

Matthew Hoh: US Just Burned Through Its Cruise Missiles... Now What?

#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Wednesday, March 18th, 2026. And our dear friend, our brother, Matt—oh, I said Max, I don't know where that came from—but welcome back, Matt. It's a great pleasure to have you on. I don't have you—your mic is muted. Yeah.

#Nima

No, you're not back yet. Your mic—this little button here.

#Matthew

Yeah, no, but also what happened was my phone connected to my computer, so yeah, that's the thing. I apologize for being late, and I'm going to have to keep all my paraphernalia here separate from one another. But anyway, it's good to see you. Thanks for having me, Nima.

#Nima

Good to see you, Matt. Let me start with the new escalation in the Middle East — the attack on South Pars, the refinery known in Iran as the Assaluyeh Refinery, one of the biggest and most important refineries in the country. This is a new escalation, something beyond what we've seen so far — the attack on oil and other infrastructure that's so important because the whole region is going to be affected by this kind of escalation. How do you see it? Why are they doing this? Because to me, it seems like there's so much desperation. When you go after oil infrastructure, oil facilities, it feels like something is really wrong in their thinking.

#Matthew

Yeah, there are several things. And of course, the response from Iran has been that they're going to strike facilities now in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the Emirates. The Iranians actually issued evacuation notices for those facilities, and I don't know anyone who doubts that they're going to do that. If there's one thing those of us in the West should have learned by now, it's that the people we fight often mean what they say. They're incredibly sincere about their statements and their actions. Um, yeah, I mean, the prevailing wisdom here—what I'm seeing and reading from experts and

commentators and whatnot—is that the Israelis are doing this, one, to try to bring the Gulf states fully into the war. The Israelis also made clear that they did this with the blessing and cooperation of the Americans.

So people recall a week or so ago when Israel struck those fuel tanks outside Tehran, and it caused that really massive environmental catastrophe. The Americans made it known that we weren't involved in this — the Israelis didn't tell us. And now, as soon as this hack was carried out, the Israelis are saying the Americans are with us on this. You know, the idea being that, just as the Iranians tried to expand the war, the Israelis are doing so as well, hoping that the Gulf states' reaction will not be pressure on the United States to end the war, but rather to enter into the war. Right? Using their military capabilities, of which we've only really seen a limited amount. We've seen some, but not a lot.

In the same way that the Iranians are using economic warfare here to try to harm the entire world—putting pressure on the United States that way to end this war, as well as serving as a deterrent going forward for why the U.S. and Israel wouldn't attack Iran again—the Israelis, I think, are making the same calculation. They're betting that the rest of the world will put pressure on Iran, given the complete disruption of energy coming out of the Gulf and all its adjacent industries and commodities. If we'd forgotten, as I had, that fertilizer comes from petroleum, we've certainly been reminded of it in the last couple of weeks. And we'll be reminded of it again this summer when our produce is super expensive in the supermarket— not that it ever really stopped being expensive in the last five years, I guess.

Yeah, I mean, I think that's the idea—the reasoning behind why Israel did this, why they want to expand the war this way. But I think it's also, to your point, about the desperation they're in. This is a war that's being carried out in favor of Iran right now. We can go over why I see it that way, but the idea is that Iran has the initiative. Time seems to play in Iran's favor. Iran has clearly stated and attainable political objectives, and a strategy they're executing to achieve them. The Americans and Israelis don't have that. And I think you also have to say that this strike on the natural gas processing facility was done in conjunction with a resumption of decapitation attacks—assassination attacks. We've seen three major Iranian figures killed in the last 24 hours or so.

So, I mean, that resumption again of just brute force, brute warfare—this strategy of hoping that maybe we'll pull out the right Jenga piece in the tower, or the right card in the house of cards, and the Iranian government will topple, or it will inspire— I know this is your favorite topic— it will inspire sectarian uprisings in Iran, right? I mean, that fantasy they hold on to. So, you know, I think there are a number of reasons here, but none of it is because the Israelis and the Americans are dominating this war. None of it is because this war is going in favor of the Israelis and the Americans. And it's certainly not because the Israelis and Americans have the initiative. They're doing everything they can right now to regain that initiative, and that doesn't seem to be the way it's going to go.

#Nima

I think when you're living in a glass house, you have to be careful about what you're doing. You know, Israel is so dependent, Matt, on desalination power plants—not Israel alone, but all of these Arab states together with Israel. Are they really suicidal?

#Matthew

There was a strike on the Iranian desalination plant right after the first week of the war—maybe about two weeks ago now. Then the Iranian response was to hit the desalination plant in the Emirates, and that seemed to stop, to cut that off. But the Israelis and the Americans view the Arab states involved in this as expendable. They see them as buffers, as cannon fodder, essentially—bits of property, territory, terrain, and infrastructure they can give up or use to absorb Iranian drones and missiles.

And then there's the hope—the fingers-crossed, strategy-of-hope idea—that somehow the Saudis, the Kuwaitis, the Qataris, the Emiratis, and so on are going to come into this war fully on behalf of Israel and the United States. Again, it's a strategy of hope. And that hope gets more desperate each day the war goes on, as it becomes clear that even if the Americans and Israelis did have a strategy—whatever it was—it was never going to be achieved, or it was absurd. Or again, it's just based on this idea that we're going to bomb them so much that they'll just break and fall apart. And then we'll either have our puppet in place, or there'll be such chaos that it becomes a failed state, you know, and so on.

And, you know, that's not the way it's going to go. And as you said, time seems to be on Iran's side here. I mean, the Iranians went with a strategy to achieve their objective of gaining deterrence in the region by putting pressure on America's allies in the Gulf, as well as putting pressure on the entire world. And they have the ability to do that, which we've seen. And here the Americans and Israelis are, trying to escalate this war by getting the Iranians to destroy Gulf state energy infrastructure in the hope that somehow this is going to roll into them coming in on our side—fully on our side.

They're already, certainly, defending against Iranian influence—missiles and drones. But yeah, I mean, it's just absolute madness, it's just absurd. You know, I did an interview yesterday on TRT, and I was basically apologizing, as I have in other interviews, because you say this and then the host kind of says, you know, "We're all like this—this is incredulous, this makes no sense." I mean, this is the reality we're dealing with: Israel, the United States—and nothing makes sense about this other than their imperial and Zionist ambitions.

#Nima

I think, Matt, what's going on in the minds of these Arab states—I don't know if the United States told them before the attack happened—but right now, Iran would hit them, and hit them hard, in my opinion. The head of the parliament said that, and the commander of the military said that too. Bloomberg reported moments ago that some regional energy facilities are being evacuated after Iran issued an evacuation notice. And here's the question right now for these Arab states, because they're coming together in Saudi Arabia.

I don't know if you heard about that. The foreign ministers of all these Arab states, together with Turkey and Azerbaijan, are going to meet in Saudi Arabia to talk about what the future of this kind of escalation would look like. Many of these countries can't survive it—that's the problem. They're going to talk about it, and how much that will influence decision-makers in the United States is a big question, in my opinion, because Donald Trump doesn't seem to care about these countries.

#Matthew

No, he takes them for granted. And these countries' attempts to buy themselves into a position of privilege—not privilege, but into a close or top-tier position with Donald Trump—showed that it didn't work. You know, last year when Donald Trump visited the Gulf region and they rolled out the red carpet, he went to all their palaces, and they swore hundreds of billions of dollars in investments in the United States. The Qataris even gave him a half-billion-dollar airplane. You know, that didn't matter when they picked up the phone to call him and say, "Mr. President, don't do this war." He wasn't listening to them. The idea that the Gulf allies are now understanding, that the Europeans are now understanding, that the Ukrainians are accepting, is this: there is a hierarchy in the American empire, and Israel is at the top of it.

And there's a big gap between that top tier in the hierarchy, where Israel is, and all the rest of the nations. Sure, the Europeans rank above the Africans. But, you know, when it comes to things like this, this is what to expect. So what will come out of this meeting of these foreign ministers? We're all waiting to see. Maybe they'll be so concerned with the short term, so concerned with keeping their grip on power, so concerned that they'll become the next American-Israeli project, that they'll go along with the Americans—just that fear keeping them in order. Right. But maybe they'll be more courageous. Maybe they'll be bolder. Maybe they'll have a better and wiser long-term perspective on this, seeing how this just doesn't end.

This will always be the case. Either Iran is shattered into a dozen different pieces, like Syria or Iraq was—and the Gulf states pay the enormous consequences and costs of that—or Iran sustains itself through this war. And then the war starts up again six months from now, twelve months from now, two years from now, five years from now. I mean, I would hope that's the way these foreign ministers are approaching this—with a longer perspective, calculating what's in their best national interest, not short term and not for their own portfolios, but what's actually in the best interest of their country in terms of, one, sustainability through the next generation, and two, sovereignty.

#Nima

When it comes to the timeline of the war and how long it will take to get out of this, here's what J.D. Vance said just moments ago.

#Speaker 03

Nobody likes war, right? And I guarantee the President of the United States is not interested in getting us into the kind of long-term quagmires we've seen in years past. I know the president. I know the way he thinks about America's national security. That is not a risk with this president at all. What he's also said consistently for 10, 15 years—maybe even longer—is that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, and he's willing to take action—diplomatic, ideally, but military action if he has to—to make sure that doesn't happen.

#Matthew

Is that convincing? What an absolute liar he is. What a terrible liar he is. What an absolute phony. Everything about this guy represents the worst aspects of this moment. Forgetting about the nonsense—what he's saying there, the lies he's saying there, the glorification of the great leader Donald Trump, all the things he has to do as vice president—let's just focus on the key point he made about Donald Trump not allowing Iran to have a nuclear weapon. Well, first of all, Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapons program and hasn't had one since at least 2003. But I guess facts and reality don't matter to these people.

As we know—anyone who's watched the American empire for their entire lives will tell you, whether they're 15 years old or 85 years old—facts and reality don't matter. It's the mythology, it's the narrative. It's the fact that the United States empire exists at the intersection of "greed is good" and "might is right." And that's all that matters, you know. But this idea—then to say that it's true, to say they're committed to that—say Donald Trump, for the last 15 years, has gone to bed every night and said a prayer to the good Lord, asking Him not to let the Iranians have a nuclear weapon. Right?

Um, how is that going to be achieved? There's no ability to do that without physical occupation of Iran—by the U.S. military, by the Israelis, by proxy forces, etc.—to prevent them from doing it. Unless we physically control all these different spaces that the Iranians possess or could build in, there's no way of stopping them from getting a weapon unless you do it through a political effort. And that political effort was what Barack Obama did in 2015 with the JCPOA agreement. That effort stopped any prospect of Iran getting a nuclear weapon—not that they were even in the process of getting one at the time.

And it was a good, solid agreement—agreed to by everyone except Trump, the Israelis, and the Zionists here in the United States, including many members of President Obama's own party, like Chuck Schumer. You know, I mean, this idea that the purpose is to stop Iran from getting a nuclear

weapon—how is that going to be achieved? I mean, it's the same thing, too. If you look at the Israelis, just yesterday Channel 12 in Israel put out a statement saying, "We just spoke with a senior official. Here are the objectives in the war—here are the five Israeli objectives in the war."

The first two concern the Strait of Hormuz, which wasn't an issue until the United States and Israel attacked Iran. So now, all of a sudden, the objectives become something that you yourself have created. I think that's something you learn in the first week or two of Strategy 101—don't do that. You know, don't—right—don't have a policy or strategy or actions in place that you then have to clean up after. And I'll say, as far as the European allies and the Gulf allies of the United States and the rest of the world go, the quickest way to reopen the Strait of Hormuz—to reopen entry into and out of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman—is for American and Israeli warplanes to be shot down, not to send ships to the region to somehow open the strait.

You know, the reality is that the quickest way to open the Strait of Hormuz would be for other countries to shoot down American and Israeli planes. That's not going to happen, of course. But, I mean, that's the fundamental absurdity in all this. You know, supporting the Israelis, the first two objectives are about the Strait. The next is the missile program, which has the same problem as the nuclear weapons program—but at least the missile program actually exists. How do you eradicate it? To do that, you'd have to have soldiers throughout the entire country, making sure they're not building these weapons and then launching them—in a country that's four times the size of Colorado.

There have been a lot of great maps going around on X recently, showing how big Iran is compared to South Vietnam—a country where the U.S. had 560,000 soldiers and still could never actually control it. I mean, this was the fundamental issue I encountered when I first got to Afghanistan in 2009 and saw the terrain, saw the geography, saw what Afghanistan was really like with my own eyes. You're in a helicopter, and you see that we've garrisoned this one valley, but then there are fifteen other valleys we haven't garrisoned. And the absurdity is that somehow this is how we're going to stop al-Qaeda from having base camps in Afghanistan, when they didn't even need those to begin with.

We'd have to garrison every valley in Afghanistan. We'd have to use the United States military as it was in World War II, with 13 million men, in order to do that. You know, I mean, the absurdity of the objectives and just the impossibility of them—how are they reached? And then the fourth objective for the Israelis was the nuclear weapons program. And, of course, the last one is regime change. This is according to Channel 12 out of Israel. And again, how do you reach that? But I think it's clear for both the Americans and the Israelis: if you can't get regime change, then civil war or a failed state—again, a replication of Syria and Libya—is the next best thing.

#Nima

Matt, do you feel that the Trump administration is, somehow from within, having some sort of difficulties? Let's put it this way: we had Joe Kent resign. He said he knows the region—he fought

there, and his wife was killed there. And he comes out and says, "No more war with Iran," because Iran doesn't, you know, pose an imminent threat to the United States. And when Donald Trump was informed about Joe Kent's resignation, he said, of course, he couldn't blame it on the left—he's not a leftist. He couldn't go that far.

#Matthew

It's all because he's watching that socialist on Dialogues Works. That's the reason why.

#Nima

But we see something here—you know, he was holding a very important position in the Trump administration. That's why his resignation matters. What's your understanding of the Trump administration?

#Matthew

Oh, it's just a clown show at this point. I think it always has been. It's full of—well, I mean, this is one of the—you know, certainly we've probably spoken about this before, so apologies for repeating myself. But, you know, the comparisons between 2003, the Iraq invasion, and this war in 2026 are very apt. There are similarities and differences. One of the differences is that in 2003, the United States was led by competent liars, and here in 2026 we're led by incompetent liars. As for the cohort, the cadre, the people around the president of the United States—say what you will about them—they were abhorrent, they were murderous, they were war criminals, but they were at least ideologues. They at least had some degree of beliefs and principles, however abhorrent they were. These were people who had loyalty to institutions, who had loyalty to structures, who had thoughts that came from something greater than themselves.

You compare that to what you had then—and no matter how abhorrent they were—compare that to what you have today, where the president is surrounded by sycophants, conmen, and opportunists. These people are sadists and nihilists. They're simply unmoored. They have no loyalty to anything except their own self-interest. Many of them are in their positions because they've managed to succeed in a corrupt American political and media environment. I mean, just look at the people testifying right now in front of the Senate Intelligence Committee—maybe it's over by now. You have Tulsi Gabbard, you have Kash Patel, and later today Pam Bondi is going to be testifying. I mean, none of these people have any kind of ideological core.

They have, again, no—they come from no institutions, no infrastructure. There's nothing you can point to and say, "I understand this person's arguments. I understand what they'll likely do next," because there's no kind of intellectual and—using this in the most subjective, relative sense—moral attitude that they possess, right? So, say, even the most ardent Zionists, as dehumanizing as they are, particularly when you get into that real, real rabid Jewish-supremacist aspect, there's at least a

structure to it that you can identify, that you can articulate, that defines them. But with these people, that's not there.

And I think that, again, as criminal and as revolting and as murderous as, say, the 2003 invasion was—and the people who led it and sustained it—what you have here is something different. And so, yeah, the inability of this administration to control things is clear, and you can see that domestically as well. You saw how their immigration raids throughout the United States got completely out of control, how they were essentially defeated and had to retreat from Minneapolis by the people of Minnesota. I mean, so—but in the larger sense, again, I said this before about the Iranians having the initiative, and having initiative is one of the principal things in warfare.

And if you cannot control the initiative—if you don't have the initiative—you're not going to win the war. And the Americans simply can't do that. They're forced to react, over and over again, to what the Iranians are doing or to what the Israelis are doing. So, I mean, you know, you look at the headlines in the United States, and for people who say those are just headlines, it doesn't matter—well, I'm going to tell you what, you don't understand warfare. You certainly don't understand warfare in the modern context if you think headlines don't matter.

But, you know, the headlines yesterday in the United States were, first, Joe Kent, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, resigning because, again, as you said, this war is a war of choice—a war of aggression—where Iran was not attacking any threat to the United States, or at least not posing an imminent threat to the United States, and that this war is being fought on behalf of Israel. That's the one big headline in the United States. The other big headline was that the Gerald Ford has to go back to Greece, or Crete, or wherever, because its laundry room caught on fire. I mean, this \$15 billion ship has to be taken out of the combat zone because they had a really bad fire—because somebody left too much lint in one of the dryers or something.

You know, I mean, the inability of the Americans to put forward objectives, to put forward any kind of strategy or plan—let alone control or manage what's actually in their power to control and manage—is just very clear. And so this is, for lack of a better term, a clown show. It's remarkable, and it's terrible, because people are suffering. People are dying. You know, you have family in Iran—I feel stupid for not even asking you how they've been—but the idea that people are dying and suffering and all this, whoever they are, with these people at the top, it's just sickening. It makes me want to vomit. I thought that the gangs in power, whether they were Bush's people or Obama's people, were revolting enough, but this is on another level.

#Nima

Matt, you remember when Tulsi Gabbard was announced as joining the Trump administration? We thought she was going to be a game changer. And today we had this Senate hearing where she was asked various questions about the war with Iran. Here's what happened—and her reactions to those questions.

#Speaker 04

That opening statement, as submitted to the committee in advance of this hearing, stated that as a result of last summer's airstrikes—quote—"Iran's nuclear enrichment program was obliterated"—end quote. Correct?

#Speaker 05

That's right.

#Speaker 04

And is that, in fact, the assessment of the intelligence community?

#Speaker 05

Yes.

#Speaker 04

So the assessment of the intelligence community is that Iran's nuclear enrichment program was obliterated by last summer's airstrikes?

#Speaker 05

Yes.

#Speaker 04

In the opening statement you submitted to the committee last night, you also stated, quote, "There has been no effort since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability," end quote. Correct?

#Speaker 05

That's right.

#Speaker 04

And that's the assessment of the intelligence community.

#Speaker 05

Yes.

#Speaker 04

The White House stated on March 1st of this year that this war was launched as, quote, "a military campaign to eliminate the imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime," end quote. That's a statement from the White House—"the imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime." Was it the assessment of the intelligence community that there was an imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime?

#Speaker 05

The intelligence community assessed that Iran maintained the intention to rebuild and continue expanding its nuclear enrichment program.

#Speaker 04

Was it the assessment of the intelligence community that there was, quote, "an imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime"? Yes or no.

#Speaker 05

Senator, the only person who can determine what is and is not an imminent threat is the President. False.

#Speaker 04

This is the Worldwide Threat Hearing, where you present to Congress on national intelligence—timely, objective, and independent of political considerations. You've stated today that the intelligence community's assessment is that Iran's nuclear enrichment program was obliterated and that, quote, "there had been no efforts since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability." Was it the intelligence community's assessment that, nevertheless, despite this obliteration, there was a, quote, "imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime"? Yes or no?

#Speaker 05

It is not the responsibility of the intelligence community to determine what is or is not an imminent threat.

#Speaker 04

That is up to the President, based on the volume of information he receives. It is precisely your responsibility to determine what constitutes a threat to the United States. This is the Worldwide Threats Hearing.

#Nima

Yeah, you know, Matt, it's amazing to see—Tulsi Gabbard wasn't able to influence Donald Trump, but she took in every bit of influence from him. And right now, we can basically say she's Donald Trump, because she's just repeating what he was saying.

#Matthew

Yeah, interesting, because I've worked with both of them before, years ago. You know, when Senator Ossoff—I knew him as Jonathan—was in, I think, Hank Johnson's office. He was a staffer, great guy to work with. And I knew Tulsi Gabbard when she was Representative Gabbard, and I worked with her quite a bit on anti-war efforts, trying to keep us out of the Syrian war. In 2019—excuse me, 2018—I stood in front of the Capitol building with her and the late Walter Jones, as she and Mr. Jones introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives that would have made impeachment proceedings automatic for any president who used military force without congressional authorization. And now we see who she is, right? Who she either always has been, or who, through getting close to power and wanting more of it, has let herself become.

And I think it's probably more the former—always has been. But yes, she's certainly doing her job very well on behalf of the president of the United States, even though Senator Ossoff did a pretty good job of having her lay out how there was no nuclear weapons program. According to American intelligence, whatever the Iranians had has been destroyed, and even recently. So the assessments have been that there is no threat. Yeah, we'll see more things like this over and over again as the war goes on. The absurdity will just grow larger and larger. And, you know, almost in parallel—as the suffering, the destruction, the expansion of this war grows—the absurdity, the scenes like we just saw with Tulsi Gabbard, will continue to grow as well.

You know, it's that, like Socrates said—the line between the tragic and the comic is like the line between light and shadow. You know, it's inseparable. And so we'll have the comic go along with the tragic, as war always does. That's why I tell people the best books you can read about warfare are, you know, **Catch-22**, **M*A*S*H**, or **Slaughterhouse-Five**, things like that. Those are the kinds of books that really tell you what warfare is like, because it's just imbued with a level of absurdity that you have to witness to truly appreciate, I think.

#Nima

Those are the new images coming out of the war. It seems the United States is burning through its cruise missiles. What's your understanding—who's running the whole operation? Is that Donald Trump? Does he know anything about the military aspects of what's going on, or is it just about the policies he's talking about? Because it seems to me there's no connection between what he's saying and what's actually happening on the battlefield.

#Matthew

And certainly, if you look at what Hegseth says, General Keane is a little more circumspect, I think. He's still a true believer in it all. You know, with the Navy running out of cruise missiles, you can see that this was something that should have been well understood—and I'm sure it was—but I'm sure the planners had said, "Look, once our ships fire off their cruise missiles, they either have to go back to the Mediterranean or they're going to have to go to Diego Garcia to reload their missiles."

The Navy ships—the destroyers—use what's called a vertical launch system. People have seen that, where the missile just fires straight up out of the deck. And you can't really replenish that underway. You can't have another ship do it. I mean, supposedly they're able to, but they don't, you know, because I guess it's just too difficult or too complex. People who know more about this than I do can fill in the comments. I'm sure Scott Ritter can talk about it much better than I can.

But, you know, the idea is that, OK, we could also do it in Bahrain—but we're not going to be able to utilize Bahrain, the Fifth Fleet port there. And I guarantee there were planners in the Pentagon who said this and were told to shut up—"shut up and color," right? I mean, that whole attitude of, "Don't worry about it," or, "Why don't you believe, like we believe, that this is all going to go the way it's supposed to?" "Why are you being so negative?" I heard that a million times during my time in the military. So this is all predictable—that at some point your destroyers and submarines are going to run out of Tomahawks, and then they'll have to go a long way to get new ones. They'll go to Diego Garcia because they're not going to be able to get back to the Med; they don't want to pass the Houthis, you know? So, yeah, I mean, the miscalculations here—the lack of foresight, the hope, again, the belief that this is all going to be over in a number of weeks.

Or don't worry about running out of cruise missiles, because by the time we do, Iran's going to be so degraded—everything's going to be falling apart. They're not going to be able to fight back. We won't even need any more cruise missiles, you know, when we're going into the fourth week of this war. By the end of three weeks, we won't need any more cruise missiles—it's all going to be pretty much over at that point. And we'll just be doing large bombing runs with B-52s, B-1s, and B-2s. You know, something that we've seen now in the last week—we've seen evidence of American and Israeli warplanes over the skies of Israel, something you didn't see in the first couple of weeks.

But everything we're seeing in the videos being put out—the B-1s and B-52s heading out to launch strikes on Iran—the videos I've seen all show them carrying standoff missiles. So it still doesn't look safe enough, apparently, for the B-1s and B-52s to come in and drop large amounts of bombs. I'm sure that was part of the planning—that by this point, three weeks into the war, going into the fourth week, we'd have total dominance and could just essentially carpet-bomb. They don't like that term, but "carpet-bomb," for lack of a better word—whatever we wanted to. We could drop large amounts of 500- and 2,000-pound JDAMs wherever we wanted to, as well as bunker busters, penetration munitions, and things like that.

#Speaker 03

Yeah, that's simply not the way it's played out.

#Matthew

And so I think this example of the Navy running out of cruise missiles is a really pointed illustration of the overall flaws in this strategy—the lack of planning, the lack of preparation for it. You know, again, where are you going to replenish your missile stocks? Where are the destroyers going to go? And, you know, in the military, you get taught the six P's—or seven P's—"prior proper planning prevents piss-poor performance." I mean, that's something every branch of the military teaches its officers and NCOs on the first day of officer or NCO school. And you just see this here, you know, over and over again.

And then you contrast that with the Iranians—their preparation, their planning for this, their ability to maintain the initiative, their ability to set political objectives and have a strategy they can actually execute to achieve them. The other thing I'd say—since we're talking now about what I find impressive about the Iranians, and why this war is in their favor and why time seems to be on their side—is that they've shown a degree of strategic patience that's just remarkable. The fact that they went through two iterations of conflict with Israel in 2024, and then, of course, a 12-day war last year, and they didn't use their best missile systems—that they didn't deploy a large number of decoys in their attacks to give away what they might do, like they did in the first day or two of this war.

They undersold their drones. They certainly didn't give away at all how they would employ them—the tactics they'd use, and how they could defeat American and allied air defenses. You know, as well, the fact that the Iranians had an understanding of the American command-and-control system throughout the region—the footprint of the American military and intelligence services across the region. And they've been able to hit that over and over again. We've all seen the photos of multiple destroyed radar systems that cost hundreds of millions, even a billion dollars. And the more important thing is that they can't be replaced. So now you see this emergency evacuation of THAAD missile systems from South Korea—right—to the United States, or, excuse me, to the region.

So, I mean, the strategic patience of the Iranians here has been incredible. And, you know, you face someone who's willing to do that—who's willing and able, through three iterations of prior conflict, to understand that they have a longer plan, to understand how they can control what they're going through right now—and they're able to hold back all those things: their missiles, their drones, their intelligence capabilities, because now's not the right time. We've got to stick with the plan. Wow, that's a dangerous adversary. That's someone I don't want to fight. You know, the other thing I should say, since I'm talking about all this now, is this notion that a lot of us, including especially myself, got wrong—the status of the Axis of Resistance.

Certainly Syria is out with Assad still in power, of course. I think a lot of us are surprised at what the Yemenis, or the Houthis, are doing right now. Are they really agreeing to the ceasefire with the Americans from last year? Did they really get hurt so badly that they can't participate in, you know, the war with Assad, the United States—both in the Biden and Trump administrations—or, and this is what I think is very likely, are they just being held in reserve? And the Iranians and the rest of the Axis are waiting to introduce the Houthis into the war when it's the best time. Now, again, you go back to Iranian preparation, planning for this war, their strategic patience, and that makes sense about the Houthis. Now, I mean, I think I got this really wrong—and a lot of other people did too—about Hezbollah.

And the idea that many of us thought Hezbollah had been neutralized—that the Israelis had effectively knocked Hezbollah out of the conflict—because, again, Hezbollah has, in the last 15 or 16 months, presented no threat to Israel and has abided by that ceasefire even as the Israelis have bombed Lebanon thousands of times. And now we see Lebanon, or Hezbollah, come into this war right away, in coordination with the Iranians, in a well-organized, structured way to put pressure on Israel and allow the Iranians to focus their attention on the Gulf states. You know, as well, the Iraqi militias have come into play here, striking American bases throughout Iraq, but also American bases across the region.

And the Iraqi militias were something that, you know, especially after those three American soldiers were killed in Jordan in the winter of 2024—yeah, you know, I think a lot of us thought that the government in Baghdad had been able to, you know, put them on a leash, essentially, had gotten them to keep quiet. And nope, I was wrong about that—certainly wrong about that. So, you know, I mean, the fact that the Axis of Resistance was not neutralized, that it's functioning as it was intended, and that only now it's being deployed as intended, as we've seen over the last few years—I think that's really remarkable. And that should give anyone who thinks this war is not in the favor of Iran a great deal of pause.

#Nima

Matt, Donald Trump is sending the USS Tripoli with 2,500 Marines on board, and they're talking about going—I don't know what this guy is thinking. When I was in Iran, everybody was asking me if Donald Trump would attack Iran. I said no, because he's not stupid; he's not going to attack Iran. And now I say I was so stupid to believe that Donald Trump wouldn't be attacked. It's this guy who just doesn't understand what he's talking about. And here's what CNN reported on that.

#Speaker 06

CNN reports that the unit is being sent. They're not revealing exactly where it will be deployed or what it will be used for. Earlier, President Trump dismissed a new warning from Iran about U.S. ground troops in the region. Here's what he said.

#Speaker 07

The Iranian regime told Sky News, "If you put boots on the ground in Iraq, it will be another Vietnam." Are you afraid of that?

#Speaker 08

No, I'm not afraid. I'm really not afraid of anything.

#Nima

Because he's not one of them. His son isn't one of them. And he doesn't care, in my opinion.

#Matthew

I mean, I think there's a—and this is not to be glib or hyperbolic or anything—but I think there's a very good case for the 25th Amendment to be invoked. Not that they ever would, because I've discussed his cabinet before, but for folks who don't know, the 25th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution establishes the criteria and process for removing a president from office if he's no longer fit to serve in that capacity. And I think this man's mental acuity, his cognitive ability, is just not there. This is what should have been done with Joe Biden as well, of course. But yeah, the idea of these 2,200 Marines, or whatever it is on the MEU—the Marine Expeditionary Unit—somehow forcing open the Strait of Hormuz is ridiculous.

They don't have that capability. They're not advertised as having that capability. You talk to anyone who knows anything about this, they'll say there's no way they could do something like that. You know, the MEU—of those 2,200 Marines, roughly 1,000 are fighters, if you will, right? Infantry and associated Marines, combat arms Marines. So they can do things like seize oil platforms, board tankers, launch raids—where they go in, hit something, and pull back out. They can be used as a floating base for commandos like Delta and the SEALs, like they were used in the Maduro kidnapping.

The Iwo Jima was used for that down in the Caribbean. I mean, a lot of what you see these MEUs used for are things like sending Marines in to reinforce embassies, right? Using the Marines to help evacuate embassies. And I think that's why I was astounded there wasn't a Marine Expeditionary Unit already in the region to do that, because there's a history of it. Just in 2019, the Marines reinforced the embassy in Baghdad because there were very serious and sincere concerns that the embassy was about to be overrun. I have a friend who was a diplomatic security officer at the time—like, that wasn't a joke, you know? I mean, let alone the history of the American embassy in Beirut.

You know, I mean, there are plenty of examples—the American Marine Corps experience in Lebanon, going back to the 1950s. But yeah, the idea that this force of 2,000 Marines is somehow going to be used to open the Strait of Hormuz, like some people seem to think, as if the Strait is

closed because the Iranians built a castle on an island and stretched a giant chain across the Gulf, right across the mouth of the Strait—like it's 1621 or something. The reality is we're not even certain if the Iranians have mined the Strait of Hormuz. We say we're uncertain because I don't think the Iranians have said they've done it.

We've not seen any evidence of it. And more importantly, ships are passing through. The Iranians are letting through the ships they want to let through. And this is where, again, it's all bonkers, because you have the Americans saying, "We're allowing the Iranian ships to come through," while others are asking, "Well, how come the Americans don't blockade the Gulf of Oman and stop Iranian ships from passing through?" It's because this is such a bad position for the United States. The Iranian strategy here—their use of economic warfare—is so confounding, so overwhelming, that the Americans can't stop the Iranian ships. Because if they do, that pulls about three million barrels of oil off the market.

And now the Chinese, where most of this oil is going, are really going to start pulling from the market. Brent was at 110 earlier today, I think, and WTI—the American benchmark—was at 100. Now you're going to see that go up to 120, maybe 125, if that happens. So just the fact that the Americans can't even do something like stop the Iranians from selling their oil, while the Iranians are blocking the Strait of Hormuz, shows how the Americans have put themselves in a position where, again, they don't have the initiative. Everything they do just creates more dilemmas and problems for themselves. But the idea that we know it's not mined is because these ships are coming through.

I very much doubt that the Iranians have opened up a special channel for these ships or that they're guiding them through that way. I don't think they would do that. I think they just have a mind to it—because they don't need to mine it. They can just, you know, do what we call control by fire. As long as they have the threat of drones and missiles to hit ships going through the Strait, or just in the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman, that's all they need. They just need that threat. And the shippers—and more importantly, their insurers—are not going to allow the ships to proceed. This is the same thing that happened in the Red Sea.

The Houthis didn't have to hit very many ships, did they, to get essentially half or two-thirds—depending on the timeline—of the ships to stop using the Red Sea. And the shippers and their insurers said, "You have to go around South Africa. Add on two weeks of travel time to this shipment." And yeah, I mean, the absurdity of it all. We look at this and just say, how do they think this is going well? How did they not foresee this? And there's no way for them to make it better. And now there's speculation about invading Iran, which is just absurd. We can't invade Iran proper. We don't have the force. We don't have the troops.

Again, as I said earlier, you'd need essentially the size of the force the Americans had during World War II. So what could you do? Could you send in the Marines? Could you have the 101st Air Assault or the 82nd Airborne jump onto certain islands—particularly ones that might be unprotected—plant a flag, shoot some videos, make it look like we're doing something? Sure. But then what happens?

Now you've got American soldiers who are essentially unprotected, facing the same Iranian ballistic missiles and drones we've been talking about for the last several weeks. What would that accomplish besides getting American casualties and having some videos of a flag fluttering on some Iranian beach on an island no one had ever heard of before?

I mean, so the choices here are either to create more problems, right? Like, let's stop the Iranians from sending their tankers out to China. Okay, that's going to create a bigger problem for us with the markets. Or this idea that we can land the Marines on some island—again, no one's ever heard of it before—but we can take some videos and it'll be on Instagram, you know, and what will we actually accomplish? Nothing. And we'll probably get some Marines killed. I mean, those are the choices they seem to have here. And it's really just amazing—absolutely amazing. We shouldn't be surprised at all, of course, but, you know, here we are.

#Nima

Before wrapping up, Matt, it seems that finally—though I don't know how serious it is—Europe is showing some sort of spine, finally saying to the United States, to Donald Trump, that they have different policies when it comes to the war in the Middle East. How long can they sustain this kind of position? Are they going to keep it, or are they going to sell out, as we've seen in other cases?

#Matthew

I think they're going to—well, with the exception of a few, like Spain and Pedro Sanchez there—I think they're trying to play both sides of it. You saw them send ships to the eastern Mediterranean, you hear them talking about defending their bases in the region. But when it comes to this idea of actually joining the war, they say no. So they're kind of joining the war, but they're not joining the war. I mean, they're saying it much more eloquently and articulately than Donald Trump did, you know, when he says the war is just beginning and it's also over. But there's definitely a vagueness there, I feel—a desire to maintain relations with the United States, to look past Donald Trump, and just hope for some kind of *deus ex machina* that's going to end this war.

Again, the best thing they could do—the Europeans, I mean—wouldn't be sending ships to the Persian Gulf to open the Strait of Hormuz, but to shoot down the American and Israeli warplanes. That would be the way—not the easiest way, but the way—to actually open the Strait of Hormuz. The fact that the Europeans, along with the Japanese, South Koreans, Australians, and others, are facing the very real possibility of a regional war—which would be ruinous and could easily escalate beyond the region—and the near certainty of a global recession, possibly even a depression, because of this.

And they would still rather risk all of that than put their ships into some kind of flotilla that's going to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. I think that tells you everything you need to know about just how screwed up, how unwinnable, and how, frankly, ridiculous this war is. So I think the European view

is: let's be vague, let's not ruin future relations, let's not make things uncomfortable in Brussels, at our Supreme Headquarters of Allied Forces—at NATO. But let's also make sure our public knows we're not getting involved in this. And in this case, too, I think it's not even like—certainly, I don't think anyone on your program is a fan of Starmer or Merz or Macron or any of them.

A lot of what they do, I think, is pure self-interest, or they're calculating a way to distract their public from the problems in their own countries. You know, the Ukraine war, of course, has a lot of those elements to it. But in this case, I really do think the reluctance of the Europeans to be involved has a lot to do with common sense, with their own intellect. They're saying, this is a bad thing. This is not going to end well. This is something we do not need to jump into—this quicksand.

I mean, we saw the British buckle and tell the Americans, "Yes, you can use our bases for defensive missions." And then you saw B-1s take off, you know, as if those were defensive missions or anything like that—going to bomb targets, going to shoot missiles at targets in Iran. I think the big thing, though, is that you're seeing some pushback. There was that big article yesterday in **The Guardian**, where Jonathan Powell, who was the British National Security Advisor and was at the negotiations between the Iranians and the Americans in Geneva, was there. He witnessed Witkoff, he witnessed Kushner—he saw how incompetent they are.

The Guardian had an article describing what he saw there—that the Iranians were acting in good faith, that a deal was possible, and that what had been put on the table before was more than fair. It wasn't a complete deal, but it was certainly heading in the right direction, essentially establishing the British position that the Americans are lying about this supposed lack of diplomatic opportunity. And then, of course, the kicker in that article is at the very end, where someone from the Gulf states says, "We all understand Kushner and Witkoff to essentially be agents of Israel who are leading Donald Trump into this war." And that, of course, ties into what Joe Kent said and what many other people have said.

#Nima

Thank you so much, Matt, for being with us today. A great pleasure, as always.

#Matthew

Thank you, Nima.

#Speaker 05

You.