

Paul Craig Roberts: Trump's Desperation Hits a BREAKING POINT as the War on Iran was LOST

#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Monday, March 23rd, 2026, and our dear friend Paul Craig Roberts is here with us. Welcome back, Paul.

#Paul

Thank you very much, Nima.

#Nima

Paul, let me start with Donald Trump's new position. He gave a 48-hour ultimatum to the Iranians: if you don't open up the Strait of Hormuz, I'm going to attack you. I'm going to hit the power grids in Iran. I'm going to start with the big one. Then we had some sort of response from the Iranians, saying that if you hit us, we're going to hit back at everybody in the region — all these Arab states together with Israel. So what happened yesterday was Iran hitting the Mona for the first time. You know, it was close to — it wasn't the nuclear power plant, but a strategic research center, something like that. And then today Donald Trump came out and said the Iranians are talking to us and trying to negotiate with us. Here's what he said — his latest comment.

#Speaker 03

In discussion this morning, let me provide a brief update on Operation Epic Fury — which is a very good name, as it turns out. That was the name. They showed me twenty names: "Sir, what name would you like?" I didn't like any of them. And then I get toward the end and say, "You've got to be kidding. What? Operation Epic Fury? I love that name." And it's very appropriate for what's taking place in Iran, because we knocked out their navy, we knocked out their air force, we knocked out their anti-aircraft — we knocked out everything. And we did it with fury, actually. As I announced earlier, based on preliminary conversations between the United States and Iran over the past two days, I've directed the Department of War to temporarily postpone planned strikes against major energy and electricity targets in Iran.

They have very, very big, new, and actually very expensive ones — billions of dollars it costs to build them. One missile, one of our powerful ones, and it comes down to the ground like it was made out

of dust. But to determine whether a broader agreement can be reached, we've had very good discussions — very, very good discussions. And you have to understand, my whole life has been a negotiation. But with Iran, we've been negotiating for a long time, and this time they mean business. And it's only because of the great job our military did — that's the reason they mean business. They want to settle, and we're going to get it done, I hope.

#Nima

Yeah. Here's what he said, Paul. By the way, it was rejected — the Iranian side said there were no direct or indirect talks between the two parties. And Donald Trump is making something up. I don't know what's going on in his mind. What's your understanding? What do you make of it?

#Paul

Well, there are two ways you can read it. One is that he's preparing to declare victory and pull out. He'll say that the Iranians have agreed not to make a nuke, and we've stopped their missile production, so everything's over — we're going to remove the sanctions on Iran, and we have victory, we're going home. And he'll then emphasize that removing the sanctions on Iran has lowered the price of energy, oil, and natural gas, and put the world economy back on a stable basis. That's one way you can read this. And the other is, it's the usual Washington trick — he needs five days to get prepared for more attacks. The real problem with continuing the attack on Iran seems to be that the United States and Israel have run out of missiles, particularly interceptor missiles, because Dimona is not supposed to be hit.

#Speaker 04

And neither was Diego Garcia, four thousand kilometers away, which is supposedly...

#Paul

According to American military estimates, that's about twice the range an Iranian missile can travel. So you can see Trump saying, "Ooh, we got in over our heads. I need five days to get forces assembled," and so on. I don't know which way to read it — we'll know in five days. It's clear the Iranians deny any talks are going on, and therefore I kind of suspect it's not so much to deceive Iran, because they know there are no talks, as it is to create a scenario of American victory and withdrawal. I don't know what else you can say about it.

At this point, it's clear the United States and the Israelis were wrong about Iran's staying power, and intelligence was clearly wrong about the range of their missiles and Iran's ability to penetrate both American and Israeli defenses. So this has changed the situation dramatically, and Trump's got to

find some way out. It's fine with me if he declares victory and goes home, because at least that removes the American possibility of using nukes against Iran. I'd rather Trump save face by declaring victory and leaving. I don't know what Netanyahu will do.

#Nima

Netanyahu is somehow hiding. You know, it's so difficult to find Netanyahu these days. There are only a few videos of him — mostly he's posting on his account on X. But the problem, Paul, it seems to me that Israel... Do you think Israel is getting to the point of somehow telling Donald Trump, "We're not going to be capable of defending ourselves, so you may have to come in again"? You remember, during the last days of the 12-day war, how Donald Trump decided to interfere and save Israel. Because today — not just yesterday — they hit Dimona again.

#Paul

Well, I think they should go ahead and hit it — not so much the nuclear power station, but the silos where the Israeli nuclear missiles are. If Iran knocked out the Israeli nuclear missiles, the war would be over, because that's the only real card Israel has left. I think Trump realizes he let Netanyahu get him into a difficult situation. Iran didn't collapse in three days, and Trump faces a midterm election which, if he loses, means he's lost the House and Senate. So he essentially has no power and would face impeachment. Whether he'd let Netanyahu draw him back into it — I don't think so.

He might, because the alternative, Nima, could well be that Netanyahu says, "Well, okay, then we'll have to nuke Iran, because we can't let them destroy us. We're out of interceptors. Our system doesn't work anyway. They can hit our nuclear facilities. We're defenseless—essentially defenseless. And we're not going to surrender. So we'll use our nukes if you don't find some way to defeat these people for us." I can see Netanyahu telling Trump that. But at some point, Trump has to choose between himself and Netanyahu. Is he going to save Netanyahu and destroy himself?

Or is he going to use the opportunity to get out of it, claim a victory, and move on to something else—get the whole attention of the American public onto another issue? I can't say for sure what he'll do, because the Israel lobby in the United States is the most powerful of all lobbies. He may think that if he goes against them, he's finished anyway. So it remains to be seen, I think. We'll see what he does in five days. It could well be there'll be another extension—"talks are going well, we're making progress." Well, you know, we've been hearing that about Ukraine for how long?

#Paul

Clearly, Nima, it was a disastrous mistake the Trump administration made. It's disastrous. Clearly, the Israel lobby is dominant in American decision-making about the Middle East. They've had us at war for Greater Israel for a quarter of a century. We destroyed Libya, Iraq, Syria, and now we're supposed to destroy Iran. Well, that's a different proposition—it's a huge country. It's as large as

Western Europe, and it's got maybe a hundred million people. What do the Israelis have? Eight million. They can't cope with that. And the Iranians—they're very slow to violence. You really have to provoke them. They're slow to violence, but they've had so many provocations that they're not likely to accept any more. So Israel is kind of hemmed in. Trump's hemmed in. So we'll have to see who Trump decides is most important—himself or Netanyahu.

#Nima

Paul, Iranian commander Mohsen Rezaei, who's very close to the leader of Iran, said the war will continue until all damages are compensated, all economic sanctions are lifted, and a guarantee is obtained that the United States will not interfere in Iran's affairs. It seems to me this means the war will go on, and there's no end in sight, at least from Iran's perspective. And Donald Trump is somehow trapped in a kind of quagmire right now. How do you see the situation, considering these demands from the Iranians?

#Paul

Well, I think it shows Iranian confidence. I've tried to investigate this as best I can. The real difference in the ability to sustain a long-term war seems to be on Iran's side, because they've been making and storing missiles for twenty or more years. They have a huge supply, and the United States and Israel are out. It takes the United States a very long time to produce many missiles. So, on the missile front, the United States and Israel—they're not players. They're not in the game. And as for the navies, they're not in the game either, if Iranian ballistic missiles can hit targets four thousand kilometers away.

That means all the American aircraft carriers have to stay far outside the range of battle. The jets they carry can't reach the fight and get back without being refueled, maybe more than once—I don't really know. So we're at a huge disadvantage. They talk about, "Okay, we'll put boots on the ground." Allegedly, a division of paratroopers has been called up and deployed, and a few Marines have been sent. But there aren't nearly enough troops to even consider invading Iran. I mean, it would take a hundred times that number, and the United States doesn't have them. So any boots on the ground would be a very limited thing—maybe on Qeshm Island.

But what would that achieve? It wouldn't achieve anything. Moreover, how would we get them there? How are you going to get the troops there? If you get them there, how are you going to get them out? So it would be a sacrifice of the troops. Surely someone in the military has the courage to tell Trump what he doesn't want to hear. If you put those troops there, it's goodbye to the troops—you won't see them again. So really, the only alternative that Israel and the United States have for continuing the war—well, actually, there are two alternatives. One, the Iranian liberals resurge and agree to some stupid settlement that merely postpones...

#Speaker 04

The conflict—it won't go away.

#Paul

That's not going to happen, Paul. I think you're right. I know, but I had to mention it. I don't think it's going to happen. And the other option is to use nukes. Now, if they use nukes, I don't think that worries you, but I think the United States would be concerned, because it lets the genie out of the bottle—and it's been locked up since 1945. And what would be the effects of the nukes, the radiation? There's a whole area there, you know. It's a big area. And what would it tell the Russians and the Chinese?

See, both of those governments have been, in my view, very foolish governments—trusting Trump, wanting to negotiate. You know, the Chinese want to have trade talks—what for? The talks don't mean anything. And Putin—well, I mean, Putin has basically destroyed his credibility, putting up with negotiation after negotiation, and they never go anywhere. So it finally tells these two rather dim-witted governments, “Hey, look, this could happen to you.” So right now, if I had to bet, I would say that Trump wants to get out. And I think he's trying to signal to the Iranians, “I want out. I'm going to declare victory and leave you alone. And of course, if you go along with this, I'm going to remove the sanctions.”

So if I had to bet, I would say that's what's in the works. On the other hand, since the Israelis attacked the large Iranian gas reserves without clearing it with Trump, they might also use nukes without clearing it with him. And if the Iranians are worried about that, it might restrain them from actually achieving the victory that's at hand. I think right now, only the Iranians can throw away their victory. And if they're fearful that, if they achieve a victory, they'll get nuked by Netanyahu, they may avoid taking it. So that's the only solution—or that's about all I can say about it. I don't know what will happen. You know, today, Paul, I talked with Professor Ted Postol. Ted Postol told me that...

#Nima

Iran has the ability, or has everything needed, to produce at least eleven nukes quickly, and it wouldn't take that much time. I don't know what the decision is—what the main decision is on the part of the Iranians—but they may... I assume they're going to consider the ability, you know, this sort of behavior from Netanyahu, because these people are not rational. They may do that, as you've mentioned, and they're considering all these options on the part of the Israelis. And that's going to destroy—well, that would be the end of Israel if they go that far and use nukes against Iran. That would really be, you know, the very end of Israel.

#Paul

Well, Nima, let me say that I think Iran doesn't need nukes to destroy Israel. All they have to do is hit the Israeli nuclear power plant, because the radiation from that would destroy Israel. I think by attacking Dimona—but only the research facility, not the actual site—they were sending a message to Netanyahu: we don't need nukes to destroy you. You can't stop our missiles; we just proved it. Because, you know, the Israeli air defenses are really concentrated around Dimona, and they weren't able to block anything. So Iran has told them, your nukes don't mean anything. We don't need nukes. All we have to do is hit that plant, and you're all going to die.

And I think, how can Israel survive if it uses nukes? I think the Iranians will hit that plant. They should also hit—well, they should already have hit—the launch sites of the Israeli nuclear missiles. Whether or not they can destroy them entirely, they can certainly block their ability to function. They can't open if there's all this rubble over them. And that's an option—if this goes on, that could be the next Iranian response: "We've just taken away your nuclear missiles. You can't get them out of the ground. We've covered them up with rubble." So it looks to me like Netanyahu and Trump have made a huge error, a huge mistake.

It looks to me like the American military, Trump's advisors, were too weak to stand up to Netanyahu. This is Netanyahu's decision, not Trump's, and so we're in a predicament. The war can't go on because we don't have any means of fighting it. And if we use nukes, there goes Israel, because, as I said, Iran can hit their nuclear reactor, and the radiation from that—I mean, I assume from what I've read that there is a nuclear power station there. And if that's the case and it gets hit, then there's no cooling, no cooldown, and the thing blows up and becomes radioactive. So it's like a huge nuclear weapon going off. That's my understanding of it. And maybe all that's wrong—it's so hard to get good information. You never really know. But we'll see, in five more days, what happens next.

#Nima

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Here's, Paul, what Donald Trump said about this trade of formulas.

#Nima

Paul, let me add this to the scene. They have...

#Speaker 03

Thank you.

#Speaker 05

What about the Strait of Hormuz? Who's going to control that?

#Speaker 03

That will be opened very soon, if this works.

#Speaker 05

How soon? And who's in control of it? Will Iran still be able to control the flow of oil?

#Speaker 03

It'll be jointly controlled.

#Speaker 05

By whom?

#Speaker 03

Maybe me.

#Speaker 05

Maybe me.

#Speaker 03

Me and the Ayatollah—whoever the Ayatollah is, whoever the next Ayatollah is. And there'll also be a very serious form of regime change. Now, in all fairness, everybody from the regime has been killed.

#Nima

Yeah, it's kind of amazing.

#Paul

Yeah, I think he's convincing everybody that he's not really all there. And that's scary, because it means the whole government isn't going to do anything about it.

#Nima

If he's not there, who is? That's the big question. Netanyahu. He attacks it? Who's there?

#Paul

Oh, they're all Zionists. Look, none of those people—those people are good from the standpoint that they're Americans, they love their country, they don't hate white people. They favor a national existence, not a multicultural existence. They're all solid in that way, but they have no experience, no knowledge. I know more about all of their fields than they do. And there are a lot of people a lot more knowledgeable than me. So they're not really up to the job they've found themselves in because of this attack on Iran. And of course, they're all Zionists, so they're all allied with Israel. All their lives, they've been dependent on the Israel lobby. So how can they break from the Israel lobby? And if they break from Trump, they're fired. I mean, look what happened to Marjorie Taylor Greene, to Thomas Massie, to this latest—uh, I forget his name now. He was, what, head of counterintelligence?

#Nima

Yeah, Joe Kent.

#Paul

Joe Kent. See, the last I heard, they're trying to find some way to prosecute him. So anybody who takes a position different from the official narrative, they go after. There's no way to penetrate their ignorance—it's shielded. And if you say something to try to get their attention, like, "Hey, you're about to step on a rattlesnake, or a king cobra, or a black mamba," they want to kill you, destroy you, get you out of Congress, prosecute you. I mean, there's no way for him to be told, even if his government understood the situation. You have to remember, the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was pulled out of retirement by Trump to put in charge of the military because Trump trusted him. Well, this general told Trump, "Do not attack Iran." And Trump said, "Well, Netanyahu tells me it's okay."

So he won't even listen to the people he puts in place who actually know something. Well, now, his Secretary of Defense—he's okay in the sense I mentioned—but he doesn't really understand the complexity of this kind of situation. And neither does Marco Rubio at the State Department. He just doesn't know this. The people on the National Security Council, I've never heard of. I spent 25 years in Washington; I was a trustee of the Committee on the Present Danger. I was on secret presidential committees investigating the CIA. I've never heard of these people who are now advising him on national security. Well, this tells you it's not the kind of government that can cope intelligently with this type of situation. And as I've already said, even if it were, there's no way for them to get through to Trump, because he just sees it as disloyal. If you tell him the truth, you're disloyal.

#Nima

Because there are some reports in the mainstream media that the head of Mossad was behind all this intelligence given to Donald Trump, saying the government in Iran would collapse in a short period of time—four days. It's amazing to me how they have that kind of leverage over the whole system in the United States.

#Paul

Well, as I've told you before on this program, the Israel lobby has more leverage than anyone. In fact, they've got more leverage than Congress, the president, and the entire executive branch put together. I've told you they can reach into Catholic universities and cancel tenure decisions just because they don't like the professor.

#Nima

Hmm.

#Paul

They can reach into red states like Texas and Florida and get laws passed saying that if you criticize Israel, you can't work for the state or have a contract with the state. That's unbelievable power, and they're on the verge of being able to criminalize, in American law, any criticism of Israel. Already, if you're an American student at an American university and you criticize Israel, you get expelled. If you're a foreign student, you get deported. Of all the countries in the world, only Israel has this kind of power.

If they can control all of this—the media as well, entertainment as well—they shape people's attitudes through movies and by deciding who they sponsor. In entertainment, that determines who gets ahead. It's the same in book publishing. If you want to be a successful author, your books have to be favorable to Israel. Otherwise, they won't get published, or if they do, they won't get reviewed. So the reach of their power is overwhelming. No one who's employed or dependent in any way can say anything against them. Only independent people who want nothing from the system can criticize them.

#Nima

Paul, here's what Scott Besant said about the Strait of Hormuz. You know, the Trump administration issued—well, they lifted the sanctions on Iran for 30 days. The sanctions aren't working anymore because of the shortage of oil, the shortage of energy in the market. Here's what Scott Besant said. It's a bit confusing when you try to understand what he's talking about.

#Speaker 06

Helping to fund a country that it's currently at war with, Mr. Secretary?

#Speaker 04

Again, Kristen, why don't we have good facts here? That Iranian oil was always going to be sold to the Chinese, and it was going to be sold at a discount. So which is better, Kristen? Which is better—oil prices spiking to \$150 and them getting 70% of that, or oil prices below \$100? It's better to have them where they are now. And to be clear, we had always planned for this contingency. About 140 million barrels are out on the water. In essence, we're jujitsu-ing the Iranians—we're using their own oil against them. We have a much better line of sight, to be clear, at Treasury, on where this oil goes. If it goes to Indonesia, Japan, or Korea, we have a much better line of sight and can block the accounts the oil goes into. When it goes into China, it gets completely recycled. So, to be clear, that \$14 billion number is grossly overstated.

#Nima

What do you make of it, Paul? He's trying desperately to explain the situation, but the more he explains it, the more confusing it gets.

#Paul

Okay, what he's doing is—well, the Iranian situation not working out like Washington expected has caused oil and gas prices to go way up. So, in other words, the Trump administration has been forced, by their failure at war, to remove the sanctions on all the Iranian oil that's already loaded on ships sitting somewhere. He said, "We've now got all of that oil to put into the market to hold down the price that's being pushed up by the restriction on movement through the Strait of Hormuz." So he's explaining away the fact that the Iranians' failure to collapse has forced the Americans to ease the oil prices that were about to wreak havoc on the world economy. And his explanation is, "Ha, see, we've got all this Iranian oil at sea, and we removed the sanctions."

#Speaker 04

So now that adds to the oil supply and helps keep the price down.

#Paul

If we don't do that, the price will go up. So would you rather have \$100 a barrel or \$150 a barrel? If we keep these ships from delivering the oil, the price will be \$150. If we let them deliver it, the price will be \$100. So that's his argument—that's what he's saying. But the question is, once that oil is delivered, where does the next supply come from? There isn't an endless number of ships out there with oil on them. It's short term—it's a way to try to reassure the oil markets right now. Look, we're going to have—I forget the figure he used—was it 140 million barrels? Anyway, it was a large

amount of oil that's already loaded and could be delivered. And if it is, it will reduce the pressure on oil prices caused by the fact that the Iranians are only letting some ships through the strait. You know, everyone says the strait's closed.

It's not. It's closed to certain people, certain countries, to certain deliveries. But the Iranians let ships go out to China and no doubt to other countries, so it's not really closed. What the Treasury Secretary may mean is, "Well, we've got all this oil that can go to the countries blocked from going through the strait." Well, that's true, but it's a short-term thing. Once you deliver it and it's used, what's next? If it's 140 million barrels—I can't remember the number—where does the next load come from? Of course, he didn't address that question, but that's the real question. He has a short-term palliative issue, but that doesn't deal with the problem that once that oil is in the pipeline and used, what stops the price from going up to 150 or whatever he's worried about? So that's my explanation of it, Nima. I think that's correct.

#Paul

If this war can't really continue because Iran can stop oil from coming out of the Persian Gulf, the consequences for energy prices and production costs everywhere would be huge. All the countries would be dealing with unemployment, inflation, maybe even depression—it would be horrendous. And everyone would blame America. So that adds to Trump's difficulty. Yeah.

#Speaker 04

I think it increases the likelihood that he'll declare victory and go home.

#Paul

But you see, as I've stressed before in our discussions, there's no victory for Iran as long as the agenda of Greater Israel exists. Because that agenda leaves no place for Iran. All of the Muslim countries—not just the Arab ones—have to be eliminated. And I think, as I mentioned in our last conversation last month, the former prime minister of Israel, Bennett, came to Washington to meet at a conference of American Jewish organizations and declared, "Turkey is the next Iran." That was the message: start demonizing Turkey, because once we take Iran out, they're next. So Trump going home removes our participation. But the question is, why should Iran stop trying to destroy Israel? Because Israel has not renounced the Zionist agenda of Greater Israel, which is said to stretch from the Nile to Pakistan.

That means the entire Middle East is destined to be under Israeli control. So for Iran, the only way it can negotiate—the only thing it can possibly negotiate—is: does Israel renounce the agenda of Greater Israel? If you don't, we're in a permanent war until one or the other goes. And we can destroy you just as easily, if not more easily, than you can destroy us, because we're a big country and you're a tiny little place. If we hit that nuclear power station, you're all dead. But we're a huge

country, the size of Western Europe. So this is the thing I'm not confident the Iranians understand—that solving this war solves nothing for them. As long as the agenda of Greater Israel exists, Iran is under the threat of annihilation. It may well be that we're not going to do it for them, like we did in Libya, Iraq, and Syria.

#Paul

As long as Greater Israel remains an agenda, Iran has to destroy Israel or be destroyed. And that's completely independent of whether the United States is part of the war.

#Nima

Yeah, I think the other reason, Paul, that I'm not very optimistic about ending the conflict—ending the war anytime soon—is the situation between Israel and Lebanon. The defense minister of Israel said they're going to do the same in the southern part of Lebanon, that they're going to destroy everything as they did in Gaza. Iran is not going to let them do that. That's the continuation of the conflict.

#Paul

Well, that's far less important than the agenda of Greater Israel. But it's not clear that Hezbollah would let Israel do that. I know the Hezbollah leadership has been decimated by their own total stupidity. But still, it's a fairly hard force, and it's twice defeated the Israeli army. And as Israel doesn't have any rockets and is relying on its air force—and you know, bombing has never won a war—the question is, can the Israeli Defense Force, whose main combat experience is killing women and children, go up against a hardened militia like Hezbollah? In the past, no, they weren't able to. They twice had to give up and leave. I think the Iranians, if they want to survive in the long term, have either got to destroy Israel completely, totally, or they've got to force on Israel an agreement that it gives up the Zionist agenda of Greater Israel. And there has to be some enforcement mechanism for that. If Iran makes any other kind of agreement, it'll probably end up being destroyed.

#Nima

Paul, before wrapping up, do you see Europe playing an important role in what's going on? Or do you think Europe is just losing its relevance in the whole calculation?

#Paul

Well, why is it important to Europe? They've already had energy problems because of America blowing up the North Sea pipeline, and now they're going to have more energy problems because America is joining Israel in this attack on the Persian Gulf. They say that Trump and Israel are losing the war—so what do they want to join a losing war for?

#Speaker 04

Hmm.

#Paul

What can they do, anyhow? I think the British have one aircraft carrier, the French have one aircraft carrier, and we already know the American aircraft carriers can't get close enough to the scene to participate in the combat. So what are their aircraft carriers going to do? Are they going to send a NATO army?

#Nima

Actually, NATO is pulling out of Iraq because they're under a lot of pressure from the resistance there.

#Paul

Yeah, I don't think there's any fight left in the Europeans at all. I don't even think they have a national consciousness anymore. They're all multicultural; they're being turned into the European Union. It's no longer France or Germany—it's the European Union. They're no longer French; they're Europeans. They're no longer Germans; they're Europeans. They're not Italians; they're Europeans. How does a French person become a European? And what kind of national consciousness does he have if he shares it with a multicultural collection of people that France has fought for centuries? So I don't think Europe is capable of any combat anywhere. In the end, it really just comes down to whether Netanyahu uses nukes.

#Nima

I think next week we'll have some sort of understanding of what's going on in the Middle East, at least within this time frame of Donald Trump—five days. Let's see what happens. Thank you, Paul. Okay, Nima, thank you. I look forward to seeing what happens; we'll try to make sense of it. Yeah, exactly. It's so difficult to do that, by the way.

#Paul

I agree, I agree. I wouldn't bet much money on anything I've said, but I think it's the best kind of explanation we can come up with. Yeah, yeah.

#Nima

Exactly. See you soon, Paul.

#Paul

Okay, Nima. Bye. Send me the URL.

#Nima

Sure. Send it right away. Bye.

#Paul

Goodbye.