet—whether some of the more reprehensible members of the Israeli Knesset, like Ben-Gvir, are dead or wounded. Bezalel Smotrich's son has apparently been injured in Lebanon. Israel is gearing up for a full-on ground invasion there, and right now we're hearing reports of Israeli army contingents being ambushed. They're not having as easy a time as they thought they would. Ultimately, what this boils down to is that you can't win a war just by lobbing ballistic missiles from hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometers away. If you want to achieve victory, you need boots on the ground. This is something Trump keeps talking about doing with Iran. But in my opinion—and I don't know, this is just how I see it—either Trump is becoming, or he's always been, laughably delusional.

I think at this point it's almost clinically delusional. And I don't know whether this is just his own ego and collapsing narcissism forcing him to sound defiant, or whether he's being given misinformation by the people around him simply to put up some show of defiance and strength. But, you know, we hear about how he failed to get NATO to respond to engaging with or opening up the Strait of Hormuz. We hear that his closest allies—the UK, France, and Germany—aren't committing any of their naval forces to the Strait of Hormuz. I kind of joked a couple of days ago that he can always rely on the three Baltic republics, Ukraine, and possibly Kosovo, because those are the five that will do whatever the United States says for brownie points. Estonia actually said that, if need be, they'll send their ships in.

So, you know, look out, Iran, buddy. As far as the EU is concerned, they've also said they're not going to do this. So Trump is isolated—Trump is effectively isolated. Both he and Israel are realizing they're in this for the long haul. We've now heard reports that this war could continue for at least another couple of months. I think at one point someone even said it could go until September. And what is that going to produce in terms of war attrition, fatigue, a drain on the economy? Because, as we've noticed, the United States and Israel do a very good job with these high-profile targetings, right? Whether it's Ayatollah Khamenei, whether a couple of years ago it was Soleimani, and now today it's allegedly Larejani. I'm going to, at this point, just assume that that's the case—unless otherwise.

I'm just going to take that more so as I'm willing to lean on that, because if Israel is saying they need a victory, it would be even more pathetic if all of a sudden he appeared and said, "No, no, I'm still alive." But while this is happening, Iran is also hammering away at the Gulf states and forcing them to either completely abandon their alliances—their government alliances—with Washington and Tel Aviv, halt the production of oil, and effectively create huge ripple effects in the global economy.

This is something that Trump cannot afford, especially as we're going into the midterm elections very soon. His popularity is very low, particularly among a vocal number of erstwhile MAGA supporters who now feel absolutely betrayed.

#Pascal

Right. I mean, the whole political scene in the United States, of course, really baffles me—that after all the peace talk, after being the president who incorporated the Board of Peace and made it a U.N. Security Council–mandated policy. I think he even got the okay from the Security Council, because China and Russia didn't veto it. He's still going warmongering around in one of the most blatant ways we've seen. I mean, in a way, much more straight in your face than George Bush Jr. Barack Obama, of course, was constantly trying to brand himself as a president of peace, but doing it through the back door—in Syria, in Libya, and with the drone killings in Afghanistan. But Trump is now doing it openly and just says, "I do whatever I please, and I bomb whoever I want."

We will kill as much as we please. It's wild. And yesterday I read that he's proposing a Strait of Hormuz peace board, or something like an alliance of the willing—a coalition of the willing—to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. And this thing has been dead in the water, obviously, right? Because no sane nation is going to join him. The only ones he could potentially count on to maybe send one or two ships might be the French or the Germans, because they're far enough away. But even then, I highly doubt they'll defend anything at all, because it's still obviously way too dangerous. And one thing that tells us, of course, is that Iran maintains all of these capabilities. Right. And again, you take out Larijani—well done, you killed one man.

But you still have an entire army—several armies—against you, and you're not able to defend, to deactivate, or to destroy their missile capabilities, which is what every sane observer before the war started actually said. This country is too large. They have too many facilities. They're too prepared. You cannot take out everything. And if we're now even speculating about the deaths of senior Israeli figures—which, if we're honest, is what we would have to expect, because Iran has made a point of trying to do an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, right? They've always tried to strike back symmetrically. So this would be a symmetrical strike against their leadership. Although, if they're not able to do that—if the Israelis are able to protect their top leadership—then that would tell us where they set their priorities.

#Michael Rossi

Well, they did say that Netanyahu is definitely someone they would go after and kill. So let's assume a couple of things. If Larijani is, in fact, dead, and Netanyahu appears not as an AI image but as an actual person who wasn't wounded, Iran is very likely going to use this as a case for retaliation. Missiles have now hit his private residence near the Knesset. We're seeing videos of Israelis flocking

to the airports, flying back to the countries they were originally born in. And it's interesting how everyone being interviewed sounds like they're from, you know, Brooklyn, New York, or Lakewood, New Jersey—English with American accents.

This is, you know, certainly not indicative of someone native to Judea or Samaria. But, you know, they can run, and that's where they're going to go. Ultimately, I think Israel is more likely to fragment internally than Iran is, for a number of reasons. Before this conflict began—and I'm not even talking about Iran, I'm talking about two-plus years ago, before October 7th—Israel was experiencing significant sociopolitical internal conflicts that have largely been, you know, buried or completely ignored by the Western press. Netanyahu is widely regarded as unbelievably corrupt and has made a number of political enemies within the country.

Israel likes to portray itself as a country for all Jews around the world, and yet there is still a socio-ethnic, socio-cultural hierarchy within Israel that prioritizes more European Ashkenazis over Middle Eastern Sephardis. And then, when we get to Ethiopian Jews, among others, they're basically considered a much lower rung as well. So, you know, we've heard stories and analyses over the last two years that once this conflict—once this war—is over, whether it's with Palestine or with Lebanon, Israel is incredibly volatile, prone to internal turmoil, whether political upheaval or social unrest.

We see demonstrations in the streets of Haifa and Tel Aviv between the ultra-Orthodox and the more secular. We don't see this in Iran. Now, maybe it's simply because this news isn't getting out of Iran. But then again, Israel is very, very focused on maintaining, you know, a picture-perfect narrative of their country. And yet these things are leaking out. So even if Iran isn't as successful in eliminating the top brass of Israel's political and even military leadership, I still feel that Israel is much more likely to be wracked by years of internal turmoil—added to the fact that their global image is now in the absolute gutter. I mean, they are just widely, widely despised around the world, especially on social media.

#Pascal

I'm very interested in that one. Since you're in New York and have your finger on the pulse of the United States as well—okay, so mass media might not be the perfect place to gauge that—but to me, it's been a little bit... it's been indicative that the New York Times has been way more critical of this war than of the Ukraine war. And we've seen, in the mainstream press, articles that surprised me in terms of how they were—obviously not in line, even if they weren't very, you know, intellectually honest with the jargon they used.

But it's a different thing from the war in Ukraine, right? The way they're trying to portray the situation—what's happening behind the scenes in the White House, and how Donald Trump is portrayed as anything but a great leader, more as someone who just puts out a lot of tweets and Truth Social posts to justify what's happening. What's your take on AIPAC? What's your take on what John Mearsheimer wrote about the Israel lobby?

#Michael Rossi

This is so much out in the open now that it's going to be very hard to put that genie back into the bottle of anti-Semitism, right? You won't put it back in. Mainstream media, at this stage of the game, is widely distrusted. I mean, when The New York Times comes out much more critical this time, then you know the gatekeepers have lost control of the narrative—Bret Stephens's op-eds notwithstanding. Bret Stephens never met a non-Western country he didn't want a regime change in. But I can tell you this: there are a lot of things going on, at least as far as the perception of Israel, Zionism, and anti-Semitism. The role of AIPAC is basically considered toxic at this point. If you're a political official and you receive AIPAC money, that's now a major, major liability, both within the Democratic and Republican camps.

What I find more interesting—and I was talking with a colleague of mine about this a couple of days ago—is that some of the most vocal criticisms of Trump, of the whole, not even "America First," no, "Israel First," no, "Israel only" at this point, are coming from people like Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, Mike Huckabee. I mean, they all come across as—some people are even saying—they need to be tried for treason, given how they seem more loyal to another country. If you don't support Israel, you don't support America. It's becoming so blatant, so many things. It's like when someone with narcissistic personality disorder finally has the mask come off—you begin to realize how bold-faced dishonest they are. And this is exactly it. I think for people like Cruz, Huckabee, Graham, and others, the mask has come off. They just don't care anymore, right?

They absolutely don't care, because they know they're going to be implicated. So they might as well ride this all the way to the end. But to my point—the biggest criticisms are coming from former MAGA officials: the Tucker Carlsons, the Candace Owens, the Marjorie Taylor Greenes—who, a couple of years ago, were considered some of the real kooky conspiracy theorists. And now, I don't know whether it's just because of the world we find ourselves in, or whether they got hit—especially Marjorie Taylor Greene—with a sense of clairvoyance, but they're now becoming the voice of reason.

Tucker Carlson is seen as more of a journalist than the talking heads on cable TV. I think one of the best things he could have done was have those real grill sessions with Ted Cruz and Mike Huckabee—to really get them to say what they truly believe, which is so outlandish at this point, so ridiculous, that it's turning many erstwhile America First conservatives away from the Trump camp. The Democratic Party has been quiet for the most part, and I think the reason why is because, A, they just don't have—sorry for saying this—they don't have the guts to do it. And number two, they're simply watching the Republican Party, in their mind, crash and burn, and they'll just ride it out to the midterms.

But we also have to understand that there are many, many political officials within the Democratic Party who absolutely prioritize Israel. And alongside what's happening with Israel and Iran, I'm sure you and our viewers know that Cuba is being starved out, being besieged. They've run out of—well,

the power grids went out. And do you hear any condemnation coming from the Democrats? No, because as far as they're concerned, it's still the old Cold War mindset. For them, they'd be absolutely delighted if the communist regime in Cuba collapsed. They'd be delighted if Ladan Jani's alleged death in Iran sparked an uprising there. They'd be absolutely delighted. I have no doubt in my mind that people like Chuck Schumer or Hakeem Jeffries would love to shake hands with Pahlavi Jr. as he somehow makes his, you know, idealistic return to Iran.

#Pascal

That's the problem, isn't it? It's like the United States—even if the Republicans and Donald Trump lose power big time in the midterms and so on—I mean, we're dealing with the uniparty, right? It's like, okay, then you get a very dishonest tweet from Kamala Harris on the first of March saying, oh, she opposes the war with Iran and that under her, she would never have gone to war with Iran. Come on, we know you would have gone to war with Iran. You would have done exactly what the AIPAC crowd and so on push you to do, because that's what you did during four years as vice president under Joe Biden, while that man was basically vegetating away. So it's just frustrating to see the most powerful country on earth—in military terms, but also in economic terms and so on—stuck in such a one-way street, with such tight walls on the left and the right. And that's just where it's going to go.

And while pretending that, oh, this is what democracy is—no, the democracy of the United States doesn't actually allow for proper course changes. It doesn't. It just allows for the one-way street, but please choose whether you want to do it with a red lollipop in your mouth or a blue lollipop in your mouth. You can change the flavor, but not really the direction. But... how many people, would you guess, do we now have in the United States in our bubble? You know, the people who would agree with what we're talking about—how big, in percentage points, would you guess this bubble, this kind of opposition to the current course, is at the moment? Are we talking about 5% to 10%, or are we more talking about, you know, 30% to 40%?

#Michael Rossi

It's hard to say, because I don't think anybody has really done the proper measurement. But what I can tell you is that the percentage gets larger and larger the younger the generation you measure. That I can tell you. So, from my own personal experience—and just take it as that—this is anecdotal, okay? This is not macro-analytical, right? But as you know, I teach at a number of universities: Rutgers, Fordham, Pace, Long Island, among others. I was here at Fordham two years ago when the October 7th incident happened. And when that first came out, the university, along with multiple others—so Fordham is not the only one that does this—issued these statements condemning the terrorist attacks, standing with Israel, the typical boilerplate material.

Completely to be expected—nothing out of the ordinary. I was a bit hesitant at first to bring these topics up in my class because I was teaching a course on conflict resolution at the time. And as it

turned out, we had just gotten to the subject of Israeli-Palestinian protracted conflicts—two-state solutions, this, that, the other thing. I was really wondering what my students were going to say. Fordham is, at least traditionally speaking, a Jesuit university. It's an excellent university—an absolutely excellent university. So I was wondering how many would be on the conservative side. My point is, Pascal, that the students' overwhelming opinions on this are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, highly critical of Zionism, and many of them are Jewish themselves.

We need to be very, very clear on this, because this is a significant internal conflict—not just in the United States, but elsewhere—separating and differentiating between Zionism and Judaism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Some of the strongest critics, some of the biggest proponents of being anti-Zionist, are themselves Jewish, saying, “This is not in my name.” So what I'm saying here is that the number of people who don't take the narrative from the media-industrial complex at face value is incredibly large. The younger one gets, the more that's the case. The older ones are the ones watching cable news, network news—and that stuff is already filtered and sanitized for our protection.

#Pascal

Although I must say, in defense of everybody 50 and above—66% of the viewership of my channel are 50 and above. It's just to say, you know, the bubble on our side is that people tune in more the older they are. At least for this form of medium that we're currently using—long-form discussions on YouTube, kind of, let's call it intellectual conversations—this really appeals to people 50 and up. Virtually nobody below 20 is watching. Or if anyone below 20 is watching, please write a comment. I'd just be surprised. I don't know.

#Michael Rossi

I tell my students, you know, I'm talking with Pascal Lottaz today, and they get excited about that. But that's also good. I'm talking about the people I see on a daily basis—my university students. And that's one thing. I think a lot of it is also because many of them don't have a cable subscription. So where do they get their news from? They get it from the internet, from social media. Some people are going to say, “Oh, you get your information from TikTok or Instagram or Twitter? That's not reliable.” Interestingly enough, these are the groups that are effectively pulling the curtain away.

And you see the little guy with the machine saying, “Oh, pay no attention to that,” you know, that scene from **The Wizard of Oz.** So ultimately, the gatekeepers of the narrative might have controlled it back in 2022 with the Ukraine war. But a lot of that also came with many news portals completely eliminating any Russian journalism—RT, any of that kind of stuff was completely banned. You know, I was wondering for a while, when I was doing my translations early on, whether YouTube was going to punk me as well for doing the full-on translations, which they haven't. Right.

You know what, they haven't. But this is very much a case where there's a firewall against any alternative sources of information. Increasingly, we find this stuff through social media, through Telegram channels as well. And this is why younger individuals are much more likely to take what their elected officials say with significant grains of salt. These are the ones who are going to, as you said, Kamala is now going to say on March 1st, "Oh, I'm against this war in Iran." And you're basically saying, "Come off it. Come on, when you were vice president, you were absolutely in Israel's corner. Why?"

Because we can go back in time—we can find the Twitter posts, we can find the statements—and hit the reply button and say, "This you? This you?" Right? Especially when it comes to a whole bunch of, I would say, doomer MAGA Republicans. These are the ones lining up with Trump, not just Ted Cruz or Lindsey Graham, who are probably the two most reprehensible ones out there. But you have people like Randy Fine, you have Andy Ogles—at least these two in particular. They're all about, you know, "All for Israel, all for Israel." And if you're against it, not only are you anti-Semitic, you're anti-Christian, you're anti-American, you're anti-Western.

And then you click on the comments of these posts, and they're getting ridiculed left and right, left and right, left and right. The only thing is, you have to ask yourself: how do these people get elected? How do they get reelected? Everybody knows Lindsey Graham is up for reelection this year. You know, at this stage of the game, he might campaign in South Carolina, which is where he's from, or he could just ride around Tel Aviv and Haifa looking for votes there. He claims to be there more than he's in South Carolina. I can't guarantee that he's going to lose, but now they're much more in the crosshairs of increasingly vocal and empowered citizens who are willing and able to call BS on them.

#Pascal

What do you think the impact of this war has been over the last—well, it's now about two and a half weeks, right? In general, on the United States and the political system. I mean, apart from just MAGA falling apart and Donald Trump basically disappointing large swaths of his voters. Do you expect that this war might reach the level of the Vietnam War in terms of galvanizing U.S. society? Or is that maybe too tall an order? Because the opposition to the Vietnam War was massive, right? It was—millions of people in the streets, literally millions. Right. Is something like that imaginable?

#Michael Rossi

I don't think so, unless two things come into play. Number one, we get to the stage where we have boots on the ground and they're dying in droves. And second, that those boots on the ground come through a military draft, because those were the two big things that led to mass protests. The draft, yeah. The draft was a big thing, and not surprisingly, as soon as Vietnam was over, we got rid of it. People are talking about reinstating the draft for a number of reasons, one of which is to instill a

sense of patriotism. I have enough colleagues who have served multiple tours, and they are the biggest critics of this. I mean, if you want to find some of the strongest critics of the way the U.S. military operates, look no further than actual veterans, who will tell you that once their tour of duty is done, they're discarded—especially when it comes to health issues, mental issues, PTSD. It's disgraceful. It's absolutely disgraceful.

#Pascal

Sorry, I just need to ask, because we've also read all these news reports now about the poor sailors on the—what is it—the Gerald Ford, the aircraft carrier that's now in its tenth month. They already had problems last month with their toilets, and now apparently a fire broke out in one of the laundry rooms. Hundreds of bunk beds were basically burned down, and people got smoke poisoning and whatnot—on an aircraft carrier that's not even close to Iran yet, or being used in active battle against them, because they're too afraid to actually go near Iran.

I mean, does this war have the potential to actually cast such a bad light on the U.S. military that it might impact their ability to recruit? We know that Hollywood is a super effective skill for the U.S. military—Top Gun and all that glorification of service—but does this one have the potential to really drive the point home? Like, it's not as glorious as it seems once you're enlisted.

#Michael Rossi

We're kind of shifting back into that demoralized period of the mid to late '70s. You know, Vietnam certainly destroyed a lot of that image, which had to be resuscitated throughout the '80s with small little wars here and there—Central America, where Reagan was able to pick one little dictator off after another, only after supporting them and then bumping them off. Then comes Gulf War I, which was a public relations miracle, followed by the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the United States engaging in a decade-and-a-half-long period of military unipolarism—give or take a Black Hawk Down in Somalia to, you know, shush that up or whatever. But then you add the war on terror. You add Afghanistan. You add Iraq.

And you add the idea—as I said before, I've had students who've served multiple tours, and I don't begrudge them. They went; I didn't. So who am I to say? But I've spoken with them, and a lot of them have said, "Look, probably one of the most disappointing things is that they put in their time, they put their lives on the line, they do what needs to be done, and they realize that a lot of times they're expendable. As soon as they finish their tour of duty—aside from a parade or a 'support the troops' slogan or whatever—it's like they don't get the level of support, the level of investment, that they thought they would." And so they have much more of a right to openly critique what happens behind the scenes and what runs counter to the official narrative.

So especially in an age now where social media, podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok give people like them platforms to openly say what's really happening versus the sanitized narrative that's being

promoted, this is absolutely contributing to a number of things. A, not so much a decline in morale, but a realization that signing up for the military is not what it's all cracked up to be. And recruitment is experiencing a significant downturn, a decrease in enrollees, which is why some officials are suggesting a draft—which is just going to throw ethanol on smoldering coals. It's going to be a disaster. It's going to be an absolute disaster. But, you know, more to the point is that with Iran—why? What are we doing in Iran? Why are we fighting Netanyahu's war?

#Pascal

Yeah, why is the United States fighting Netanyahu's war? I mean, again, Mearsheimer has an answer to that. But the other side is, of course, like the Brian Berletic side that says, no, no, no, you've got it backward. This is a war of imperial expansion that the United States wants to fight, and it's just convenient to have Israel as both an excuse and a scapegoat. And this has been in the works for decades; now it's just being implemented. I can't tell which one it is, but maybe, just in the last couple of minutes, what else do you think was very important over the last week in the development of the war—aside from Larijani's potential death—that we should be aware of to have a clearer picture of what's going on?

#Michael Rossi

Well, I think that Trump cannot rely on NATO to expand this conflict. NATO has said that this is not their scenario, this is not their avenue—which you have to think about. This is somewhat interesting because, yeah, they can play exactly by the book: this is outside of Europe, this is outside of our scope. And yet some of the same officials are talking about NATO having branch offices in East Asia, in Southeast Asia, to counter China. But when it comes to this, they don't want to get involved. They don't want to get involved. So that's probably the first thing—that Trump is running out of friends, he's running out of allies. And I think a lot of it is that, increasingly, countries don't want to align behind two of the least popular countries in the world right now.

And if people realize that Israel is using—well, it's hard to say where the dividing line between America ends and Israel begins. You know, some people say one's a puppet of the other, one's a proxy of the other. I mean, you listen to how vociferously pro-Israel people like Ted Cruz or Lindsey Graham are, and you have to think, what does Mossad have on them that makes them say what they say? But be that as it may, we won't realize this until many months or years afterward. I think another significant point since we last spoke is that Israel is getting hit hard. They're getting hit hard—Tel Aviv, Haifa—they're now getting hit hard, which means that the Iron Dome, which was built to be absolutely impenetrable... I guess it is impenetrable when your biggest enemies are Palestinian children with rocks.

But when you actually go up against an army that fights back, it's pretty quick how suddenly this defiant attitude disappears. And this also explains why social media is so much—it's a weird thing to say—but why social media is absolutely in favor of this sort of eye-for-eye justice that Israel has

been finally getting. Because we see the hubris, we see the absolute sense of entitlement that many Israelis feel—that they simply deserve to have—in terms of defending a country at the expense of everyone else out there. So the narratives are coming completely undone, and there are attempts to try to correct those narratives. You might remember, I think it was about a year ago, Hillary Clinton, of all people—but I'm not surprised—said something like, "The reason why the kids are pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli is because they're getting the wrong message through social media, and we need to set them right." Okay. Every time you try to set the narrative right, we realize how bogus the narrative is.

We realize how transparent that narrative is. It's like I have this sort of unofficial rule in my classroom for my students. I say, look, it's really a two-part rule. Number one, if you're going to cheat, cheat within your expected capabilities. And number two, if you're going to lie, lie convincingly—at least lie convincingly. I might actually give you a couple of points just for creativity. But they can't even lie. That's the thing. The narrative is so transparent at this point that a good chunk of the world is on Team Iran—regardless of the government, regardless of the internal dynamics of the country. It's this idea that Iran is not going to just roll over and die.

I just read this weird thing from Newt Gingrich. Remember Newt Gingrich? The 1994 Republican. He came up with this great idea—this fantastic idea. He was like, "Look, if we can't control the Strait of Hormuz, let's just create a canal. Let's, you know, use some thermonuclear bombs to make a canal somewhere in Oman or the UAE, and problem solved." Yes, he actually said that. He said this. And you know what? Maybe—maybe—and this is one of my favorite responses—maybe Steiner's Ninth Army will just set things right all of a sudden. Steiner will come in. Steiner will make it right. Yes, absolutely. What somebody needs to do—I don't know if they've done it yet—but somebody needs to make a parody of that scene from *Downfall* with Trump and Netanyahu and the dialogue.

#Pascal

It's pretty mind-boggling, you know—the kind of commentary you get from people who are supposed to be quite serious about this. But then again, it's like the entire war looks like it was planned and started by children. It does. It's like... well, the commentary about it is Donald Trump, two days ago, saying nobody could have foreseen that Iran would strike back at Gulf countries where the U.S. has its bases. It's quite a bit of insanity. That he says something like that is one thing, but that the entire apparatus goes along with it and implements it is another.

#Michael Rossi

Some of the news reported—remember, they were interviewing the Iranian foreign minister, I forget his name, but he's becoming an internet sensation. They literally asked him, "How can you justify attacking American bases in the region?" It's almost like, "How dare you fight back?" So, look, it's more than just Trump. It's not just Trump. It's not Hegseth, it's not Cruz or Graham. I mean, you kind of put them all together and you realize that—well, yeah, lump in Europe as well. When you

throw in Kallas and von der Leyen and Rutte and Macron and Starmer and Merz—oh my God, Merz—yeah, that's the thing. I mean, we're talking about some of the most pathetically mediocre, incompetent people. Finish the sentence. You know, I just can't believe that if we were led by children, we actually wouldn't have started this war.

#Pascal

And you know what you said earlier about the majority probably supporting Team Iran—this is certainly true in the Global South, and really anyone who's not part of Europe or North America. Tomorrow, I'm going to put out a video with a Chinese PhD student who does a wonderful job explaining why China didn't veto that UN Security Council resolution—the one last week where they actually condemned Iran for hitting back. But the point is that while governments are very, very cautious at the moment—what they do, what they say, what they utter—the mood on the ground is pretty clear. The only question is: is Iran a victim-victim, or is it going to be a fighting-back victim, right? So do you want to support somebody who's going to lose, or do you support somebody who might even win in the long run? The kind of bad blood that the United States and Israel have after two years of genocide is in its own league, I would say. Yeah, absolutely.

#Michael Rossi

Now that, of course, leads us to ponder—and we can do this at another point—what are the possible scenarios for this war coming to a conclusion? You know, our colleagues like Glenn and Jeff, among others, I think we're all in the same boat here, saying that the United States is riding this tiger that it just cannot get off right now. I mean, it's just—we're in it for all kinds of horrible purposes. And, you know, that still presupposes that the country is led by rational people who can realize that perhaps we made a mistake, and all they have to do is just pull out. Let the IRGC continue to run Iran. Trump can give—well, I don't know.

He can, you know—I don't know—beat up on Cuba for a while or whatever. Israel can punch down, you know, more against Palestine, because that's what they do. OK, that's effectively what they do: they punch down on weaker people. Yeah. But there's also—and I hate to bring this up now—but there's always the nuclear option. And I don't know who's going to come up with it first. Will Israel do it, or will Trump do it? Remember, Trump is having his whole **laissez-moi** moment, and he's screaming it in every direction to any audience that's going to believe him. Yeah. But he is not the Sun King, not by far. I mean, look, every civilization has its mad emperor or king every so often—and we've got him now.

I remember there was this great episode of **Game of Thrones** way back in the beginning, when the episodes were good. King's Landing is revolting after being besieged by Stannis Baratheon's army, and Joffrey—the idiot king or whatever—orders his guards to start attacking the mob. And Tywin says, "Listen, we've had idiot kings before, and we've had vicious kings before, but I don't think we've ever been plagued with a vicious idiot before." And I think that when the allegedly most

powerful country in the world is run not just by one vicious idiot, but by a number of vicious idiots, you shouldn't expect stupidity to shoot itself in the foot. Stupidity can still do an immeasurable amount of damage.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, but it's—I mean, I wish we didn't have to explain everything that's happening just through stupidity. I wish there were some rational way of saying, like, okay, no, there's this logic or that logic. But the best thing I've found so far is basically Christian Zionism as an explanatory variable for why this was started in the first place. But that's not much better in terms of—well, as an explanation, I mean, of something satisfying.

#Michael Rossi

So it's funny—speaking of Christian Zionism—Mike Huckabee, who's the Israeli ambassador to Israel, somebody had posted this to him: the Christian leaders in Palestine, in Jerusalem, have condemned Zionism. They've condemned evangelism. We're talking about the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Armenian Catholicos, the Latin Patriarch—basically the original historical heads of the Christian churches. And this was sent to Huckabee saying, you know, you being a big Christian, you do know there are actual Christians who live in the area and have condemned this.

And he basically said, in no uncertain terms, that they don't know what they're talking about in so many ways—like, "Well, what do they know? They're misguided." So yes, I'm sure there's some logic beyond just simple stupidity. And I think it really is that the United States is looking to secure regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and give Israel the opportunity to establish hegemony in the Middle East. Iran is the last major obstacle to that. All the other countries have either been subdued or vassalized. Iran is not going to go down easy.

At this stage of the game, what Iran is also doing is picking at the weaker Gulf states to make them seriously reconsider their position. Notice there are two other countries that haven't done anything yet—Saudi Arabia and Egypt. And they're not stupid for holding back right now. But if it gets to a point where they need to be dragged in, I wouldn't put it past Washington or Tel Aviv to do something. You know, Larijani had said—or it could've been Araghchi, one of the two—that we should expect a 9/11-style false flag as a way of widening this war. If that happens, it's going to be blamed on Iran.

#Pascal

It was Larijani. Larijani wrote that in a post four days ago, saying, like, yeah, we would never do a 9/11-type attack because we are not at war with the people of the United States. We will not hurt you. We're at war with the military, not with the people. Sure. And that's the man who now was probably killed by Israel. But, well, Michael, thank you very much for your time today and for

discussing this. I do hope we can have some more hopeful analysis sometime soon. For people who want to follow you, they should go to your channel, Michael Rossi PoliSci. Yep, PoliSci. People who want to follow me can reach me under Neutrality Studies.

#Michael Rossi

Let me just say, you guys have been doing a phenomenal job. I mean, one video or two almost every single day—my hat goes off to you, good sir.

#Pascal

Right now, I just have so many interesting people to talk to, including you. So thank you to everybody who's sticking around for the conversations. I've got so many midterms to grade.

#Michael Rossi

I have no midterms. Yeah, well, I have to run to class in about half an hour. So this is my real—this is my actual job. Okay, go to the actual job, and we'll talk later. Thank you. Good to see you again. Bye-bye.