

Pepe Escobar: Iran's Strategy of Attrition Warfare

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#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Pepe Escobar, a political analyst and author focusing on the greater Eurasian continent. Thank you for coming back on. My pleasure, Glenn. So, I wanted to ask about Iran, obviously, as the world watches in shock and horror at what's happening. I often think about U.S. General Wesley Clark—he made a comment about what happened after the September 11 attacks, saying they had a plan to take out seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan.

And of course, the grand finale was Iran. Even Bush later put Iran on the "axis of evil." Why is this so important to the Americans? Because this is a very different target from what they've had over the past 30 years. All the U.S. presidents, it seemed, more or less wanted to go after Iran. They all shared the same rhetoric as Trump, but they knew it would be too much—too big to take on. But still, Trump went all the way. What do you see as the strategic significance here? Besides, you know, "liberating girls" and all that, helping protesters—this nonsense?

#Pepe Escobar

No, Glenn, this is way more complicated. Iran is the Holy Grail. I'm one of the last old-school foreign correspondents on the planet. I was in Afghanistan before, during, and after 9/11, and I was in Iraq before, during, and after. I went to Iran many times during the 2000s, including when Rumsfeld and the Cheney regime were talking about "bomb, bomb, bomb Iran." That was John McCain's refrain every week, in fact. So we all knew Iran was the big prize. It always was—according to the Project for the New American Century, according to "Clean Break," according to the Zionist influence in D.C. already in the '90s, everywhere. So, of course, they couldn't do it before. And what the famous Wesley Clark quote says, in fact, is that they got everybody.

And of course, the only missing piece was Iran. So this war was planned. We can say it was planned since the late '90s—in fact, not just the past 20 or 25 years, but even earlier, back in the previous

millennium. And now they found the perfect messenger—what some of my Chinese friends, scholars, call “the baboon in the White House.” I love it—the barbarian baboon in the White House, totally controlled by Zionists, not only by Netanyahu but by the circle around him, the international Zionist alliance, especially the financial one. And of course, his inner circle—the people he actually listens to—there are many of them, and they’re making a lot of money out of this war.

And that includes everybody, starting with the ghastly Jared Kushner. This should be an investigation in itself, obviously, because there’s no more investigative journalism in the U.S. You see, this only appears on Substack accounts, for instance. But how Kushner is profiting—even starting when he left the White House after Trump 1.0, when he got the first \$2 billion for his Affinity Partners fund from MBS directly. Basically, MBS wrote a check for Kushner. And now the price is even higher—it’s \$5 billion. He’s getting \$5 billion from the Saudis for pushing Kushner. Of course, the father of Ivanka, let’s put it this way—and the real brains in that couple is not Jared Kushner, it’s actually Ivanka.

He’s absolutely ghastly—a low-life, cheap real estate entrepreneur. But of course, Trump listened to him, and that’s very, very dangerous. He was the main salesman for this war, face-to-face with Trump—or ear-to-ear, you could say. And everybody is profiting: Lutnick, Chris Wright, the Secretary of Energy—all of them. For them, it’s also a free ride financially. The big picture, of course, is Eretz Israel, Greater Israel. And that, according to them, is advancing fast if they can eliminate the only regional superpower, which is Iran—the only competitor to Israel for being the number one power across West Asia. So there was never any real planning beyond that. They thought it would be a decapitation strike and the whole thing would be over in a weekend.

And on Monday, we would have had “mission accomplished,” you know—Wall Street going through the roof and all that. That was the plan. But things started to derail half an hour after the decapitation strike on February 28th against Ayatollah Khamenei and much of the leadership. They had no plan B—and they still don’t. And what just happened a few minutes before we started talking is absolutely extraordinary. We were all expecting the beginning of the real highway to hell—the bombing of Iran’s electricity grid—but there was a stop. Trump pulled back all over again. And why? Because he looked at the numbers, he looked at the markets, he looked at gold, he looked at the bond market—and obviously, panic set in. So he had to back off.

And for the moment, it’s been five days—we don’t know how this is going to play out. But the most interesting thing is that a few minutes later, the Iranians went online and basically told the whole planet that the president of the United States is a liar. There are no conversations going on right now. And this is something we’re hearing from Araghchi, the foreign minister, from Qalibaf, the head of parliament, and from other political sources across Tehran. He made that up. And the main reason—this is what financial analysts say—the main reason is the bond market. When Trump saw that the bond market was going totally out of control, with yields on 10-year Treasuries hitting 5%, actually going over 5%, then coming back to 4.5%, and now around 4.4% or so, he realized it could go up again.

The United States simply cannot survive with bond yields this high—simple as that. They can't finance anything; it collapses financially. You've got mortgage rates in the U.S. going to 7% or 8%. That's suicidal. Much more than the oil market itself, the real issue is the threat to the oil market from the Strait of Hormuz being "closed but not closed," which is actually quite interesting. In fact, it's not closed—there's a toll booth. You have to pay the toll to get in. If you pay, no problem; you navigate through Iranian territorial waters. And first of all, your cargo must have been settled in petro-yuan. These are the three imperatives. If you follow them, no problem—you can cross. Anybody can cross, including the Japanese, who are asking, "Should I stay or should I go?"

But the most important thing—much more important than oil—is the bond market. So it's all about following the money. It's all about money. And obviously, the people who are making money out of this war inside the U.S. are absolutely terrified because it's getting out of control. That would be the number one rationale for some sort of deal. But, Glenn, we know that a deal is impossible when you look at the list of demands on the Iranian side and the list of demands on the American side. It's absolutely impossible to find common ground. And that's why it's still so dangerous. It's like, you know, the infernal machine—an escalation machine that's been running for the past three weeks—which today we thought would be OK, and now it's gone totally out of control. It's just been postponed for the next five days.

But the escalation machine is still there, and there's no way out—no off-ramp. For Trump, if he chooses an off-ramp, that is, in practice, the end of the American empire. And even people with an IQ of 10 can understand that in the U.S. At the same time, he cannot fulfill the demands of the Iranians, and some of them are really, really hardcore: no more U.S. bases anywhere in West Asia, payment of reparations—some figures floating around are \$500 billion—and, of course, continuing with their nuclear and missile programs the way they want. All of those, from the U.S. point of view, are out of the question. So it's still a cliffhanger. The cliffhanger was supposed to be today; now we have to wait another five days.

#Glenn

I'm glad that the horror show was postponed a bit. But it's interesting that, as you framed it, what the Iranians are after essentially is the capitulation of the U.S. in that region. But what the U.S. is asking of Iran is their capitulation—that is, to give up its regional allies, its ballistic missiles, its conventional deterrence, key components of its economy. So, given that this is the case, the only way this can be achieved is through victory. We seem to be locked in this war of attrition where the goal is to exhaust the other side. Now, Trump says that he has unlimited weapons, which, of course, is nonsense.

Otherwise, they wouldn't be pulling their missile defense out of Asia. It doesn't make any sense. But we have a general, you know, somewhat clear idea of what the United States has, and also its ability to produce new weapons. But about Iran's weapons, we know a lot less. The Iranians say they have

a lot of weapons stored in their tunnels—tens of thousands, again—but it's very difficult to verify that. Not just the quantity, but also the quality. So what is it that we actually know about Iran's weapons, especially their quality? The quantity is a bit more difficult, I guess.

#Pepe Escobar

The quality has already been proven by the way they've used some of their best missiles, like the Khorramshahr-4 and the Fatah-2. They only started using them in the past week or so, and very sparingly—not yet in large quantities. Nobody really knows what's stored in the underground missile cities in the eastern part of Iran, in the southeast, in the far east near the Afghan border. None of these areas have been touched by the Americans so far. The Americans don't even know where these underground cities are. So every time the Iranians make a technological leap in the kinds of missiles they're using, it's always very impressive.

And now that there's no protective shield over Israel—for all practical purposes, David's Sling, Arrow-3, that's most of it—it's all gone. They can bomb Israel the way they want. And this is part of their new strategy. They keep tweaking their decentralized mosaic strategy, I would say, week after week. And now they're saying openly, "Now we have an offensive strategy." So far it was defensive, and now it's offensive. Why? Because they know they've exhausted the response capacity of American and Israeli air defense. So now they can choose their targets precisely. For instance, they didn't attack the Dimona nuclear reactor; they attacked a building about ten kilometers away from Dimona, housing scientists.

So this was a message. Basically, they're saying, look, we can bomb Dimona anytime we want, but we won't do it now. If you bomb Natanz, we're going to bomb Dimona. That's part of the message as well. And the Israelis have already bombed the vicinity of Natanz, and the Russians were absolutely furious about it. There are still a lot of Russian technicians over there. So the Iranians' deterrence is incremental, and they always come up with new weapons that we've never seen used on the battlefield. So we can say that they haven't—it's true—they haven't shown everything they have, for obvious reasons, because they're planning for a long war.

And when they say they can last for the next six months—yes, they can. First of all, because we don't know where most of these missiles and drones are. Second, every week they come up with new weapons we've never seen before. Third, we haven't even seen what they have to actually defend the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf—assuming the Americans get nearby, let's put it that way. So this is what deterrence means. And this is how you have a decentralized mosaic strategy that can be fine-tuned on purpose—progressively, methodically, meticulously. And it's extremely impressive. And on the other side, what do we see? The only thing they do: bomb indiscriminately, bomb civilian targets, bomb residential neighborhoods in Tehran.

But that's the logic of—well, in fact, the syndrome of—the terror regimes intertwined. These are two terror regimes walking side by side and bombing side by side, with no regard for civilian lives. They

never have. And the Iranians still—because, you know, everything we can talk about in terms of Shiite theology, their ethics of resistance, their respect for human life—they are not attacking civilian targets. They're starting to attack civilian dual-use infrastructure in Israel. That's another story, because now they want to concentrate on basically smashing all the key nodes that make the State of Israel function. That's what they call the "great constriction." That's their own terminology for it. And this has started over the past three or four days.

And it will continue a lot this week. You can count on that—they'll keep bombing the Haifa refineries and military installations. Some of those installations are right next to Ben Gurion Airport, no question about it. Obviously, the Israelis can't admit that, even with the enormous censorship in Israel. But now that some images are circulating everywhere, anyone can see they're being hammered again, just like during the 12-day war. But for them, they simply can't pick up the phone and call Trump again to get a ceasefire. First of all, because nobody wants a ceasefire as things stand. It's the logic of escalation on both sides—on three sides, if you count Israel as one side. They're going to keep getting hammered.

#Glenn

Well, I also picked up on the Iranians making this argument that they're shifting from defense to offense. I expected something similar after the U.S. and Israel had spent a lot of their munitions and air defenses—for the Iranians to escalate. But what do we actually know yet about Iran's strategy in the war? Not just their ambitions, but how they expect to achieve them? Because, as you mentioned, the Iranians' wish list for a post-war settlement is quite high. I can't see the Americans agreeing to essentially any of it. So how do you see them moving forward with this?

#Pepe Escobar

The number one demand is, of course, no more U.S. military bases across West Asia. Well, they're already on it, because 70% to 80% of those bases are already completely destroyed—and that's after only three weeks of war. If it goes on for three more weeks, they'll destroy all of them, period. And yesterday, something truly extraordinary happened, which nobody's talking about, but the significance is stratospheric. Twenty-three years after "shock and awe" in Iraq, the United States and NATO have been expelled from Iraq. Period. They're not there anymore. That's it. It's over. They only have a base in Erbil, but that doesn't count—because Iraqi Kurdistan is basically run by a bunch of gangsters.

It doesn't count. Even in Baghdad, they look at Kurdistan—ah, those gangsters. But Iraq itself, there are no more U.S. or NATO troops. It took 23 years. And in the end, they had to agree to a ceasefire because they were being bombed relentlessly by the different strands of the Iraqi resistance—Hashd al-Shaabi, Kataib Hezbollah, and many other groups and militias. So it's possible: long-term,

relentless, with clarity of vision and spiritual strength. You could say there are many variations of how resistance works. In the case of Iran, they haven't been preparing for this war for 47 years—they've been preparing since 2005 or 2006. Let's put it this way: about 20 years.

You remember in the mid-2000s, when there were active plans to really bomb Iran, coordinated by Rumsfeld at the time. But the Americans were thinking, "We don't have enough," because at that time they were also thinking in terms of a ground invasion. Everything that was gained in Washington was a total disaster, so they abandoned it. They said, "No, we need to undermine the regime, the mullahs—all that crap they talk about all the time—for a few more years. And then, when the time is right," which, the way they see it, is now. So it's not only hardcore Zionists, but also old-school neocons—the people from the Project for the New American Century, the remnants of that project. Now is the right time.

After they tried to undermine it through the so-called protests—which, yes, there were legitimate protests, but they were weaponized by foreign forces—the time is now. And they're in for a very rude awakening. Because, especially after the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei, very few people in Washington know that Mojtaba had been, for at least 15 or 16 years, working very closely with the IRGC leadership. When we were together in Iran last year, I was asking practically everyone I could about the relationship between Mojtaba and the IRGC. And everybody said, yes, it's very close. He's the kind of bridge between his father—who has so many dossiers to take care of—and the IRGC. He knows exactly how the IRGC works.

He's totally respected by the IRGC. I remember that in May last year, they were telling me, yes, he's one of the top candidates to be the next Supreme Leader. There were three contenders, but he was very well positioned, especially because of his relationship with the IRGC. So the fact that he was elected by the Council of Experts to be the new Supreme Leader, even though he's not a top Ayatollah, shows they're betting on the idea, on the symbolism, on the fact that he's continuing his father's work. And this is so powerful that even if he doesn't appear in public, his aura and his reach are tremendous. He's been universally respected from day one.

So that in itself is extraordinary. He doesn't need to come out and give fantastic speeches—no, that's not the point. This implies a continuity of government, a continuity of the idea of resistance, with the difference that now the people completely in charge are the IRGC. There's no question about that. They are running Iran at the moment. So, obviously, the survival of the Iranian state is their survival. It's inexorable. So they're going all the way. And of course, you should never forget, they have the Shiite spirit of martyrdom fully incarnated. If they are martyred, they are dying for the cause. You cannot break people like that—it's out of the question. Especially when, on the other side, you see people who can barely read, who can barely string two sentences together.

Not to mention, read a book by Kant—written by Ali Larijani, also assassinated. So the imbalance between the spirit of barbarism on one side and the spirit of Persian culture on the other is brutal. And they learned something they didn't know before: the art of PR. Their PR is working very, very

well all across the Global South. Now they've become hits in terms of public opinion. Support for Iran across the Global South is practically unanimous now. Making those little funny videos with Lego characters and all that works miracles in terms of PR, showing that they have a bit of leeway. You have one of their spokesmen saying, "Donald Trump, you're fired." Yeah, I saw that—it was absolutely great. They turned the whole thing upside down.

So this, with young people in the U.S., across the West, in China, in Africa, in Southeast Asia—wow, this is absolutely priceless. The Epstein syndicate has already lost the battle for public opinion on a global level, that's for sure. And now, married to the Iranians who've learned how to play the soft power game as well, when you put this all together, they have military cards, soft power cards, and pressure cards in their hands that nobody thought they would have. Three or four weeks ago, nobody would've bet that they'd resist—first of all, that they'd resist this long and counterpunch as fiercely as they're doing now. Of course, once again, they were underestimated. And that's one of the traits of empire: the empire underestimates everybody.

Everybody is, by definition, inferior. Not to mention that death cult in Tel Aviv. For them, the whole planet is inferior. So it's part of my personal thesis that Iran is fighting for the entire Global South in this war. It's much more than a war—against three BRICS. And we could talk a lot about the implosion of BRICS at the moment. BRICS now is in a coma. It pains me to say that. I've dedicated a lot of work these past few weeks just to follow BRICS, and at the moment it's in a deep coma. We don't know if it's going to be resurrected. But basically, this is a war—Iran is leading it with the backup of Russia and China. And yes, it's three BRICS trying to defend the whole Global South from a cancer, essentially.

#Glenn

I've always found the image of Iran fascinating. If you'd gone back 20 years, it would've been unthinkable to see this kind of sympathy for Iran around the world. Of course, two surprise attacks and this kind of savage destruction of Iran tend to whip up sympathies. But I think there's more to it. What you said about continuity is also a very good point, because this is the problem when you demonize your opponent—you assume they're all weak, just one evil leader holding the whole house of cards together. The continuity, I think, was underestimated.

I've seen politicians and journalists argue that after Khamenei was killed, oh, well, now the Iranians finally have an opportunity for peace and, you know, freedom. First of all, I'm not sure he took that away. I don't even know where to begin. It's just very strange. They thought, you kill this one guy and tomorrow it's a new country. I mean, I don't understand it. I usually think it's ignorance or malice, but I think I underestimate the ignorance at times—what they actually thought would happen after killing Khamenei. But regarding BRICS, I thought this was an interesting point, because given that it's a war of attrition, it's largely a war of all or nothing.

That is, the U.S. hopes, of course, that it can knock out the Iranian government and maybe replace it with a pro-U.S. one. Otherwise, just destroy Iran—balkanize it, whatever it would be. This would also weaken Russia and China. On the other hand, if the United States fails, you're going to see a much stronger Iran, locked in closer with Russia and China. So essentially, this greater Eurasian project will be much more powerful than it was before. But why is it, then, that you see BRICS being in a coma, and also the Shanghai Cooperation Organization? What do you see? Iran is now a member of both. How do you see the future of them?

#Pepe Escobar

Well, they didn't say anything. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization released a statement—a pitiful statement, for that matter—when one of their full members was being directly attacked. BRICS is even worse, because this is something we've been discussing for years: the internal problems of BRICS. We talked about this with the Russians a lot, and the Russians are always the agglutinators inside BRICS—they're always bridging differences. But how can you bridge differences now, when you have BRICS members like the UAE prodding the Abstan syndicate to go all out against Iran, a full member of BRICS? And when you have what India did to Iran—a series of betrayals. Everything.

Including that absolutely ghastly episode with the ship that was invited for that show—and when it left Indian territorial waters, it was torpedoed by the Americans. Nobody knows for sure; it's still being endlessly debated whether the Indians passed the coordination to the Americans or not. There's a huge debate about that, including among many well-informed and prepared people in India. Some of these analysts and scholars there are absolutely appalled. They've said, "Look, we have no words to express to our friends across the Global South how Indian foreign policy is betraying Indian values. We are not that thing in government right now." But there's not much they can do. So the internal splits within BRICS are terrible. Brazil is a joke.

I prefer not even to talk about it. And South Africa is irrelevant. So, you know, we still depend on Russia and China—for the moment, two different strategies but both very effective. We all know how Russia and China are defending Iran diplomatically, including in the UN Security Council. There was a phone call between Lavrov and Araghchi yesterday—very, very important. What was leaked from that call was the usual blah, blah, blah, but I'm sure they talked about very important bilateral issues, including this backup, short and long term. And China is also helping Iran diplomatically and, of course, with intel—both Russia and China. I wrote about this in some of my previous columns in detail, how Russia and China are helping Iran with 24/7 satellite intelligence.

In the case of Russia, even better—those Shaheds that went to Russia were transformed into Geraniums, then went back to Iran, and now they're on the battlefield, much improved compared to the original Shaheds. Not to mention the famous Astrakhan–Tehran shuttle, where we have no idea what was inside those Ilyushin cargo planes coming from Russia to Iran, in terms of hardware and

software as well. So they've got Iran's back, no question about that. But they're looking at the bigger picture, long term.

And they know that the only way to constitute Iran—the project that we, all of us independent analysts, you included, have been talking and writing about for many, many years—is Eurasian integration. It depends on these three actors, these players, which happen to be in BRICS and the SCO: Russia, China, and Iran. So they cannot possibly allow Iran to fail, to be dismembered, to decompose, or to be blown up. That's the number one thing. This is what guides their strategic considerations in Moscow and in Beijing. On the nitty-gritty, on a day-to-day basis, it's fascinating because, for instance, the Russians say, "Look, the Iranians are not asking for anything, just as they didn't ask in the recent past."

If they do, we'll be there. And of course, the Persians—as we all know—are very, very proud. They would only ask if they were really against the wall. And they're not, at the moment. They're controlling the narrative. They have practically all the cards in their hands, apart from indiscriminate bombing. All the other important cards, the Iranians have. And the Chinese, of course, are looking at a strategic partner—one of their sources of energy, one of the key nodes of the Belt and Road, the New Silk Roads. And of course, they do it the Chinese way, in ways that none of us see. But it's there, you know.

So this will be the future of the multipolar Eurasian integration world, depending on these three actors. And at the moment, we can say that BRICS is a non-entity—completely. I hope it changes. I hope the Russians can tell the Indians a few things in the run-up to the BRICS summit in Delhi later this year. It's a terrible year to have India as chair of BRICS, because there's very little trust in India from many of the BRICS nations. But it's going to be hard to come back from the dead. It's going to be very, very hard, very different. I assume you have the same point of view. So let me ask you, Glenn Diesen, do you agree with this mini-analysis at the moment, or are you more optimistic—or realistic? Realistic.

#Glenn

Well, I was also a bit shocked by the behavior of the Indians—the way they invited Iran to participate in this naval exercise, and then saw the Americans destroy the Iranian warship on its way home, and still weren't able to condemn it in any way. I thought that was quite shocking. But then, on the other hand, you see Iran now giving India access to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. So I'm not sure if some of these things can be fixed. Also, the International North–South Transport Corridor—the one running from Russia through Iran to India—at some point, it's simply in India's strategic interest to preserve it.

So if they don't develop this with the Iranians, then they're not going to be able to connect properly with the Russians, which means the Russians would lean even more toward China. And I think it's in the Indians' interest—or ambition—to create more of a balance of dependence in Eurasia, to make

sure there are many centers of power so China doesn't become too dominant. The only way to do that is to diversify. You need Iran. If you don't have Iran, Eurasia will be very, very China-centric. And that's why it's not in India's interest, and not in the U.S. interest either. So I don't understand this obsession with trying to disconnect this corridor. It seems very foolish.

But my last question for you was about Azerbaijan, because I spoke to a mutual friend of ours, Professor Marandi, and he was making the point that it's very likely that at some point in this war, Azerbaijan will be pulled in—given that in the past it's been more than indirectly involved in attacks on Iran. How do you see this? Do you see Iran—well, Azerbaijan—being pulled in, and what would be the wider consequences? Because if you look at the energy architecture of Eurasia, Azerbaijan has this small energy corridor between Iran and Russia. This is essentially what Europeans look to for diversification. Even now, they don't have Iran, they don't have Russia, they don't have the Gulf states. I mean, they can't live without Azerbaijan. So it's becoming more sensitive now than it was in the past.

#Pepe Escobar

Absolutely. And of course, there's the BTC–BTS angle. The numbers vary—it's somewhere between thirty-something and forty-nine percent of Israel's oil that comes from the BTC, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline. That's a story I've followed from the beginning, when Brzezinski went to Baku in 1995 to sell the idea to the Aliyev clan. It's a very, very long story. And even back then, it was the same narrative: we need to bypass Russia and Iran. So why not build a pipeline that's going to cost almost four billion dollars? That's what it is. But the problem is, Aliyev and Erdoğan didn't do anything to cut off the supply of Baku oil to Israel. It's part of their shady, dodgy deals—Erdoğan and Aliyev. Aliyev is a pure gangster, and Erdoğan is a hedger. He's always hedging. A very, very complicated alliance.

From an Iranian point of view, they pay enormous attention to everything they do, down to the minutiae. They know they cannot antagonize Turkey, and vice versa—Erdoğan cannot antagonize Iran. First of all, there are the energy links, and they're neighbors. And of course, Turkey still has, in the back of Erdoğan's mind, the idea of being a key Eurasian player. For the moment, they're not. They're not part of anything important. They have their own strategy, which is something that—when I was in Istanbul, I went there and talked to them—they couldn't really explain what they want. The famous, uh, what's the name of this thing? Sorry, sorry, Glenn, it escapes me now—the Foundation of Turkish States, or rather the Organization of Turkish States, headquartered in Istanbul. Basically, it's a real estate scheme for Erdoğan's friends to get contracts all across Central Asia.

That's essentially it. So it's not power projection. In geopolitical terms, when you put Turkey competing with China and Russia in Central Asia, it's a joke. They don't even register, right? But the ambition is there. And of course, the relationship between Turkey and Israel is still extremely shady. Our friend Professor Morandi, in fact, talks about it all the time. His position is very—well, I'd say it's

aligned with the ruling classes in Tehran, including the military analysts. You cannot trust anything about Erdogan. He's always playing a double game. It's true—he plays a double game with everybody. But Azerbaijan is very complicated. They would be dragged in eventually, assuming this war goes on.

If they get dragged into something and allow, for instance, attacks against Iran coming from Azerbaijani territory, they're going to pay a huge price. That's what happened during the 12-day war, and Iran didn't do anything about it then. But Iran had full evidence that drones were coming from Azerbaijani territory to attack Iran. If that happens again, Aliyev is going to be in deep, deep trouble, to say the least. For the moment, it's a wait-and-see situation. They think, well, this war has nothing to do with us, and in the end, depending on how it goes, they might even profit from it. But nothing is certain yet. Anyway, I got an invitation to one of these forums in Baku. I'm going to take it, because I'd love to ask these questions to people there—assuming they don't throw me in jail.

#Glenn

It's just too many—I always make this point with the war on Iran. I think the reason so many American presidents avoided it is because there are so many uncertain, unknown, and uncontrollable variables—like what's going to happen to Azerbaijan if it gets pulled in. This is huge. It's going to change not just the Eurasian but also the European landscape. Yeah. It just seems so reckless to have gone down this path. But I think for the Iranians, this is the main miscalculation by the U.S.—that Iran isn't simply trying to get out of this war, get a ceasefire, and go back to normal. The idea is that Iran sees this as a time to clean up—after all these decades of sanctions, threats, attacks, proxy wars—it wants to settle some scores and do it on its own terms. So, yeah, this was an easy war to start, but it's going to be very, very difficult to finish, because when it's over, well, the world will look very different, I think.

#Pepe Escobar

Completely. And you see, Glenn, part of their—well, I'd say one of the categorical imperatives on their list of demands—is no more sanctions. Meaning no more sanctions, period. Which is absolutely impossible, because those sanctions would have to be abolished by the U.S. Congress, and we know that will never happen. Payment of reparations—this will never happen either. Can you imagine the empire paying reparations to Iran? And for the Iranians, this is a matter of faith. It's one of their top three or four points, alongside no more U.S. military bases in West Asia. So the gulf—literally, metaphorically, and otherwise—between both sides is unbridgeable.

Unbridgeable. And there's nobody who could possibly mediate. The only possible mediator could be Russia. And this is something that, if you look at what Ushakov didn't say about the Trump–Putin phone call, of course they touched upon the subject. Putin might have said to Trump, “Yes, I can be the mediator. All the players over there respect us.” The problem is, do the Iranians want mediation? For the moment, this is what we hear day after day from the Iranian leadership, including Ayatollah

Ali Khamenei: "No. No ceasefire, no mediation. We're going all the way." And that's what makes it so volatile, man.

#Glenn

Yeah. Now, the only thing the U.S. can do, it seems, is offer a way out—a ceasefire—and try to put pressure in that direction, just not escalate. But once they notice that Iran can match their escalation, I don't see where this is going to go. It's, again, a foolish war to have started in the first place. Yeah. Anyway, Pepe, it's always good to see you, and I hope to see you again soon, in person.

#Pepe Escobar

Thank you so much. All the best.