

Alexander Mercouris: Iran War Transforms Ukraine War

Alexander Mercouris discusses the misconceptions and miscalculations that led to the failures in the war against Iran, and how this is also transforming the Ukraine War. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: 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. We are joined today by Alexander Mercouris, the host of the very popular Duran podcast. He also has his own separate podcast under his name, Alexander Mercouris. Both of these channels are where most of us go to get our daily updates and analysis. So thank you very much for taking the time.

#Alexander Mercouris

And thank you very much for having me on your wonderful channel today.

#Glenn

Over the last few days, what started as a regime-change war seems to have turned into an energy war, with both sides trying to exhaust each other. In just the past few days, we've seen some very extreme attacks — from the South Pars field to the Bushehr nuclear power plant. How are you assessing this — the attacks on Iran, but also Iran's retaliation?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think the explanation is one of extreme frustration and bewilderment in Washington and in Israel. I think when they started this military campaign three weeks ago, the Americans and the Israelis assumed it would be over very quickly — that the government in Iran was weak and fragile and would fall very fast, that as soon as the leadership was eliminated, a power vacuum would arise. They did not anticipate a long war, and they did not anticipate that Iran would be able to continue to resist in the way that it has. So, in this kind of situation, people find it very difficult to retreat, because they've primed themselves for victory, and the political consequences of not achieving that victory would make the whole effort tantamount to defeat — victory meaning regime change.

They're striking out, and they're doing it in a way that, to me, was initially intended to put enormous pressure on Iran and some of Iran's friends — notably Russia — to come to the table and start making the kind of big concessions the Americans and the Israelis needed in order to justify what has happened. That's why you had the attack on South Pars, which was a massive escalation. And that's also why you had the attack on Bushehr. Now, Bushehr — hardly anybody's talking about it. Thank you for asking me about it. I think it's enormously important and consequential. This is, of course, a largely Russian-built reactor. There are Russian technicians in the area. As far as I know, nobody was injured or hurt. But it seems to me that the attack on Bushehr was also a message to the Russians: reduce your support for Iran, get them to talk to us.

Again, the same miscalculation we saw at the start of the war was repeated with this attack. Instead of the Iranians rushing to negotiate or agree to a ceasefire or whatever, they said, "If you hit us in that way, we have every potential to do the same in return." And of course, they did carry out their attacks. This came as a massive and unexpected shock. We saw the extraordinary events that unfolded over the last couple of hours, over the last couple of days, following these attacks on the energy systems. A war of attrition on energy is a war that the United States and the Western powers cannot win. They rely—depend—on energy. Their adversaries, Iran, Russia, and ultimately, if Russia is in the game, China too, are far better positioned to withstand it.

#Glenn

Well, we heard all these comments from the United States saying that they—well, Trump said that no one could ever have predicted they would strike the bases of all these Gulf states. And he had seemingly—well, apparently, according to the Wall Street Journal—also dismissed the idea that the Iranians would close the Strait of Hormuz. I mean, if you recognize that Iran sees this as an existential threat, all of these responses should have been understood as the first thing it would do.

I mean, many people did predict this — you being one of them — so how could they get it so wrong? Because it feels like this has become a common trend. If you look, for example, at the Ukraine war, one of the reasons the Europeans joined in on the proxy war against Russia was that they thought Russia would run out of missiles within a few days. We heard this already by March. They thought the Russian economy could be turned to rubble by the end of the week, that the whole world community would turn their backs on them. But it's the same with Iran — their ability to strike back, the extent of their drones and missiles. I mean, even though they fought a war against them only back in June, here we are again. Yeah. Is this just about selling the war too hard, or is it hegemonic hubris? How do you explain this?

#Alexander Mercouris

Because this is dangerous. Well, it's incredibly dangerous. I think hegemonic hubris plays a big part in this. There continues to be, in the United States and to some extent in Europe, an entrenched

belief—an embedded belief—that the United States, the West, possesses almost unlimited power, that the mere act of applying that power is enough to achieve the desired outcome, and that everything, in the end, comes down to a question of will. If you read the kinds of publications produced by many of the people who make these decisions, you can see that willpower is a major factor in everything they think about and do.

They focus too much on will—specifically their own will—and not as much as they should on capabilities: their own capabilities, and even more so the capabilities of their adversaries. How this has come about is a big question, because it wasn't always like this. There was a time during the Cold War when I remember—and I'm sure you remember too—we used to read very detailed analyses in the West about the state of the Russian oil industry, the state of the Russian machine-building industry, and things of that kind. Today we see far less of that. It's mostly caricature: Russia is a kleptocracy, Russia is run by oligarchs, there's this huge issue of corruption, that Russia is a petrostate.

The idea that the country has an industrial base is simply never taken seriously. And with Iran, I think that's been taken a whole step further—the assumption that the regime there is brittle, that it's unpopular, that it's a house of cards, that all you need to do is blow on it and it will fall. And that, of course, they wouldn't dare close the Strait of Hormuz because if they did, they'd be undermining their own economic position—which, of course, contradicts everything else. But, I mean, people... I actually saw people who thought that, and that the Chinese would never let them do it, as if China actually makes the decisions in Tehran. This has never started. But these talking points were out there, endlessly repeated and assumed to be true.

#Glenn

I don't know, it's like this—I often make the point that during the Cold War we were allowed to discuss, for example, the security concerns of our opponents, which is a necessity if you want to reduce security competition and actually create indivisible security and peace. But I think it goes even deeper than that. It's about the ability to even discuss what's happening with our opponents. Because I often point out that, for example, in Russia, their economy has become quite diversified. They're not that dependent on energy. They've made great advancements in developing their own digital ecosystem, and they're advancing toward technological sovereignty.

But if you make these points, it's not as if you're just describing what's happening in Russia and comparing strengths and weaknesses. It's considered pro-Russian because you're talking about their strengths, which means it's labeled a Kremlin talking point. So we've essentially banned ourselves from talking about their strengths. And I noticed the same thing with Iran, because Iran has stable institutions. It's not just some crazy religious fanatics ruling through sheer violence. And, you know, when I was in Tehran, I noticed that a lot of the repression of women is exaggerated. In higher education, there are many women, and on the streets you see women who aren't forced to cover themselves—girls in T-shirts and jeans without covering their hair.

I mean, if you mention it, you're kind of talking pro-regime now, because it seems like you're defending them. There's no appetite anymore for anything positive, or anything that could be considered "pro." But if you can't—as you say—if everything has to be doom and gloom about your opponent, that they're just a gas station masquerading as a country, or crazy mullahs wanting to destroy the world—how can you improve your own security if you can't have an honest assessment of the other side? It's quite extraordinary. But I did want to ask you about this: people say we might be walking into a world war, because these wars are quite connected. The Iran war is quite connected to the war now with Russia.

#Alexander Mercouris

So how do you see the wider Iran war impacting our proxy war with the Russians? – Well, I think one undermines the other. If you look at the economics of this, we've already seen that the United States has had to relax its sanctions on Russian oil. The reality is that we're now in an energy crisis. Already in Asia, Indonesia—formerly an oil producer and exporter—has had to approach Russia for help. South Korea is apparently doing the same. If this drags on, more and more countries in Asia will be obliged to do that. And it's not just oil. This is where the whole idea of talking about Russia as a corrupt, kleptocratic petro-state comes in. And by the way, I completely agree with your point that we've disastrously restricted the terms of debate—that having intelligent discussions about the other side has somehow become morally and politically unacceptable.

But the Russians don't just produce oil—they produce naphtha, fertilizer, and helium. The Persian Gulf is a major source of the helium used in Taiwan to make advanced microprocessors, the chips we hear so much about. There aren't many alternative sources of helium gas, so the Taiwanese, if they're going to maintain production, have to go ultimately to where the helium is made and to the people prepared to sell it. They may have to go to the Russians. So ultimately, the whole sanctions apparatus we've created and tried to enforce—with very patchy success over the last four years—is going to start breaking down the longer this crisis continues.

It's not just a case of lifting the sanctions for 30 days and then putting them back on again. I mean, even to talk that way is absurd. If you're going to have to lift the sanctions, even for a short time, you're fatally undermining them. And of course, the connecting thread between these two conflicts is exactly what you've been talking about—that they both ultimately derive from this hegemonic surge, this hegemonic impulse, which launched us into a conflict first with Russia and then with Iran, without thinking through the consequences.

#Glenn

The foolishness was quite unnecessary if one had taken into consideration Russia's security concerns. Their security demands were not outrageous: "We don't want NATO military infrastructure on our borders. We don't want secret CIA bases along our borders." A lot of these things could have

been met. Kissinger made this point back in 2014. He said, why are we all talking about the need to defeat Russia? First, we should determine whether or not it's a great power. And if it is—which he thought it was—then our first step should be to discuss with Russia where our security concerns or interests can be aligned, and where they are not aligned, how we manage the competition. Instead, there's this assumption that, okay, well, now we're clashing with them.

Now we have to defeat them. It's very primitive. And it's the same with the Iranians. Trump was making the point that if we hadn't attacked, Iran had a plan to take over the whole Middle East. I mean, where does that come from? It's just really wild. You couldn't get any serious expert on the Middle East to sign on to such a crazy statement. But if we didn't make these statements, we'd be allowed to talk about Iranian security concerns. We might have noticed that their interests could have been met—and they've proven that they could be, at least on the nuclear issue. Otherwise, I think you make a good point with Taiwan, though—that the markets will go where the money is. We saw the same with the Germans when they shut down access to Russian gas for their industries.

Now the German industry is packing up and going where the Russian gas went, which is to China. But also, of course, some are going across to the United States. You can only ignore reality for so long. Yeah. But on that—ignoring reality—how do you think this affects the diplomatic willingness in Europe? Because many of them are stubborn, but the Belgian prime minister did come out and say that perhaps we should start talking with Russia. "We're financing a war. We're not even allowed to participate in negotiations. Maybe now is the time." And he got some sympathy—or support, or understanding, I think that's the right word—from the Italians. So how do you see the possibility of fragmenting some of this pro-war attitude within Europe?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, before I answer that, can I just say that I completely agree with you—that what the Russians and the Iranians wanted was perfectly within our ability, the West's ability, to agree to without compromising any of our security interests. On the contrary, we would have strengthened them. We had the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was working with Iran and prevented Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability, if that was ever their intention. And at the same time, we had peace in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz was open, and we were in a much better security situation than the one we're in now.

We had agreements with the Russians at the end of the Cold War that NATO would not expand eastward and that NATO infrastructure would not be established in Eastern Europe. That was a time of peace, a time when the Cold War was ending. We went back on all of those agreements. Now we have a war in Ukraine—a war which, as we've both discussed in many places, we are now losing. So we again find ourselves in a worse security position than we would have been in if we had just agreed to those reasonable proposals to protect and preserve security that you've just been talking about. And you're absolutely correct.

Now, everything we've talked about—all the problems we've discussed—are really about fundamental failures of perception and dialogue, internal dialogue within our own societies, which have propelled us toward these very dangerous confrontations and the problems we find ourselves in today. There is a way back. We can negotiate. Neither of these two countries wants to conquer the Middle East—it's beyond Iran's capacity to do that. Russia certainly doesn't want to conquer Europe; it's beyond their capacity to do that either. But we have to change the outlook we've brought to bear in this conflict. Now, I'm not sure whether I've answered your question exactly, but if you want to bring it back, then we can.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I guess, Walter, let's delve a bit deeper into it. The divisions we might see now in Europe, because...

#Alexander Mercouris

Exactly.

#Glenn

Because, yes, I thought this was one of, perhaps, the advantages for Russia. People say, you know, oil prices are going up, weapons are being diverted to the Middle East. Of course, a lot of these are good things. It's temporary, though, so I think people are maybe putting a bit too much emphasis on it. But what's interesting is the ability of the Europeans to maintain solidarity around this "no diplomacy, send more weapons, Ukraine is winning" narrative. It seems that this might fragment as a result. And if that fragments, it's going to be very hard to put it all back together. Do you see this? I guess von der Leyen and Kallas—you know, maybe Scholz—these are diehards; they'll never change their minds. But you do see divisions emerging in this, in the war enthusiasm of the European leaders.

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, yes, but this is going to take a very long time to work its way through. I mean, Bart De Wever is important because Belgium obviously hosts the European Union. It hosts NATO. It is, for that reason if no other, a critically important EU country. And what Bart De Wever is saying is what a lot of other European leaders are thinking. He's said this himself. And what he's pointing to are the realities: we cannot defeat the Russians. There's no way we could defeat the Russians with the Americans, and we certainly can't defeat them without the Americans. And the Americans are not going to throw themselves back into this conflict. The economics aren't working the way we thought they would either.

Now, when somebody has the facts on their side, eventually the facts break through, and you'll start to see some of these leaders—Giorgia Meloni, perhaps, in Italy, Sánchez maybe in Spain—who have never been quite as obviously committed to these platforms as the hardliners have been. Gradually, maybe they'll start to come out and speak up, at which point we'll see fragmentation and division spread. And then we'll see things start to move forward. But unfortunately, this is the problem: the hardliners remain very powerful. They still control the key levers, they still, to a great extent, dominate the narrative, and the media is still with them. And as long as they're there, the other side—the Russians—will say to themselves, yes, we're prepared to engage the Europeans in some dialogue.

We can see this fragmentation. But can we really be confident, in the long term, that once things stabilize, the hardliners won't prevail again, just as they did before? So this process probably will happen, but I don't think we'll get back to that position yet—the one we were in during the early 1990s, when we could have built a stable security and political architecture in Europe. I don't think we'll get to that point for a very long time. Maybe, just possibly, now that somebody at last is talking in that kind of way, we'll start to see that essential dialogue—which, as you rightly said, has been so relentlessly suppressed—begin. But as I said, too much damage has been done for too long. Repairing the trust is going to be very difficult.

#Glenn

Well, it's also this—I know it's something you've spoken about in the past—that when the Europeans imposed economic sanctions on China, there was all this moral outrage and indignation when the Chinese responded in kind, as if that was somehow the prerogative of the West. A lot of this comes from the assumption of escalation dominance—that the West gets to decide, both on the military front and in economics. We decided to boycott all diplomacy. Until now, of course, Macron says, "Okay, we might talk to Russia after all, if it's within this format with the Americans and the Ukrainians." And then they're told, "No, you're not invited," by the Russians. It's the same with cutting ourselves off from Russian oil, gas, and fertilizers.

You know, and now, of course, we have this problem in the Middle East. We're debating whether or not we should temporarily allow the Russians to export to us, only to find out that the Russians might not even be interested—that they have other markets. Do you see something similar happening, perhaps, with Iran? That is, the Iranians—you hear some comments that there's no going back to the way things were before the war, which is why they don't want a ceasefire. They keep saying they want to address the underlying causes, they want a political settlement—similar language to what we hear from the Russians, you know, an end to this hegemonic dominance, if you will. How do you see the Iranians playing this? What would they be after?

#Alexander Mercouris

I think it's exactly the same as what the Russians are saying, and it follows from the same factors. Both the Iranians and the Russians—and you, by the way, have documented what the Russians have done meticulously in various books you've written—went very, very far to try to negotiate in good faith, to reach long-term settlements with the Europeans and with the Americans. We saw that just recently, with the Iranians negotiating with the Americans in Geneva and apparently making very big concessions there. And the Iranians are going to say to themselves, as the Russians have already said to themselves, that this is impossible—we're negotiating with people who take but never give.

And as soon as we give to them and they take, what always happens is they come back and ask for more. No negotiation can succeed if it's conducted that way. So both the Iranians and the Russians—the Iranians with far more passion and far more anger, because they're a weaker country, and for them this is more obviously and directly an existential issue—are saying, "We cannot negotiate unless the root causes..." It's, you know, a Russian expression. We haven't seen it from the Iranians yet, but we will eventually, I'm sure—unless the root causes are addressed. And ultimately, what they all mean when they talk about root causes is that they can identify specific issues: NATO expansion, support for coups in Ukraine, and impossible demands for Iran to abandon its entire foreign policy.

What the Russians and the Iranians ultimately mean when they talk about root causes is, finally, an acceptance by the West that they are important peoples, societies, and nations, and that they must be treated as equals, with their concerns properly listened to and addressed. And going back to your point about the fact that we assume we can sanction other people but get astonished and shocked when they do the same to us—well, we need to get out of that mindset and understand that, yes, we may have our disagreements with the Russians, we may have our disagreements with the Iranians, we may not like a lot of what they do, but ultimately they have a right to be there, and we have to negotiate with them—and negotiate with them in good faith—just as we used to do with the Soviets during the Cold War.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think it's an important point to make about them always coming back for more in these negotiations, because I think that's a key problem of the whole post-Cold War era. When the Soviet Union fell apart and the Europeans and Americans decided to create a new Europe without the Russians, they didn't just offer the Russians an unfavorable new status quo—there was no status quo at all. Every year, NATO has to move its borders a little bit to the east. The military infrastructure has to move a bit to the east. Missile defense infrastructure has to move to the east. And the energy transit states are gradually brought into the NATO orbit again.

It just seems as if there's no emergence of any new status quo. It's always this incrementalism—pushing and pushing further—which at some point will compel some kind of balancing. But how do you see this? I mean, if you're looking at the large Eurasian powers, how does China view all of this? Is this an opportunity? Is it something that requires deeper involvement from them? Because they've

expressed some condemnation—for example, over the killing of Iranian leaders—saying this is something you can't do. So how do you see their calculations in all of this? Yeah.

#Alexander Mercouris

I mean, just to say on the incrementalism—you use the expression “salami slicing” to describe it—and I think that's exactly what we've been engaging in. As I said, we constantly slice the salami until, as far as the Russians and the Iranians are concerned, there's no salami left. And we just keep doing that, bit by bit by bit, always coming back for more. Now, as for China—China is in a different position from Russia and Iran. It operates economically and at a military-strategic level on a completely different scale. It is today the colossus of Eurasia and will remain so for a long time. The Chinese have this very complex relationship with the United States, which has served their interests well to preserve—and which they are still trying to preserve.

But again, one senses increasingly that Chinese attitudes have been shifting. They've been seeing how the rhetoric in the United States has become increasingly hostile toward them. And of course, they're perfectly aware that there are all sorts of people in the United States quite openly talking about how pulverizing Iran and gaining control of its oil would deprive China of that oil—that that was what much of the Venezuela affair was about. To the extent that there were proposals from the Trump people to try to improve relations with the Russians in some way, it was ultimately done with no other real purpose than to try to pull the Russians out of the Chinese orbit. So I think what the Chinese do is—they know this.

They see this. They read all about it. They build up their own economy, they build up their own forces. But they will always do just enough—just enough to keep their allies on side and to keep them functioning. So they will buy Russian oil, they will provide the Russians with chips, they will sort out any supply issues the Russians face. They will give diplomatic assistance to the extent that it doesn't cut too obviously against Chinese diplomatic interests. They will do the same with Iran. Again, we don't know exactly what the Chinese are doing with Iran, but there have been rumors about Chinese radars and about Chinese financial assistance. They'll make sure it's all there under the surface—but they will do it.

And they've become very skilled at it. I think the other countries—the Russians, the Iranians—probably calculate that it's to their long-term advantage to keep it this way, that they don't want the Chinese coming in too obviously or becoming too deeply involved. Not only would that escalate the crisis with the United States, the global crisis involving the United States, but it would also mean that the Chinese are not there in such a big way that there's, in effect, a chance they might take over—take over in Moscow or in Tehran—which is exactly what those two countries don't want to see. So I think the Chinese have this actually fairly well calculated and fairly well balanced.

#Glenn

Well, about the salami tactics—I actually wrote an article back in November 2021, three months before the Russians went into Ukraine. I referred to the salami tactics, and the headline was something along the lines of “why a war will soon be inevitable.” The reason we don’t recognize it is because we make these tiny little steps, which makes it difficult for the opponent to retaliate. And for our own public, it would seem very irrational, even unprovoked, if the adversary were to take such grand steps. But again, that’s built into the whole system—you take the small pieces, and at some point a pawn has to react, and then it does seem irrational or unprovoked. What I was trying to make clear is why it’s becoming inevitable, even though many people think it’s very unlikely. But how do you see it? You mentioned that the Chinese are measuring their support quite cautiously. Do you have any information or assumptions about what they’re actually doing for the Iranians at this point in time?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, again, everything we hear is based on information from all sorts of sources, which, of course, we can’t fully corroborate. But my sense is that the Russians are quite involved. We’ve seen how the Shahed drones—the Iranians have been using Shahed drones fairly effectively. I’m fairly sure the Iranians have been coached and trained to do that by the Russians, who now have massive experience with this. The Iranians have also learned how to blend missile strikes with drone strikes, which apparently isn’t an easy thing to do if it’s to be done successfully.

And again, I think the Russians have probably helped with that as well. I noticed this morning there were pictures of American missile strikes on Iran’s Caspian Sea ports. Now, why would the Americans be attacking the Caspian Sea ports? Presumably something is coming through those ports, and it can only be coming from Russia. There are rumors and pictures of convoys of trucks rumbling through from Central Asia. I think when the full history of this conflict is written—probably quite a long time from now—we’ll discover that the Russians, in particular, have been involved in Iran quite a lot.

It was not until the 2000s, for example, that we learned the full extent of Soviet involvement in Vietnam—that there were Soviet technicians helping the Vietnamese, actually in Vietnam, guiding and operating the radars and air defense missiles and that kind of thing. So I suspect the Russians are quite involved. With the Chinese, it’s always more difficult to say. I suspect the Chinese are there too; they’re in a better position to provide spare parts, rocket fuel, parts for drones, that kind of thing. But a lot of this is guesswork, and I don’t want to imply that I know more than I do.

#Glenn

Yeah, I watched those convoys coming in from Tajikistan as well. Most of them were delivering aid, but I also assume that within all those trucks—these very long convoys—it would make sense if

there was something else besides aid. Usually, this is common in almost all conflicts: when you set up these aid corridors, that's how weapons get through as well. And I assume that's the case this time around.

#Alexander Mercouris

It's important to say, though, that aid itself has implications in a war of this kind. I mean, the Iranians are under very, very heavy pressure. They will need foodstuffs, they will need flour, they will need all the things that keep the cities functioning and alive. Obviously, Iran is a huge country with a large agricultural base, but even Iran probably needs some of this kind of help—things like fertilizer, for example. All of these can be validly classified as humanitarian aid, but for a country that is locked, as Iran is, in a war of attrition, all of these things count and become important.

#Glenn

Okay. Well, my last question was about the time aspect, because, again, this is a war where each side is trying to exhaust the other. When you can't go for the weapons, you can always try to wear down society by attacking infrastructure—which, of course, the U.S. has done before—attacking energy infrastructure to hit the economy. But how do you see it? Where would you expect the main challenges to come first? I mean, who would break? Because the U.S. seems to be running low on weapons, at least. As for Israel, it's unclear how the Israelis are faring.

Iran as well—this is taking quite a toll on the Iranians. But even beyond that, the Gulf states—how long can they hold on? A lot of the damage we're seeing in places like Qatar will take years to fix, even now. And if this continues, even the Europeans—how long can we hold out? We're both in Europe, and energy prices are going up. We're already in pretty bad shape. How do you see the time aspect? Where are the pressure points for the different contributing parties?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, the country that is by far the most heavily battered at the moment is Iran. I mean, Iran does not have the level of strike forces that the United States and Israel do. And it's important not to overlook that. There's been very heavy bombing in northern Tehran, and attacks in all sorts of other parts of Iran. There is huge damage being done to the country, its economy, and its society. But of course, with the Iranians, this is where the calculus is different. This is a conflict they feel has been forced on them. In fact, they're talking about it—they're using that expression, that it was a "forced war." They were attacked in the middle of a negotiation.

They feel this is an existential conflict—that the alternative is to lose their independence, to become, in effect, a Western colony again, to see the gains of their revolution reversed. I suspect quite a lot of people in Iran still support those gains and want to see them preserved. So they have that issue of motivation; they're prepared to endure an awful lot of pain to keep going. In the West, it's

different, because for us—for the United States—this is a war of choice. There was nothing that required the United States to carry out the attack it did on the 28th of February. In Israel, less so. But Israel cannot conduct this war the way it's been doing without the United States.

For the United States, it's a war of choice. For the rest of us—in Europe, in Japan, in South Korea—we're not even involved. We weren't even consulted. It's not a war of choice for us; we're just passengers on this train, if you like. So, given that, our level of endurance is going to be far less than the Iranians', and our tolerance for government action to sustain this war is going to be lower as well. In Iran, they can consider things like rationing, for example, if they're pushed into that kind of position. Rationing in the United States—or say, in Britain, where it's now being discussed, by the way—has a completely different political effect on the population, because people would say, "What for? What is this all for?" So it ultimately comes down, it seems to me, to this.

How stable politically is Iran? How strong institutionally is the government? I think what we've seen over the last three weeks is that it is strong institutionally. Given that, it can probably—indeed, plausibly—endure a war of attrition much longer than we can in the West. And at some point, as prices rise, as shortages grow, as people come under financial and economic pressure in the West, demands for a political solution are bound to emerge. That is the Iranian calculus. That is their strategy. That is the war they've decided they must fight, which makes it even more likely, by the way, that they'll see it through. And of course, it makes complete sense for them. As of today, one has to say, it appears to be working.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think the "war of choice" is an important component—something the Americans probably didn't think through properly. When they launched a surprise attack—Trump always emphasizes how important it is to catch them off guard—it has material benefits on the battlefield; you can take the other side by surprise. But the problem is that all wars require some political support from society at large. And I think one of the reasons the Iranian government holds up so well is because, well, what's the public going to say?

Usually, when a war takes a heavy toll on society, people ask, you know, why didn't you try to negotiate and avoid war? Well, they did. They were in the middle of negotiations. Why aren't you trying harder now to seek peace and negotiate? Well, this is the second time in just a few months that they've attacked us. They'll keep coming back again and again because they want to destroy us. So it's very difficult to see what exactly the Iranian public would want to ask of their government, because they seem to be completely in the clear. They did everything they could to avoid war, even if they now want to get out of it.

Now, it doesn't seem likely that any negotiations will achieve that. It would just be another ruse, in contrast with the United States. People are now asking, as things go wrong—that's when the questions come up. And there are good reasons to ask: why did you do this? What was the plan? I

think this was Joe Kent's whole point—that there was no need to do it. If things were going well, he wouldn't have stepped down, he wouldn't be asking these questions. But no, I think a lot of mistakes have been made—the war planning, the control over the media narrative. I mean, everything is very, very messy. But... yeah, do you have any final thoughts?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think you've made a very sharp and excellent point. I mean, for the Iranians, this is a war forced upon them. If you're going to undertake a war of choice—and by the way, if you have the choice to go to war—you should be very, very careful. You should always, if you choose to go to war, think it through in advance, very carefully. I'm not advocating that any government should undertake a simple war of choice, but if you do, if you must, then think it through. In the United States, they went into this lightly and frivolously. President Trump talked about a little excursion—and here we are.

#Glenn

Well, with a surprise attack, it also gives allies a reason to say why they want to sit this one out. That's what the Europeans are saying: "We were never told about this. This took us by surprise. If you didn't ask us about starting the war, why ask us to come help now?" You probably saw the comment by Trump to the Japanese, because he was asked, "Why? Why weren't our allies informed?" And he said, "Well, he wanted it to be a surprise. You know all about surprises—with Pearl Harbor." I mean, that's how it is.

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I know—absolutely frivolous. But I should say we shouldn't let the Allies off too lightly, because anybody watching this situation from the perspective of Europe or Tokyo, or wherever, should have seen this coming. And people like Scholz and Macron should have been going to Washington, demanding to know what was going on, saying to the American leaders, "Are you really serious about this? Have you thought it through? What are your plans? And how is this going to affect us?"

So for them to suddenly say, "Well, you know, we didn't know anything about this, it's all a surprise, it came out of nowhere"—I mean, that's nonsense. And again, them talking in this way—and it goes back to other things you've written about—illustrates once again the extent to which, in Europe especially, but of course in Japan too, we have completely surrendered the conduct of our policies, our statecraft, our foreign policy to the Americans, so that we allow ourselves to be surprised in this way.

#Glenn

Well, as always, thank you. And again, I'd advise people to visit The Duran and catch your daily analysis. So thank you very much for taking the time.

#Alexander Mercouris

Thank you. Thank you very much, Glenn.