

Pepe Escobar: What Washington Doesn't Understand: The Iran Ground War Trap

This interview argues that a ground war with Iran would be disastrous, stressing Iran's large, battle-ready forces, deep military experience, and strong public unity. It claims pressure and assassinations have only hardened decision-makers, while resistance movements across the region are regrouping and growing stronger. The discussion also portrays U.S. leadership as misinformed and easily manipulated, warning that attempts to escalate could backfire badly, reshape regional power, and weaken Washington's position globally.

#Nima

Pepe, many people don't really know about Iran's ground forces. They're the strongest part of the army and the IRGC. I think the United States would face something they've never experienced before if they went there.

#Pepe

That direction. Talk about that a little bit, Nima. Talk about it for our audience, if you can.

#Nima

Because right now they have more than one million soldiers ready to fight—ready to fight on the ground. And they're so... Pepe, I did my military service in the Navy, in the northern part of Iran, in Anzali, in Bandar Anzali.

#Pepe

Bandar Anzali too—which, by the way, was bombed a few days ago. You saw that, right?

#Nima

Yeah, yeah. The ground forces of Iran are really unbelievable. They're so well equipped, so ready, you know, in every way you can imagine. That's why I don't really see the United States having a good option going in that direction. That's a problem—a big problem. They'd be slaughtered. Nobody wants to see that. And Donald Trump could go down. This is a swamp for Donald Trump, a trap. The more he struggles, Pepe, the deeper he sinks, in my opinion, if he goes for a ground invasion of Iran.

#Pepe

But he's not being fed correct information, Nima. Now it's already leaked that it's basically two or three-minute videos every day—five minutes at most—a collage of images showing successes, bombings, and so on. So obviously he doesn't read. He's incapable of contextualizing. He can't see nuance. He behaves like a two-year-old, not a four-year-old—a two-year-old. And obviously, all these sycophants around him, who are immensely mediocre, that's it: "Ah, we cannot enrage the boss." That's what he gets every day. So no wonder he doesn't have access to qualified information. And even if some people have qualified information—the CIA, the Pentagon, and so on—they're not admitted into the Oval Office.

#Nima

What's happening right now in the minds of, you know, most decision-makers in Iran comes down to two options: one, negotiating with the United States, and the other, deciding everything on the battlefield. And from what I've seen so far, more than 99 percent is about fighting, because no one sees any kind of positive outcome through these negotiations—talking with the Americans—because it's all about deceiving and creating some sort of fake positions. Then comes the attack on Iran again and again, to assassinate the leaders, assassinate the commanders—nothing new there. Right now, that's why, Pepe, what's happening is that for such a long time—more than 20 years—the right wing of the government, the conservatives, have been arguing: why are we letting these people use the Strait of Hormuz?

#Pepe

For more than 20 years—and that's what's happening right now.

#Nima

Most of these liberals—you know, neoliberals—in Iran are laughing at them. These people are crazy. They don't know, they don't understand the reality. But this is the reality of what's going on right now. That's why those people are the main decision-makers. Because after all, you know what the United States and Israel have done so far: they've assassinated all the people who were somehow keen, somehow eager to talk to someone, to make some sort of democratic outcome or some kind of bridge between Iran and the West. But they've assassinated all of them.

#Pepe

Exactly. Apart from Araghchi and Qalibaf. And now we know the story—that they were spared. They were on the list to be killed, and there was an intervention: "No, we need somebody to talk to." Otherwise, who are they going to talk to? IRGC generals? No. IRGC generals send Mr. Khorramshahr's business card straight to your place. Qalibaf and Araghchi, at least—Araghchi experienced, face to face, the treachery of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, incapable of reading a report written in plain English. And Qalibaf, of course, is on another level. He's a much more hardcore character—very well

prepared, with a military background, fighter pilot, you name it—but he also understands diplomacy. After all, he's in the Majlis. In the Majlis, you have to be extremely diplomatic. That's it. And everybody else is a military commander.

#Nima

Ninety-nine percent of the people in power right now were involved in the Iran–Iraq War. They know what war is.

#Pepe

They know what real war means. These idiots in Washington—they don't know what war is. A war in the streets of Wall Street? Can you imagine a real war, with trenches and bombs? They have no idea.

#Nima

You know, the guy who was the IRGC commander, General Mohsen Rezaei—when he was head of the IRGC during the Iran–Iraq War, he was 24 years old. The thing is, these people don't understand—killing commanders isn't going to change anything.

#Pepe

No, this is the problem. And on top of it, you have layers—and the people in the second, third, fourth layer, they're almost as competent as the leaders. Absolutely. What do you think of the new secretary of the Security Council? He seems to be much more hardcore than Larijani. Much, much more.

#Nima

I think it's not even comparable. Not even comparable. He knows how to fight. He knows how to... He's not that much—after all, he studied economics at the university. He understands the economic side of what's going on. But still, he's far, far to the right. And he's one of those people who, when it came to the Strait of Hormuz, said it should be closed. And that's what's happening right now. It was even under his command—it was under Larijani's command. You have to think about how things are changing here. And you know, Pepe, the other part of the war is the psychological war in Iran. They were completely defeated in Iran. That's why they're not talking about regime change anymore.

People from the right, from the left, from the middle—all of them, all young, all together—they're ready to fight against the United States. And they see this as the destiny of the Iranian people. They've been through this before; Iranian history isn't just a couple of hundred years, it goes back thousands. They've dealt with invasions before, they know how to handle that. They have all this history behind them, and they have the means. That's why, Pepe, I think the basic question right

now is: why is the president of the United States begging for negotiations if they're winning? He said, "I'm winning, I destroyed everything—no army, no navy, no air defense system, nothing left." So what? Why are you begging for negotiations, for a ceasefire, if that's the case?

#Pepe

Exactly. Well, we're not dealing with—once again, we are dealing with a grown-up, an old man, theoretically grown-up, but psychologically a two-year-old, four-year-old at most. Totally megalomaniac, a narcissist unbounded, incomparable in terms of narcissism, which he uses, of course, as a cover—as his shield against his own mediocrities and incapacities. The fact is, he's essentially a coward, he doesn't display any empathy toward anybody or anything, and the whole planet revolves around him. And now, in a position of power as president of the United States, it's very, very easy to believe that the world revolves around you. This happened with previous American presidents, but not to this level. He's mentally unprepared to be—you know, to take care of a high school, which is already too much.

Can you imagine the so-called invincible or indispensable nation? That's extremely complicated. And it's very easy to manipulate him, Nima. The best example is if you feed him selected information—that's the only thing he'll absorb, because he doesn't have the intellectual curiosity to look elsewhere, or even to look at those gigantic, voluminous intel reports sitting on his table every day. He doesn't even open them. So it's very easy—very, very easy—to manipulate him. And in the case of the genocidal war criminal in Tel Aviv, who went to the U.S. seven times in the past year, year and a half or so—he's always in D.C.—it's very, very easy to manipulate. And he's wily. He may be a war criminal, but he's very, very clever. So he turns Trump around like... it's very, very easy.

And on top of it, he's surrounded by mediocrities—like, you know, the Secretary of Energy, right? Rick Perry, who's basically a grifter, a financial grifter. Then there's the absolutely ghastly son-in-law, Kushner. We can call him the silent gangster in the whole mafia enterprise. Extremely dangerous. Not very bright, but brutal as hell. The bright one in the couple is Ivanka. And I had confirmation from people who know the couple closely. They said, look, Ivanka is the brains. He's an absolute asshole. But he can talk directly to Trump anytime, and Trump listens to him. Very, very dangerous. So it's so easy to manipulate him. As much as Obama was a disaster, at least Obama, intellectually, was not a total idiot. He read.

He listened to people. Okay, decision-making is another story. But intellectually, you can't compare the two. At least you had a president who was capable of enunciating a thought, stringing sentences together, developing a cogent argument—actually debating, which is something he did when he was in university. So this is essential. The psychological profile of this character is essential because now, because of his ultimate decision—the decision may have been taken for him by higher powers. We know who they are: the usual suspects, the donors, the super-financiers, etc. The Zionist International Axis, you name it. It was their decision. But they found the perfect messenger.

And that's why we are in these dark, dark times—the dark clouds enveloping the whole planet, in fact. He didn't have the intellectual discernment or the capacity to analyze the consequences of something like this. It's crazy, because even people who are functionaries of the system inside the CIA, for instance, or who worked with the CIA, can't see it. And now some of them, at least, are coming out and saying, no, the whole thing was completely absurd from the beginning. So this proves once again that he's impermeable to self-analysis, to start with, and to critical thinking. If you don't read, if you think you're the king of the world, if you're an unbounded Narcissus—well, of course it's impossible.

You blind yourself. You're deaf and dumb and blind to reality. And that explains the enigma. Every day we're "winning." We're tired of winning. We destroyed everything. That's it. This is the subtext of this blah, blah, blah every day. It's that. Because he only has a set of information that conforms to his own prejudices. That's the short version. It's much more complicated. It would warrant—well, you know, people write books about serial killers. This would warrant a book about an extreme narcissistic personality who happens to have virtually unlimited power. How dangerous that is. Well, we're all living under this cloud right now.

#Nima

Pepe, it seems that the whole concept of war is based on Israel—on the security of Israel and what the outcome would be for Israel. I'd say two important things have happened so far. One of them was the Iranian ballistic, hypersonic missile hitting Dimona. That one was a total game changer.

#Pepe

This is a psychological shock—not only for Israel, but for everybody. Exactly. Yes, go ahead, please.

#Nima

The second one is how Hezbollah is capable of hitting the central and southern parts of Israel.

#Pepe

Remember that we talked about this a lot, and we were always trying to remind our audience that Hezbollah is restructuring. It's going to take some time; it's a very complicated process. This is what I heard in Lebanon last year when I went to the funeral of Sheikh Nasrallah and talked to Hezbollah political leaders. They were saying, yes, it's complicated. There was this decapitation, but our second, third, and fourth levels are very, very good. They're young and very well prepared. It's going to take time, but we're already doing it. That was last year. This year, we're already seeing the results. This is the second, third, and fourth generation who are in command now in Hezbollah.

They're killing Merkavas. Now it's a sport—"Okay, how many Merkavas are we going to destroy today? Easy. Let's go." That's it. It takes a while to restructure a military environment, and Hezbollah is complicated because they have their social wing, which is extremely active. They have to provide at least some relief to entire neighborhoods in the south of Beirut and villages all across southern Lebanon. And on top of that, at the same time, they have to reorganize their military machine. It's immensely impressive. You can only do this with cadres at the highest level—well-educated, alert, dynamic, creative, and as forceful as the previous generation.

And, of course, they learn from the previous generation. In Iran, we're witnessing the same process. The people who are now, let's say, in the second layer replacing all the leaders who were assassinated are keeping it up. And, of course, the drive is strong, because they saw what happened to their mentors. All of that is subordinated to a higher purpose—and when I say higher, I mean not only in geopolitical terms, but in spiritual, ethical, and moral terms. And with the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei, even more so. They're fighting for his memory, for his legacy, for the continuation of an idea. It's extremely important.

So I've always immensely admired my Iranian friends, Nima Alkhorshid, who are experts in Shiite theology and Western philosophy. There are very few places in the world where you find this mix. You know, they can have a full discourse on the intrinsic meaning of Velayat-e Faqih, and then they jump to talk about Empedocles and Aristotle. It's brilliant—absolutely brilliant. When the Americans can't string maybe even one sentence together—can you imagine two?—which is the case of the push-up clown secretary of forever wars. There you go. It's an intellectual war, a war of intellect against supreme stupidity. No question. Demonstrated individually by people in positions of power.

#Nima

Just imagine you're Donald Trump coming to power and seeing that Assad is gone, you know, the assassination of the head of Hezbollah. You see assassinations in Iran, commanders in Iran, and you think that the acts of resistance are somehow disappearing from the scene. "Let's go after Iran right now." This started with Yemen, you remember. He started with Yemen. He tried to destroy Yemen before going after Iran, but that was an unsuccessful mission on his part. Still, he somehow felt that because of these fake riots in Iran, the people were going to do that for him.

As he would, you know. I think what was so misleading for Donald Trump was the case of Venezuela. He thought he could manage something like that in Iran—that it would be the end of the acts of resistance. What he ended up with, Pepe, is a strong Iran from within, not only militarily but internally as well. A new Hezbollah in Iraq, which is so powerful. They're ready to be even more—well, I'd say they're going to be the next face of the Iraqi government. They're going to capture power; they're going to be in charge in the near future. They're deciding everything in Iraq right now.

#Pepe

They are very capable. Yemen hasn't joined so far. Yemen, exactly—capable, cultured, very well-educated. There are excellent universities in Yemen. They learn everything. They have their own industrial and military complex—everything. And in Iraq, wow. I met Hashd al-Shabi years ago in Baghdad, and I was extremely impressed. When I met them, Mohandas was still, let's say, Secretary General, maybe the number two. This was before he was assassinated with General Soleimani. He spent one afternoon with us, Nima, in a safe house inside the Green Zone. You need guts to do something like that. I remember the Green Zone during the Iraq war, you know.

And obviously, I never entered because I refused to go into the Green Zone. Whenever I wanted to interview somebody, we used to meet in the Red Zone—sometimes even in front of the gates. You know, when I was interviewing someone from parliament, I'd say, "Okay, meet me at the gate or outside," right? So Hashd al-Shabi—it's fantastic. They took us to their own safe house inside the Green Zone, maybe a five-minute walk from the American embassy. Only if you have nerves of steel can you do something like that. And they are perfectly capable—all of them, extremely capable.

And it's a good sign that this Iraqi government—it's a complicated arrangement. We met the current prime minister. I was there, what, two years ago or so. At least the militias, officially, have the right to defend themselves. It's not that Baghdad is openly endorsing what they're doing, but at least, okay, you have the right to defend yourselves and defend against attacks on the Republic of Iraq. Excellent. So they can go on. And de facto, they've already expelled the Americans. The Americans and NATO are, for all practical purposes, out of Iraq. The problem is—and this is a larger-than-life problem.

#Nima

There's no Green Zone anymore.

#Pepe

No, the money—the money is not in Iraq. The money is in the bloody Federal Reserve in New York. So the Iraqis can't even use the money from their oil exports because it's automatically confiscated by the Americans. So how are you going to turn this around? And it's true. As you mentioned, it's true. There's no more Green Zone, in fact. Yes, the Green Zone is still there, but it's essentially offices of the Iraqi administration—the Baghdad administration. There's one five-star hotel where foreign guests usually stay. The American embassy, which is a gigantic monster—we don't know what's going to happen to it. It will continue to be attacked, no question about that. But the symbolism of the Green Zone is there, and it's controlled by the Americans. This is over. It's dead—twenty-three years after Shock and Awe. It's something that many of us will never forget. Well, twenty-three years in historical terms is not much. They did it. They did it in the end.

#Nima

And what's happening in Iraq isn't going to stay in Iraq—it's going to spread to Kuwait, in my opinion.

#Pepe

Absolutely. You know what would be the ultimate poetic justice, Nima? Eventually—maybe not now, but assuming this war ends, say in a few months—Kuwait could be reabsorbed by Iraq. Because don't forget, Kuwait is part of Iraq. It was part of the province of Basra. So for all practical purposes, Kuwait is Iraq. Saddam Hussein was right when he said that at the time. So this would be the ultimate poetic justice, if it happens—historical poetic justice.

#Nima

And it's not going to be an invasion. It's going to be a grassroots, you know, sort of movement in Kuwait—joining the Iraqi resistance, in my opinion.

#Pepe

Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because history comes up with stuff that is—exactly—it can be mind-boggling, right?

#Nima

I think the future is so different. And I don't see Donald Trump being capable of changing anything in West Asia, because the history—the scale of what's going on—is so huge that the Trump administration doesn't matter. I think there's some sort of recognition on the part of the Europeans. That's why they're not getting that much involved in the Strait of Hormuz. They understand what's going on. You know, it's a long history for the British Empire in the Suez Canal.

#Pepe

And they're not... Can you imagine? In 1956, the Suez Crisis was de facto the end of the British Empire. And now we have 2026, the Strait of Hormuz—the beginning of the end of the American Empire. That would be another outstanding historical poetic justice, you know, if it happens.

#Nima

Yeah, exactly. Muito obrigado, Pepe. Obrigado a você.

#Pepe

As always. It was great talking to you. The next few days are going to be very, very heavy—so heavy, yeah. Everything could be turned upside down.

#Nima

Yeah, and we all know that Donald Trump wants to end the conflict before going to China.

#Pepe

By the way, don't forget that now we have a date, Nima. He's going to China on May 14. So why did they already choose a date? Because, in his own calculations, the war might be over by then—he needs to go to China in a Trump-manufactured position of force. But what if he goes to China as a loser? Don't forget that, once again, it's on, and it's like a think piece about the future: oil at 40 a barrel or oil at 150 a barrel? Same thing in the script to China—position of force or total loser?