

# Alastair Crooke: Iran Sets Conditions for Access to the Strait of Hormuz

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat and the Founder of "Conflicts Forum" based in Beirut. He was formerly an advisor on Middle East issues to Javier Solana, the EU Foreign Policy Chief. Crooke outlines Iran's retaliation strategy, which entails conditional access to the Strait of Hormuz. Follow the Substack of Alastair Crooke: <https://conflictsforum.substack.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: [https://x.com/Glenn\\_Diesen](https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen) Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: [buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng](http://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## #Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We're here today with Alastair Crooke, a former British diplomat and negotiator who worked for decades on various conflicts in the Middle East. Alastair Crooke is also the founder and director of Conflicts Forum, and I've left a link to his excellent Substack, Conflicts Forum, in the description. Thank you, as always, for coming back on the program.

## #Alastair Crooke

My pleasure to join you today.

## #Glenn

So, only over the past few days, we've seen some, I guess, dramatic developments. The U.S. and Israel attacked the South Pars field, which is the largest gas field in the world, the Bushehr nuclear plant, and also assassinated Iranian leaders. That's now triggering a massive retaliation from Iran. I was wondering, how do you read this situation? To what extent is this escalating out of control, or is it calculated? How are you assessing where this is heading?

## #Alastair Crooke

I think the wheels are coming off this whole thing. It's really spiraling out of control. And it escalated enormously with that attack on the Iranian end of the South Pars gas field, which is important to Iran. It underpins a lot of its electricity supply and other things. So that was a very big escalation.

Now, of course, Trump said on social media just the other day, "Oh no, this was—Gaza had nothing to do with it. They were innocent in all of this, and it's outrageous that, in response, Iran attacked the energy infrastructure of a number of Gulf states—five in all."

Not the tanks any longer, not the storage—which had been under attack before—or the ports, but this was the infrastructure. And they attacked, if you like, the infrastructure of Qatar, and that has set it back. It's caused huge damage. The liquefaction structures, the infrastructure, have been badly hit. Qatar is now declaring force majeure on its long-term gas contracts for five years, and they estimate it's going to take at least that long to rebuild. So what happened then—and the explanation I've heard from someone talking to people in Trump's circle, Mike Wolf—is that Kushner, Jared Kushner, called his father-in-law and said, "You know, the Qataris are hopping mad."

They're going crazy. They're really angry about what's happened. And, you know, this is bad news. Of course, Jared has huge investments there—much of his funding for his investment funds comes from Qatar. So he said, you know, this is bad, they're really angry, and they're very upset about it. And Trump said, well, look, I'll take care of it, I'll take care of it. And so he produced some response, this crucial statement saying, oh no, you know, I didn't even know about it, and the Qataris didn't know about it.

It was purely Israel. So he put it off onto the Israelis. The Israelis are pretty clear—I mean, you can read it. We've been looking at the Hebrew press this morning, and they're very clear. They say, listen, on these things, we're joined at the hip with the White House. Of course they agreed, of course they approved it. And why? Because Trump thought that would put pressure on Iran to abandon the selective closure of Homs. He thought that this sudden sort of attack on the gas of Iran—the Iranian side of the South Pars field—would make the Iranians say, oh my goodness, we'd better stop and open Homs. I mean, delusional stuff, really. That's why I say the wheels are coming off this thing, because you're getting into complete delusion. And then, you know, I watched a clip.

I don't know exactly the date, but, you know, Trump was sitting there with Susie Wiles, who turned out to be one of the main advisers besides Jared and Steve Whitcock on Middle East issues. She, of course, is closely connected to Israel. I think she was a campaigner for Netanyahu at one stage. Anyway, he's sitting there with her and saying, you know, I don't understand. These missiles—the attack was intended for Iran. No one expected that they would, you know, strike back, that they would react and hit Gulf states. I mean, who could have guessed that? You know, we are in La La Land. It's getting completely out of control, and the wheels are coming off because this is becoming quite desperate in terms of American politics and in terms of the economy. I mean, especially for Europe. He doesn't care too much about that.

But even in America—what they call gas prices, petrol prices to Europeans—the gas prices are going up, and people are noticing it and are not happy about that. So it's really, you know, getting out of control. It's serious. This attack by Israel on the Iranian gas facilities, and Israel's reaction to it, is taking energy off the market for many years—perhaps up to five years. The engineers say you need

special steel to replace it, and it's not going to be very quick. So, you know, of course now panic is setting in, and markets are still just about surviving, because they survive simply every time Trump tells them.

I mean, it's—I don't know how they run these things—but every time Trump says, "Oh, it's going to be a short war, short war, soon be over," then the markets go back up again. I mean, it's infantile, really. You know, they don't seem to do any sort of due diligence on these things. They just go up and down according to, you know, "Oh, he says it'll be short, it'll be short now," and then we'll open almost, and it will be short, and then prices will sink. Oil prices will go straight down. I mean, you know, again, as I say, this thing is not just out of control, but out of rationality and, you know, a sense of what is possible for the United States to do and what is not.

I mean, now we know they're talking about sending 2,500 Marines aboard amphibious ships to Karg Island, or to, you know, militarily open Hormuz. And now, I believe—I'm not sure, I haven't confirmed it—there's so much misreporting at the moment and so much propaganda going around that you can't tell. But he said, no, he may have to send thousands to open Hormuz. I mean, we may get into that in a while, if you want, but that is delusional too—absolutely delusional.

And Israel is putting out absolute propaganda. You know, Netanyahu's virtual news briefing—the line coming out from Israel is that Iran is collapsing, their command system and leadership are in chaos, they don't know who's in charge any longer. It's complete chaos; they're breaking down. And, you know, "We have destroyed, we have destroyed utterly their nuclear capability," Netanyahu said, "and we've destroyed their capability of assembling and constructing new missiles." Hoping, I suppose, that people don't remember he said exactly the same thing after the June war—that they had destroyed both the ballistic missile capacity and the nuclear prospect.

But it's quite clear that the interest of Israel—at least the faction around Netanyahu, because others in Israel are saying different things—is that unless it can be presented as a great success, mainly for Trump's interest, as a great success where everything is going smoothly, then there's going to be a crisis in the United States for Israel and for Trump. So they have to keep the propaganda flowing full-steam, to say, "No, everything is going perfectly, there are no problems at all, this is a great success." And of course, it's Trump's success, and he needs that, because there are big divisions opening up within the Republicans and indeed within the Democrats.

And it's turning into something that could be an increasing danger to Trump, to the Republicans, and indeed to the political fabric of the United States, because people are getting more and more critical—asking, you know, who actually took us into this war? What were their interests? What is this sort of barely visible command structure above the political level that takes us in? We don't know who leads it or what their interests are, but nonetheless there's this feeling in one section of the Republicans—the MAGA side—that there is this invisible, if you like, superstructure, a kind of

control structure that stands above what they can see, what they can touch, and what they can understand. And they're saying, "We need to really understand what's going on." And, of course, the resignation by the head of the counter-terrorism department has made that worse.

## **#Glenn**

Well, you follow the Israeli media—especially the Hebrew-language media—quite carefully. How do the Israelis assess this development of the war? I mean, how is victory defined, or maybe redefined? And, overall, how do they assess Israel's ability to, well, you said they exaggerate a lot about the pain they're inflicting on the Iranians, in terms of everything falling apart, but also their own ability to absorb pain?

## **#Alastair Crooke**

It's quite difficult to give a direct answer, because much of it is based on sentiment. You know, the support for the war in Israel is at 93%, according to the Post—there's huge support for it. But much of that is based on, well, you can call it hopium or delusion, whatever you want. There's this expectation, fueled not only by Netanyahu but also by Trump's statements about obliteration: "We've obliterated their navy, we've obliterated their missiles, we've obliterated everything, and we bomb and we bomb." So there's a lot of expectation that Iran's state is about to collapse and fall. And this is seen as a miracle—a miracle often framed in religious terms by Netanyahu and others—that this is almost a kind of divine providence coming, led by Trump, that's going to bring about a pro-Western, completely de-radicalized, disarmed Iran after the war.

And so there's a lot of that, and people cling to it—a great deal. I have to say, they're not immune to the propaganda that's been coming out about this from America and being echoed across the West. European newspapers are full of the same sort of thing, suggesting that Iran is about to collapse and will fall into Israel's lap at any moment, completely de-radicalized, in the sense that its whole psyche has been seared by defeat—so much so that it will emerge from this war like Germany or Japan did after the Second World War, their psyche seared by the experience.

So there's that side of it, and there's still that— I mean, euphoria in parts of the Hebrew press. There are also people, including senior military officers and others, who say very clearly, "Well, look, you know, you should just declare victory and get out." And, you know, the sooner he does that, the better. They're very careful not to say too much about the damage inflicted in Israel, because the propaganda inside Israel is very strong too. The censorship is huge. There's even a heavy prison sentence for photographing incoming Iranian missiles.

## **#Glenn**

There's a five-year prison sentence for photographing the aftermath.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Yes, I know you've probably seen videos of the remains of bombs and so on. But as the Israeli news magazine \*972\* has reported, these videos we see are being run by the authorities in Israel, by their public relations departments—deliberately—to show almost banal images: a slightly damaged car, debris in the street, accompanied by messages like “only light injuries have been reported.” And mostly, almost all the people shown are Indian or Sri Lankan workers who've been injured by these missiles. So they're deliberately sharing just a little glimpse of the debris. And in one case, they were even attacked by a local who said, “No, no, why are you filming this?”

## **#Glenn**

This is nothing.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Film what really happened here. And, you know, the camera crew just ignored them and kept going. So I'm just trying to paint a picture: for Israelis, do they know how damaging the Iranian missile attacks are? Do they have a sense of the balance in this war? I don't think they really have a proper sense of it, for those reasons—because of the endless good-news propaganda and also because nothing is allowed to be shown. However, last night it was reported, after the Iranian barrage, that seven million people were in shelters for the whole night. Well, my understanding is that equates almost exactly to the population of Israel—about seven and a half million, I think.

But, so, I mean, there must be a greater sense that something's wrong. But I guess a lot of people just cross their fingers and hope that, you know, this is all going to turn out to be a divine victory for Israel. So that's on the Israeli side. On the Iranian side, it's much easier to see, because we've seen the photographs of people after Iftar. I mean, quite clearly, Iran is now more together, more engaged than at any time since the revolution in '79. They're fully behind the state and fully supporting it. And they're resilient and tough. I mean, you know, when a missile lands nearby, they just stand there.

They don't run. You know, they don't run for the shelters. They just stay out in the squares at night when this happens. I mean, of course, occasionally people do. And of course, a lot of the strikes have hit—I think Iran says they've had about 20 hospitals attacked. That's from Iranian sources. They say the head of the medical service said, frankly, hospitals have been attacked, schools have been attacked, residential blocks have been attacked. Of course, people have to run when that sort of attack is taking place. But by and large, the resilience is strong.

## **#Glenn**

Well, I thought in this war, if the purpose is to exhaust each other—that is, to measure by the ability to cause pain and absorb pain—it makes sense, in the propaganda, to exaggerate the pain caused to the adversary and minimize the pain on one's own side. I guess Iran is different in this regard because it was attacked, so if it shows the destruction to itself, it also becomes evidence of what the aggressor has done, and it helps to unify the country. Because this is not the cost of military opportunism, as it would be seen by the population of Israel. But how do you make sense of the wider Iranian retaliation strategy? Because, as you said before, Trump claimed that no one could have foreseen that they would hit U.S. military bases across the Middle East—which is an incredible statement. But it's interesting that they apparently weren't well prepared for the fact that there would be attacks on these bases, attacks on Iran, on the energy facilities in the region, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Is this essentially an economic strategy, or how are you assessing the objective here of the Iranians?

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Well, there's a fundamental objective that people often overlook, because it's becoming pretty clear that the West was not prepared for a conflict. They were prepared for a very short, three-day bombing exercise. Their logistics were set up for a short bombing process, and those logistics are now expiring—running out very clearly. Interceptors are not—well, I mean, clearly Israel has almost zero intercept capacity, especially for the new missiles that Iran is using, the latest one being the Fattah-2 hypersonic missile. Also, Gulf logistics haven't been tested, so there was no proper preparation; it wasn't thought through in the planning for this. But on the other hand, Iran has been planning for 20 years against the possibility that, at one time or another, they would have to fight a war with the United States. Because after 50 years of hostility toward Iran, it seemed there was no way out—otherwise you'd get into the same cycle, which, as Glenn Diesen has said, keeps repeating.

You know, you have a war, then you have a truce, then the war comes back three years later—another truce. You've heard all this from Russia too, about the danger of ceasefires and what they mean. So they're very clear that it's a long game. What this means is that they have a plan, if you like—a sort of paradigm—of how they'll increase the pressure on Israel. They'll judge that against the depletion of the capacities of the West and of Israel, and aim to reach a peak just after they think those capacities are waning, so they can have the maximum effect on Israel. So for Iran, really, it's only just getting started. I mean, they knew it would be two to three weeks, and they calculated—well, I'm not privy to their actual calculations—but I do know they were thinking it would be about two weeks or so, and then the depletion would become evident, and that's when they could use the main force they'd been holding back.

So it's both a very phased and planned structure they have for a long war, one that would reach its peak at the point where they see the maximum military advantage. They've been holding missiles

back—husbanding, if you like, the more sophisticated ones—metering their use for a long war and for the moment they want to reach that peak. And that, I think, is a psychological issue as much as a military one. When will it be most effective in collapsing the psyche of Israelis?

When is the moment when it's going to cause a rethink and undermine the confidence of the Arabs in parts of the West? If you go too soon, you don't affect it. So it's psychological as well as a military calculus, I believe, that's underpinning it. It's a prepared force—carefully prepared, well thought out—engaging in asymmetrical warfare against an ill-thought-out, ill-prepared, poorly supplied alternative coming from the United States and from Israel. They haven't got the missiles. They haven't got the interceptors they need for anything other than a short war. They bet on a short war.

They're clearly already wrong on that calculus. They're wrong on the second calculus—that the state was about to crumble because they were assassinating people. I mean, for all the hype about Israeli intelligence and how wonderful they are, they've made a really serious strategic intelligence misjudgment. They still consider—some of them, not all, I emphasize—this idea that after Larry Janney was killed, that was it, the state would collapse. They were convinced of that. And now they're saying, well, it didn't happen. There's no sign of collapse. The command still carries on.

So a lot of Israelis are looking at it with clear eyes, but they haven't come to a conclusion about what that means. I mean, you know, that leaves them confused and unsure—so what's next? Where do we go from here? And I don't think they have an answer to that. So that's one element of it, if you like, in terms of how Iran is thinking about this war. And the other part of the war, apart from the kinetic side—and this is really important, it's so significant—is that Lloyd's of London have come out. I said it yesterday or the day before, but Lloyd's have now confirmed it. They're the main insurance agents for shipping—worldwide, famous Lloyd's of London ship insurance. All ships have to have these policies that they use.

And they're saying that the IRGC has now completed a system for allowing the passage of approved vessels. This is very important because it's through a special channel which runs—if you look at the map, you'll see the island of Qeshm, which is quite close to the Musandam Peninsula. Between Qeshm and a small Iranian island called Larak is the new channel—not the main channel, the one used for big ships, if you like. It's a slightly smaller channel, very close to Qeshm, so there can be a visual inspection of the vessels passing through and checking that they have the license or permission to go past. Whereas the main channel—I don't know if they're going to mine it or just simply attack any attempt at an escort, or American naval vessels going in there.

I don't think it's really understood that over that entire main channel—the one the Americans would have to use because their naval vessels have a deeper draft—they've now created this smaller channel. And what's so interesting about it is that I think they've given nine vessels to the mission. They include ships from India, Pakistan, and Malaysia—I can't remember the full list of those four vessels. What they're required to do is show that their cargoes are bought with yuan and not with dollars.

And this is going to—I mean, you know—it’s resetting the whole global energy paradigm. You won’t get passage for any cargo traded in U.S. dollars. This will be the case for the Gulf States, which will be a shock, and it will also be the case for Europe. I think—I can’t confirm it—but I believe some European states are toying with opening negotiations with certain countries. So it’s going to become much more regulated. Lloyd’s of London say the IRGC is about to make it a formal, regulated system of passage through this special, limited channel.

And they will check at Qeshm that they have the papers, that it was bought in yuan, and that this will be negotiated and regulated. It will become, if you like, the way in which the energy supply can be served—but only by those states that have not taken or provided military support for the attack on Iran, and which are leaving the U.S. dollar structure and buying only in yuan. And I think ultimately everyone is going to have to choose. It puts people on the spot. It may be awkward, but the Gulf States will have to choose, because it’s not just oil and gas that go down the Hormuz. The UAE imports nearly all its food through the Hormuz, and I believe they have about ten days of food reserves at the moment.

And then there are other things—fertilizers, chemicals, and other goods—that pass through the Hormuz. So they have a chokehold. The IRGC has a chokehold on this, and they can regulate the amount of energy passing through—possibly just enough to avoid a major economic collapse, but not enough to prevent a certain amount of pain, or to, if you like, minimize their impact. They hold their grip over this—the chokehold over energy—and this, if you like, is their leverage over Western states. Very interesting. And, of course, Chinese vessels are passing through, which they probably have been from the start. In fact, you know, I think some in America keep saying, well, you know, they’re going to try and stop it with China.

## **#Glenn**

But the Chinese vessels are passing through.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

And whereas China does take about 40% of the oil energy that passes through Hormuz, it’s not crucial to China because that’s only about 5% of their total energy imports. They’ve got many other sources of energy. So yes, it’s significant, but it’s not existential for China, even if it were shut down—which it won’t be. And so, you know, we’ve heard a lot about “freedom of navigation of the seas,” which America seems to take as its prerogative. Well, actually, they’re losing that, because a new freedom of navigation in the area of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is coming into effect. So this is a complete inversion of the geopolitical power.

I’d just add, you know, what it does is it affects this basic strategy that we saw in the National Security Strategy, the NSS, that was drawn up by—oh, I always get his name wrong—Colby, not Everard. Anyway, the assistant secretary who wrote a book about it earlier. His book was essentially

saying we cannot allow China to, if you like, consume as little as they are. They have to consume more, because we have to stop them exporting so much. So we have to restrict their exports and coerce them into becoming more of a consumption-based, internally focused nation. And that way, the export market becomes more open for America to compete in this area.

And we can do that in one of two ways, the NSS suggests: either through tariffs and sanctions, or alternatively by blockades and pressure on the sea passages—the naval corridors, the choke points that affect China, Russia, and Iran. We clearly see this in Venezuela with the naval blockade, in Cuba with the naval blockade, and with the seizure of vessels, including Russia’s so-called fleet of tankers. So both Russia and China see this American strategy as an attempt to squeeze them—in China’s case, their energy supply; in Russia’s case, their energy exports—either by blockades, by tightening the screws on the choke points, or by seizing and preparing all their vessels to be sanctioned. Well, the...

## **#Glenn**

It’s a good point you make—that the great maritime powers have always drawn a lot of strength from controlling key sea corridors: first the British, and later the United States. And this is indeed, if you look at Alfred Mahan, the strategy for the U.S. to become a great power. Much of this took shape after the Spanish-American War of 1898. After that, the U.S. controlled many of these key routes. Hawaii gave them control over the Pacific; the Panama Canal connected the oceans. Again, under Trump, the U.S. reasserted control over the Panama Canal. And you can see how Greenland would be valuable for both the Atlantic and the Arctic, where the Russians are establishing a corridor.

As you mentioned, the blockades on Venezuela and Cuba—we’re really back to this issue of freedom of navigation. It’s something large powers can strip away as well. And again, this campaign against Russian ships is something they now have an enhanced ability to do, especially with NATO expanding in the Baltic Sea. Against the Chinese, the Americans always have the Strait of Malacca, so there’s always this key point they can go after. But this is why it’s so unique—and I’m glad you mentioned the Strait of Hormuz—because with cooperation from Yemen, they can also start to tighten up that other strait accessing the Red Sea. So there are a lot of things in the plan.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

That is certainly in the opinion plan, to be absolutely assured. But as I said, all of this is, you know, carefully meted out and planned. The Hezbollah have been activated. The Hashad in Iraq have been activated. And at the right time—and I don’t know when that is, of course—the Houthis are all primed and ready to shut down the pipeline that Saudi Arabia has connecting to the Red Sea, the loading port where they can ship petroleum from Saudi Arabia. It’s only about five million barrels a day, I think, but they’ll shut that down at the right moment. It’s all about getting the balance of these things just right. But I was going to say, when did all this start? In a way, it’s quite interesting.

I think in the late 19th century it was crucial, because Churchill made this dramatic decision that he was going to stop having the Royal Navy of Britain fueled by coal and change it to oil-fired engines. So the whole navy was converted away from coal to oil. And, of course, most of that oil had to come from Iran. A lot of that thinking has stayed in the process—they have to keep it going. You know, oil, even from that distant period—Iranian oil—and the idea of allowing the Iranians to nationalize their oil and keep it out of Western naval hands has been an issue. Even though nowadays we have nuclear ships and everything like that, these old ideas still linger on.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, well, I saw some U.S. Marines leaving America's west coast, and I assumed they might be heading for Yemen to possibly prevent the shutting down of the Red Sea. Again, I don't know what the Americans are thinking or what they're going for. But the Iranians did say, or at least indicated, that things with the Strait of Hormuz can't go back to the way they were. I saw that you mentioned this—creating selective access to the Strait of Hormuz and safe shipping corridors—on your Substack as well. And I was wondering if it's possible this could also be used as a form of extracting reparations, in terms of taxing those that go through. Because I've heard this comment too, that the Gulf states at some point will have to pay compensation for the destruction they allowed the U.S. to inflict on Iran.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

I understand. I can't be absolutely sure, but I heard that the fee for Pakistan's passage through this channel was about \$2 million. So yes, the IRGC are building some sort of structure there. All right, but the Marines—what are they going to achieve? I mean, again, I just can't see that this idea of boots on the ground makes any sense. It just seems absurd. As you pass around the Musandam Peninsula, in Hormuz, that very narrow strait there, the Iranians have about 270-degree fire control from the land side over that point.

Behind, on the Iranian side, all along the Hormuz, there's a mountain range. So at the moment, they control, if you like, Hormuz. It's under fire control from artillery—not on the coast, but way back, even from the mountains. I mean, 80 kilometers for artillery is fine. The strait at that point, when you go through it, is only about five kilometers wide as it passes between Larak and Qeshm. So they can control it simply with artillery fire. But they also have other means—things we haven't seen yet—like submerged and submersible drones, which you could think of as high-speed torpedoes that are directable, steerable. You can target them.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

They travel underwater and then strike a vessel.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Then they have surface drones loaded with explosives that can be directed, and they're kept in underwater tunnels. They can emerge from tunnels mined into the seabed, come out very fast, and attack a vessel. Then they have manned drones—or at least manned speedboats. I think they're supposed to have at least 300 of those and about 600 of the unmanned ones, all equipped with anti-ship missiles. And then you have many small submarines, which can maneuver into the Hormuz because they're small and don't need great depth. They can fire anti-ship missiles while submerged.

So, you know, when we hear, "Oh, the Iranian Navy has been disabled, it's on the floor of the ocean, we've just obliterated it"—they haven't obliterated one jot of the Iranians' ability to control this passage. In fact, it's being fast-tracked. So where are these amphibious ships going to go, with these Marines, to take back control of Hormuz? I mean, we hear talk of Qeshm Island. Qeshm Island is at the other end of Hormuz; it's not by the straits at all. I've been to Qeshm Island, and that's under the control of artillery and ballistic missiles. And this whole coastline of Hormozgan, which is Iranian, is about 2,000 kilometers long.

I mean, so what do you get? You put 2,400 Marines into this—that's one Marine for every kilometer of coastline. And then what do you do? Who's going to keep supplying them? How are they going to be reinforced? How are they going to be supported? All a mystery. No one says, no one spells it out. I suspect because they can't. And that's why I wonder if it will really happen. Because I can't think of a better recipe for disaster than to try to land a lot of Americans who are completely unfamiliar with the Middle East in a country that's mountainous, has forests, has tunnels, and has an army of a million men.

## **#Glenn**

You know, it doesn't make any sense, really. I keep wondering if some of this talk about opening the Strait of Hormuz, as you suggested before—efforts by Trump merely to talk down the oil prices, even temporarily, just to try to mitigate some of the worst of the situation. I think you're probably very right.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

But, you know, you can fool me once, fool me twice. I mean, how many times can they fool—will they be able to fool the markets—by saying, "Oh no, no, we're going to close Hormuz"? You know, there's a certain shelf life to this tactic, actually.

## **#Glenn**

That's the last brief question. What do you think are the wider risks to Israel here? Because you said that a lot of the damage inflicted on Israel is underreported, since they seem to have bet more or less everything on this. And even the U.S. partnership with Israel is now being challenged by many key voices in the United States—especially some factions of the America First crowd, at least in

terms of what that was supposed to mean—who are now very worried about this. Do you see this possibly becoming an existential threat for Israel? Because that seems like something even Iran should be very worried about, given that this is a nuclear-armed country that tends to link its security to the concept of regional dominance.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Oh, yes. I think that's exactly what we're going to see. As I said, what we've seen from Iran has been a carefully unfolding plan, thought through over many years. We're still at the early stages of it. And only in the last two years or so have we seen the hypersonic glide missile that's steerable, with an extra rocket motor attached so that when it reenters the atmosphere after going into orbit—what they call the ATMAC-18—they can steer it around air defense missiles and land with great accuracy. Some of these missiles are starting to carry warheads of up to two tons. According to Israel, there have still been only two real casualties, with just arm or leg injuries—nothing major to be concerned about.

But I mean, I think this is going to—yes. The question is, when does the psychology change? When does the psyche suddenly think, “Oh my God, this is a crisis, this is a catastrophe, the wheels have come off—what's next?” And it's interesting, because you mentioned America. It's exactly the same in the sense that America is actually arriving there, perhaps before Israelis are arriving at the same point, because it's becoming a crisis in America between those who are America-firsters and those who are Israel-firsters—the hardline neocons, the Rubios and all those voices on the neocon front, the Lindsey Grahams and others.

So it's becoming a real division. With the closeness between the United States and Israel—I mean, you know, in many, many ways, more than just closeness, it's a kind of integration. I think that's going to feed back into Israel, too. The fracture that's taking place in America over this war, I think, is feeding back into Israel. At the moment, Israel is just holding on. As I said to you earlier, it's quite clear from what we've read, even today in the Hebrew press, they're saying very clearly that it's so important to keep alive the sense that victory is imminent—victory is in our hands, it's going to happen.

The war is progressing perfectly—in order to, if you like, keep Trump engaged in it and to keep America involved, to get American boots on the ground. That's the objective: to get American boots on the ground. However, my own view—this is a personal view—I'm not in America, I'm in Europe, but my personal view is that if there is an absolute red line for the MAGA people, it will be boots on the ground in the Middle East. I just think it would be politically catastrophic. Yet, I have to say, it's quite possible. I mean, everything Trump says suggests that he is contemplating this.

I think it is, you know, in terms of strategy—military strategy—but he does, I think it's possible that will happen. I think it will be catastrophic, and therefore it will be catastrophic for Israel too. And in Israel, I mean, both Trump and Netanyahu have elections coming up. They have to be winners.

They need to be sure that they are strong, that they've taken these steps. You know, Trump said the other day—he gave a statement saying, "We've had this problem for 47 years, and I'm the only president..." A former president came to me and said, "I envy what you've done, because you're the only one who could do it."

I mean, it's a lie because all the past presidents have denied ever saying that to Trump. Three or four presidents said, "No, no, we never said that to him." But, you know, it's part of Trump's persona—"Only I had the nerve, only I had the courage to do this, something that's been begging to be done. These people are evil, they're horrible, we have to get rid of them altogether, we're going to obliterate them." I mean, you know, this could all come apart. This is much more serious than the other predictions he's gotten himself into. For America, for the Republicans, for the West, for Europe—it's going to happen.

## **#Glenn**

Well, Trump also said that the Iranians told Witkoff they would continue to develop nuclear weapons no matter what, which sounds kind of weird. And again, the lies are getting ridiculous. But I very much agree with this assessment of Trump, though, because his whole premise behind "Make America Great Again" is that America is in relative decline, it's weakening, and he kind of blames that on what he sees as simply weak leaders.

So the return of America's greatness does require strength, and he more or less embodies that strength, which is why he's seen as indispensable for the revival of America. This narrative that "we're winning, everything's going well"—we've listened to that for four years now in Ukraine, and it was obvious nonsense from day one. It just shows they can spin it nonetheless, because reality doesn't always stand a chance against narratives. But there's something weak about the narrative control in this case. At least in Ukraine, they controlled the narrative to a great extent. Now it's a bit all over the place, I feel.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

And you can understand that with his mindset. He can't understand—I mean, you know, he says, "Here I am, I've done what everyone said. These awful people—I'm obliterating them, I'm bombing them. I'm bombing their military, I'm bombing their nuclear arms, bombing their missile capacities. What's there not to like about it? Why are people questioning it or querying it?" Well, Mr. President, it might be because you've actually made a big mistake and a mess of it. You've gone into a war without any preparation, unprepared, without the logistics to last longer than a very short time, based on your presumption—and on faulty intelligence, probably from the Israelis—that Iran was a house of cards ready to collapse at the first little shot. And you will face the consequences.

## **#Glenn**

Well, Iraq was, 23 years ago, supposed to be finished off in a few weeks. They dealt a lot of death and destruction. And now, of course, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad is under fire. Iraq overall is leaning much more toward Iran than it would have if they'd left Saddam in power. So killing a lot of people doesn't necessarily translate into victory. I guess how one assesses victory is quite important. Yeah, everything is oversimplified, I think. Anyway, as always, thank you very much for being so generous with your time.

## **#Alastair Crooke**

Well, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to speak on your program. Anyway, thanks.