

Larry C. Johnson: Strait of Hormuz on the Brink: The Escalation Trigger

This interview examines claims of political intimidation, media narratives, and the wider war involving Iran, Israel, and the U.S. It questions allegations against journalists, disputes official claims about battlefield success, and argues that propaganda and dehumanization are being used to justify escalation. The discussion also looks at the Strait of Hormuz, missile stockpiles, air defense failures, and the risk of a long war of attrition, while highlighting the moral and religious principles shaping Iran's response.

#Nima

Since you mentioned the CIA, it seems they're preparing something for Tucker Carlson and want to go against him. Here's what Tucker Carlson said. I want to understand your take on that.

#Guest

He's preparing some kind of criminal referral against me—a crime report to the Department of Justice—on the basis of a supposed crime I committed. What's that crime? Well, talking to people in Iran before the war. They read my texts. So the crime under consideration apparently would be under the Foreign Agents Act or something like that—acting as an agent of a foreign power. I don't expect this to go anywhere. I'm not too worried about an actual criminal case against me for a bunch of reasons. One, I'm not an agent of a foreign power. Unlike a lot of people commenting on U. S. politics and global affairs, I have only one loyalty, and that's to the United States.

#Nima

Larry, what do you make of what Tucker Carlson is saying? It could be a serious case, the way he came out and talked about it.

#Larry

No, it's not a serious case. There's no legal foundation for this. You're required to register as a foreign agent if you're acting on behalf of a foreign government—if they're paying you and directing you, saying, "Here, say this, do this." You know, I don't—Tucker and I are not, by any stretch, best friends or even great acquaintances. We've had text exchanges over the years, and he's called me a few times to ask for interviews on certain issues. I mean, you can go back—good God—23 years

ago. No, I take that back, 25 years ago, I was on *Crossfire* with him. He was just about 30 years old back then. But really, the fact that he's been told this by friends in the agency or somewhere in the Trump administration is just a sign of desperation.

And, you know, I can understand Ratcliffe doing it, because Ratcliffe is just a tool of Israel. And, you know, we can't rule out the possibility that he'll come after people like myself, Ray McGovern, Doug McGregor, and Danny Davis. You know, they'll try to intimidate. They wouldn't be doing that if they were winning. If the war was going great and they were triumphing, as they claim they are, they wouldn't be doing this. So this is just another act of a desperate government. But, you know, fortunately, Tucker's got a lot of money, and he can hire the lawyers he needs, and this will be a PR disaster for the Trump administration.

#Nima

Larry, let's start with these other rumors. The one about Netanyahu—there are two recent videos of him that were both created by AI.

#Larry

Right.

#Nima

What can you say about the situation with Netanyahu and his case? He's not participating in the security briefings that he's usually part of, right?

#Larry

He didn't participate in one. We haven't seen—I don't know if they've had another that's been televised. You know, I view it as just a distraction, because it's not affecting the conduct of the war toward Iran. So I don't know who's putting it out; it's one of those shiny objects a magician uses to distract attention. And I think that may be part of it—just to distract attention from the fact that the war is not going well for Israel and the United States, despite their claims that they're wiping out the Iranian Navy.

Just as a side note on that, I heard Carolyn Levin say, "Yeah, we've destroyed a hundred ships." I went back and said, huh? How many? You know, the CIA Factbook—which I just learned they stopped publishing as of 2026, but the last one was in 2025—listed the total size of the Iranian Navy, meaning actual ships that float above the water, not including submarines and such, at about eighty. So they've destroyed twenty more ships than Iran even has in its Navy, which is, again, just the hype—the line that goes along with these kinds of events.

#Nima

Donald Trump says that most of the kamikaze boats were destroyed by the United States. Here's what he said.

#Speaker 04

Iran has been—so they put out a phony story: the kamikaze boats. The kamikaze boats don't exist. They're fake. And you can almost see that when you look at them, because if they did exist, we'd hit them just like we hit other boats all over the place. But they don't exist. In fact, some people say, "Where are the boats? How come nobody's seen the boats?" You know why? Because it's AI-generated. It's fake. And I found—I didn't realize this before we started—but Iran is known for a lot of fake news. And they deal with our fake news. And I actually think it's pretty criminal, because our media companies, who have no credibility whatsoever, are putting out information that they know is false.

#Nima

And here's the video we got from Iran about the boats.

#Speaker 05

This is the first time they're showing this tunnel. Yeah, I think those are called Boghammers. And...

#Nima

How come Donald Trump thinks it's all about AI when it comes to the Iranian people coming out into the streets? It's AI.

#Larry

Hey, look, if it's AI, then great—send our ships in there. They don't have anything to worry about. Iran's been 100% destroyed, right? So what are you waiting for? Iran's 100% destroyed. They've lost. They don't have any boats, they don't have any submersibles, they don't have any torpedoes. Open up the Strait of Hormuz. I mean, if that were the case, it would just underscore that he's lying, because the Strait of Hormuz isn't open for normal shipping traffic, and Iran still has the ability to stop it. And, you know, they didn't put all those small attack boats out there so they could be videotaped and seen on the water. They've kept them in secure locations, and they'll come out when needed—if needed. Right now, I think Iran's doing quite well in shutting down maritime traffic out of the Persian Gulf.

All they've got to do is call Trump's bluff. AI, great—what are you waiting for? You don't have anything to fear, right? I mean, if he says it doesn't exist, what the hell are you waiting for? Instead, why are you asking all these others—hey, China, England, France, come on, everybody get together, we'll have a flotilla, we'll open that strait. Well, I thought you said it was all destroyed. I mean, you know, I can't keep track of a lot. I'm going to have to get one of those neck braces, you know, the kind you get when you're in an automobile accident and get whiplash. I've got to get one of those because, you know, I can't keep up with this back and forth, back and forth. My neck's hurting.

#Nima

Larry, the Trump administration—you know, the other day he was talking about the genetics of Iranians, saying, you know, they're not like us, they're different.

#Larry

You mean they're humane, intelligent, honorable, decent human beings—unlike the trash that surrounds Trump? Sorry. Sorry.

#Nima

Because they see—it seems to me that he feels the same way Netanyahu feels about Palestinians. You see all these people as Amalek; they don't see them as human. What is the basis of that kind of mindset? Because these people are so much... If you decide, based on those kinds of ideologies, that you have to fight, you have to go to war, you have to destroy these countries because they're not going to obey—well, because Donald Trump... Let's put it this way: what the Iranian media and most Iranian officials are feeling right now about the United States and its strategy toward Iran, for example, is that they say the U.S. wants us to be slaves—or be destroyed.

#Larry

Well, look, whenever the United States goes to war, the first thing it has to do is dehumanize the enemy. Because if you approach them as human beings like you, it's certainly tough to kill them. As long as you can convince people that they're cockroaches—like in World War I, the Hun; World War II, the Japs, the Slopes, the Slant-Eyes, the yellow monkeys—not exactly what you'd call humanizing them. The Krauts for the Germans. And you can go back and watch even the cartoons that were put out in the '40s by Warner Brothers with Bugs Bunny.

They'd portray the Japanese with big buck teeth and slanted eyes, make them look like monkeys. Dehumanize them, and then it's easier to kill them. That's what this is about. Because if you show them as they really are—and that's one of the reasons the State Department is pissed off at CNN for going over to Iran and showing the Iranians as they are—oh, you mean they're not out clubbing

women for not wearing a hijab? You mean they actually have children who laugh and smile and play together? Well, we can't have that. That would humanize them. So unfortunately, that's been the U. S. method of operation for so long.

#Nima

Larry, Donald Trump was trying to force at least a political move together with European or NATO countries. He also tried to bring China into the conflict, saying, "Come here and help us open up the Strait of Hormuz." And the German government said, "What else can we bring to the table? What else can we bring to the war?" Because it doesn't seem they're very capable of changing the battlefield. How does Donald Trump feel? It was political—he wanted some political move, a military move, or a combination of both. What's your understanding of what he was asking for?

#Larry

You mean Trump?

#Nima

Donald Trump.

#Larry

Uh, help me. Help me get out of this mess. You know, I wish we could put a musical track under some of the things Donald Trump says. Like on this one, I'd use the Beach Boys—"Help Me, Rhonda." You know, "Help me, China. Help, help me, China." And, "Help me, China, please get through the Strait of Hormuz." That would be the lyric, okay? And the Chinese are sitting back going, "What's with this guy?" Because if you've defeated Iran—100% destroyed, no, no, no, 120% destroyed, defeated—

#Larry

Why do you need us? I mean, you've defeated them, so why do you need all of us? It should be a piece of cake. Go ahead, send your troops in there, send your ships—go for it. And they're not doing it because the military commanders realized this would be a suicide mission. No, we're backing off. You know, Donald Trump still thinks he's doing the TV show **The Apprentice.** It's all staged. Like when he attacked Kharg Island—oh, he devastated Kharg Island. He left all the oil facilities, the oil terminal, intact. The next day, reportedly, Iran was still shipping oil out of Kharg Island. Reportedly, he bombed an airstrip and maybe some—well, I don't know if they were radar sites or what—but whatever he did, it didn't change the strategic or tactical picture at all.

And then you step back and realize there's a reason why the United States has even restricted Israel: do not attack the oil terminals in Iran. Because if we do that, Iran will take out all the oil terminals in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai—whoever's got oil terminals and is pumping oil. Iraq too—it's all going to disappear. So it's not just that 20% of the world's daily oil needs wouldn't be shipped out of the Gulf; we'd lose 20% of the world's capacity, period. It would be taken off the books. And then you're looking at years of shortages, and that's going to have a direct impact on economic growth. So that's why the Trump administration, even with all this craziness, hasn't given the green light for that.

What I find fascinating is—again, I'll call it—the religious conviction of Iran when it comes to retaliation. When they vowed, "You hit our oil, we'll hit your oil. You hit our ports, we'll hit your ports." The one area, though, where they didn't—and one of my readers pointed this out to me, and I'd like you to verify if you think it's true—was when the desalination plant was hit in Iran. Now, admittedly, that affects about 8% of Iran's ability to produce fresh water. Iran did not retaliate in kind against the Gulf Arabs, because doing so would have meant that many of those countries would have faced a complete breakdown of their fresh water systems.

It could have really caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. And this one reader reminded me of the legacy of Imam Hussein—when he fought against the Sunni army, a force of about 3,000 men, while he had only 70 followers. They were deprived of water for three days, and they died in that war. That is the foundation, if you will, of the Shia Islamic outlook on the world. And they're not going to do that to other Arabs. They're not going to do that to other Muslims. They're not going to do that. They recognize that they're not going to do to others what was done to them. And I thought, you know, that's pretty profound. Do you think that's a fair interpretation?

#Nima

It is. It is. That's huge. That's the foundation of the Shia faith, Larry. And it's not just something they talk about every year—it's huge when it comes to Shia Muslims.

#Larry

Yeah. Well, we've seen, you know, the United States spend an enormous amount of effort trying to demonize Shia Muslims. But when you go back and look at the history of Iran since the Islamic Revolution, Shia Islam has not encouraged suicide bombers—just the opposite. It was during the period we talked about on Friday, during the Iran-Iraq War, when Iraq attacked Iran, and then the United States started supplying Iraq with chemical weapons, first used in August 1983 and continuing to be used about 20 times until August 1988.

#Larry

During that entire time, Iran did not respond in kind. It didn't say, "Okay, we're going to produce chemical weapons, and we're going to use chemical weapons on Iraq." They didn't do that. And I believe it was not because they lacked the scientific skill to develop them—it was the moral foundation of the Islamic Republic. This is not a contrived belief; it's genuine, and the religious principles undergirding it are quite strong. And this is something the United States doesn't grasp. We assume that they are as devoid of moral principles as we are.

#Nima

Larry, you mentioned the case of Israel's air defense systems—the Iron Dome and the Patriot system. We've had some reports that their air defense is running into trouble because they're running out of interceptors.

#Larry

No, no, no, you're wrong. They're not running out—they've already run out. It's depleted.

#Nima

The Times of Israel said that. The Times of Israel said they're not running out of interceptors.

#Larry

Oh, well, they said they're not running out. That's a lie. Look, it's basic math. And, you know, you're an engineering professor—you can help the audience here. So, at most, 4,620 Patriots have been produced since 2015.

#Larry

It may actually have been less, because when I did that calculation, they said that during the first six years, between 100 and 300 were being produced. Well, I went with 300. If I'd gone with 100, that's 600 as opposed to 1,800—that's a gap of 1,200.

#Larry

By the end of 2025—December 31st, 2025—there were a grand total of about 4,620 produced. So let's work through the math. The math is basically this: there's a missile battalion, and every missile battalion has between four and six batteries. You can run the calculation—four batteries or six batteries per battalion. Then each battery can have 72 or 96 of the PAC-3 missiles. So again, that gives you, at one end, if you multiply one battalion with four batteries and each battery has 72 missiles, that's about 300 PAC-3 missiles at the low end per battalion.

And then at the upper end, do six times 96. Okay, that sets the upper and lower range. When you realize that every time you fire a Patriot missile, or you've got an incoming missile you need to defeat, you have to fire at least two. Now, I'm ignoring the fact that we've seen multiple videos where they fired four, five, even six Patriots at one missile. But let's just go with two. That means, under ideal circumstances, with 4,620, they could only produce 2,310 missiles.

#Larry

They could defend against that many missiles—cruise missiles, ballistic missiles. Well, Iran, in the first 15 days of this war, was firing on average about 50 missiles a day. But let's call it 40 missiles a day—that's 600 missiles right there. So if a Patriot missile had never been fired in anger, you'd have a total supply of 2,310. But what we know is that at least 1,000 have been shot off in Ukraine. So let's go from 2,300, the capability to defeat 2,300, subtract another 500 out of that—what are we down to? That's about 1,800.

#Larry

And so we've just described that they would have used a thousand in just one war. So they're depleted, or almost depleted. The situation with that is even worse. They started production in 2007, and as of January 1st, 2025, they had nine hundred total. And once again, with those, you fire two against each missile. So they're either...

#Larry

Depleted already, or they're almost depleted. But they certainly no longer have—neither the Israelis nor the United States—the defensive missiles in place capable of shooting down Iranian ballistic and cruise missiles. That's a fact.

#Nima

Many people in Israel—the Israeli media reported that they're not receiving these warning alerts before the impact. It seems there's some sort of internal failure in informing people that a missile is coming, for example. But is that related to the radar?

#Larry

Yeah, no, that's obvious. When Iran took out the U.S. radars throughout Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Jordan—some at Muwaffaq al-Salti Air Base in Jordan—that wiped out the early warning capability. So, yeah, that's why Israel is effectively blinded now. The other thing is, with really no air defense, Iran can sit back and hit whatever target it wants in Israel. They don't have to worry about the air defense systems anymore. And the longer this war goes on, whatever sort of, I'll call them, subsidiary systems the Israelis have, those too will be depleted. The concept of air

defense that the West has relied upon was based on the assumption that a country would only launch one or two missiles.

They didn't expect, you know, 40, 50, 100. In the early days—February 28th, March 1st, 2nd, 3rd—Iran was firing a lot more missiles, but they were older varieties, and they were doing it for the explicit purpose of depleting the U.S. inventory, because the U.S. doesn't have an unlimited supply. They can't produce Patriot or THAAD missiles in large quantities overnight. The system wasn't automated; it was basically designed to be built by hand so that Lockheed Martin could make more money off the contract, candidly. And there are some people out there claiming that I don't know what I'm talking about. Well, they're entitled to be stupid.

All you've got to do is—it's not a great secret—the Department of Defense, with Congress, proposes a budget, and the budget gets funded. Then there are line items for THAAD missiles and for PAC-3s. So, you know what the basic cost is, and you can calculate how many missiles are being produced. There's no great secret. This isn't some highly classified information. Now, they do want to keep quiet what their actual inventory is, but you can't deploy and use these missiles, as they have been in Ukraine and Israel, and then claim, "Oh yeah, we've got ample supplies." No, they don't. They're stripping missiles out of the Indo-PACOM command—you know, it used to be called Pacific Command—which means they're taking from what's meant to deal with China as a threat.

#Nima

Larry, Donald Trump was asked if he's ready to declare victory. He said he's not ready to declare that. And even though—what is the timeline on the part of the United States? How do you see it? Is your expectation that the next three weeks are going to be the peak of the war? Because the war is turning into a war of attrition, as you've mentioned. And as time goes by—yesterday, Iranian officials, the foreign minister of Iran, had an interview saying that Iran is not asking for a ceasefire, not asking for negotiations.

Even those enrichment issues that were part of the discussions before—they're not on the table anymore to discuss with anybody. And here's the question for them: many people are asking if Iran feels somehow comfortable negotiating, if they feel confident about their capabilities to fight this war as time goes by, and that it doesn't matter how long it takes. But on the part of the Trump administration, do you see any sort of wisdom in what the end goal is for them? What's the achievement? What are the main objectives they hope to reach during this war that's happening?

#Larry

They didn't define that very clearly at the outset. I think they were banking heavily on—well, I'll call them rumors—but the reports that General Ismail Kani, who was head of the IRGC, was actually a secret intelligence asset of Mossad. Mossad had supposedly convinced the United States that, "Hey, we've got this general who's a cooperating informant, and if we simply kill the rest of the leadership,

he can step up to take the lead. He's got the IRGC, he'll be able to command them, and Iran will fall." I think that was the plan. Again, if those reports are true—but I think they are. So once that fell apart, once Kani was discovered and executed, the entire plan for regime change under new IRGC leadership cooperating with Israel and the United States disappeared.

And they didn't count on that. The Trump administration reportedly ignored the warnings that Iran was quite capable of shutting down the Strait of Hormuz—and would do so. I'm not sure how far they went in warning about Iran's counterattacks or attacks on U.S. military facilities, but I'm pretty sure they were briefed and warned about that as well. And we simply don't know how many missiles Iran actually has in its inventory. Someone I once considered a friend said I was making some of this stuff up, but I'm not. We've seen the images of the missile cities—these underground cities, literally hundreds of miles of tunnels—where these munitions are stored and produced.

And I maintain that that alone prevented the United States and Western intelligence from getting an accurate account of how many missiles Iran actually has. All we know is they've now fired over 52 waves of missiles—wave after wave. They're averaging about three and a half to four missile waves per day. That doesn't sound like someone who's running out of missiles, number one. So you've got the United States miscalculating on that front. And they also didn't count on the fact that all of their military installations in the Persian Gulf are being destroyed piece by piece. So I think Iran's demands will be—and in fact, they've started to confirm this—reparations, repair of the damage done to Iran, lifting of all sanctions, and expulsion of U.S. military personnel from their bases in the Persian Gulf.

And, you know, at the same time, it looks like Iran may actually be doing a favor for the people of the Global South by destroying Dubai, destroying the United Arab Emirates. That is one of the most shameful regimes on earth today in terms of the economic exploitation they inflict on Filipinos and other Asians who've come to the UAE to work as slaves. Their passports are confiscated, they're kept there in inhuman conditions. And then you've got all these extremely wealthy people who've been using it as Satan's playground. They claim to be an Islamic country, but they're not—they violate every tenet of Islam. And the war is actually starting to force all those extremely wealthy people to get the hell out because it's not safe. So it's bringing a form of justice in that regard.