

Paul Craig Roberts: 48 HOURS TO WAR: Trump's Ultimatum to Iran EXPLAINED

Middle East crisis escalates: Trump issues 48-hour ultimatum to Iran over Strait of Hormuz, threatening energy strikes. Iran warns of regional retaliation. Iranian missiles hit near Israel's Dimona nuclear facility. "Operation Epic Fury" announced, claiming Iranian military degraded, then strikes paused citing negotiations—Tehran denies talks occur. Analysis points to US/Israel missile shortages versus Iran's proven long-range capabilities. Concerns mount over nuclear escalation risks, oil market disruption, and the "Greater Israel" agenda fueling conflict. With Europe sidelined, the coming days may determine if diplomacy or further confrontation prevails. Key questions: Can sanctions relief stabilize energy markets? Will regional allies be drawn deeper into conflict? What role do nuclear deterrents play? This discussion examines military realities, diplomatic maneuvers, and the high-stakes calculus shaping one of the region's most dangerous confrontations in decades.

#Nima

Donald Trump's new position — you know, he said there's a 48-hour ultimatum for 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 — we're going to hit 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 at — the nuclear power plant, but it was at 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 on the power of Donald Trump.

#Paul

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 I said, "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 cost 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 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 the Iranians have agreed not to make a nuke, we've stopped their missile production, and so everything's over — we're going to remove the sanctions on Iran, we have victory, and we're going home. Then he'll 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 footing. That's one way you can read this. The other is, it's the usual Washington trick — he needs five days to get ready 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.

And neither was Diego Garcia, 4,000 kilometers away, which is supposedly, according to American military estimates, twice the range an Iranian missile can travel. So you can see that Trump said, "Ooh, we got in over our heads. I need five days to get forces assembled," and so on. So I don't know which way to read it. We'll know in five days. It's clear that the Iranians deny there are any talks going on. And therefore, I kind of suspect it's not so much to deceive Iran—because they know there are no talks going on—as it is to create a scenario of American victory and withdrawal. So I don't know what else you can say about it. At this point, clearly the United States and the Israelis were wrong about the staying power of Iran. And clearly, intelligence was wrong about the reach of their missiles and the ability of Iran to penetrate both American and Israeli defenses.

#Paul

So this changed.

#Paul

The situation changed dramatically, and Trump's got to find some way out. It suits me fine 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 him 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—it's not just yesterday—today they hit Dimona again, and this is going to continue.

#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 Israel's nuclear missile capability, 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 will 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—senselessly 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—get the whole attention of the American public onto some other issue?

Now, I can't say what he'll do for sure, because the Israel lobby in the United States is the most powerful of all lobbies. And 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. But, you know, we've been hearing this about Ukraine for how long? A year, you know. 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.

You know, 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—about 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

Here's what the Iranian general, or rather the 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 that this means the war will continue, and there's no end in sight, at least from Iran's point of view. 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, and I've tried to investigate this as best I can. The real difference in the ability to stay in 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 also, the navies—they're not in the game. If the Iranian ballistic missiles can hit 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 get to the battle and back without being refueled, and maybe more than once.

I don't really know. We're at a huge disadvantage, and 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 enough troops there 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? And if you get them there, how are you going to get them out? It would just be a sacrifice of the troops.

#Paul

Surely someone in the military...

#Paul

It's 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 he really has 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 the conflict. It won't go away.

#Nima

That's not going to happen, Paul.

#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 Iran is concerned, but I think the United States would be, because it lets the genie out of the bottle. It's been locked up since 1945. And what would be the effects of the nukes—the radiation, the fallout? 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—trusting Trump, wanting to negotiate.

You know, the Chinese want to have trade talks. What for? Talks don't mean anything. 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." Right now, if I had to bet, I'd say that Trump wants to get out. 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'd 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 all I can say about it. I don't know what will happen.

#Nima

Today, Paul, I talked with Professor Ted Postol. He told me that Iran has the capability—or has everything needed—to produce at least eleven nukes quickly, and it wouldn't take much time. I don't know what the main decision is on the part of the Iranians, but I assume they're going to take into account Netanyahu's behavior, because these people are not rational. They might do that, as you mentioned, and they're considering all these options on the Israeli side. And that would destroy

Israel—that would be the end of Israel—if they went that far and used nukes against Iran. That would 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. 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—and 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 with rubble.

#Paul

So...

#Paul

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, because 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—well, 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 cool down, and the thing blows up and it's 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's next.