

USA Plays for Time: Prepping Invasion, Gaming Markets, Loosing War | Johnson

Former CIA analyst, Larry Johnson is quite sure; there is no "grand strategy" or "4D Chess" going on. The US/Israeli coalition war against Iran is just a rolling disaster (academics would call it "path dependent") in which one bad decision leads to the next and by now a ground invasion with US boots on the ground is basically inevitable because they already went through the built up of the forces—so you gotta use 'em. But what can they do? And what will happen once Iran then obliterates them? Well, buckle up because this is ain't gonna be pretty. However, the noble men and women in Washington still manage to game the markets and make a lot of money while we are waiting for the troop build up to be completed. What a horror show. Support Larry: <https://sonar21.com> Support us by subscribing on substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Shop & Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com>

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody. This is Pascal Lottaz from Neutrality Studies. It is March 31st, 2026, and we are joined again by Larry C. Johnson. Larry, welcome back.

#Larry C. Johnson

Hey, thanks for the invite, man. I really appreciate it.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for taking the time, as always, in your late evening. It's still March 30th for you, of course. Tell me, the last time we spoke was about ten days ago—what's your assessment of the past week or so of the Iran war, and especially the kind of very erratic ups and downs coming out of the White House?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, if you're following Donald Trump, you know, imagine you're sitting at a Wimbledon tennis match—boom, boom, boom. You'd have to wear a neck brace watching Donald Trump change all his positions. I mean, he's all over the place—right to left, up and down. The latest... Remember, last time we talked, Scott Besson, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Trump had lifted all the oil sanctions on Iran. Why? Oh, we've got to get as much oil out there as possible, got to keep the price down. Then today—or yesterday, yeah, early this morning, Monday morning, Washington, D.C. time—Trump is out talking about how he's not going to seize Karg Island and blow up all the Iranian

oil wells. I'm thinking, huh, wouldn't that reduce oil availability by taking all that Iranian oil off the market?

#Pascal

So I'm going to ask Trump: which is it?

#Larry C. Johnson

My favorite meme so far is Trump lying on a psychiatrist's couch, and the psychiatrist is sitting next to him saying, "So, Mr. President, these two Iranians you've been talking to—are they in the room with us now?"

#Pascal

I mean, the whole idea that Trump is actually doing diplomacy with Iran—that they have back channels, a 15-point plan, a 17-point plan, and everything's going well, Pakistan is helping, things are winding down—I mean, it's all a ruse again. Or maybe not even a ruse; it's just dressing up for the American public, I think. It's theater at this point, isn't it?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, it's theater, and it's also market manipulation. This is the second week in a row that, early in the morning, Donald Trump tweets, "Oh man, we're so close to having a deal. Peace is at hand." You know, he's got his Neville Chamberlain moment—everything but the white paper in his hand—claiming he's got a deal. And that's about an hour and a half before the stock market opens. When the U.S. market opens—boom—up 600 points. I'll guarantee you somebody connected with Trump is making a lot of money off that. So Trump is engaged in deliberate market manipulation, because what he's saying is just flat-out not true. I think in other quarters they'd call that a lie. There are no direct conversations with Iran, number one. Whatever conversations are taking place are through a third party. Previously it was Oman, back on February 26th, and today it's Pakistan, ostensibly.

#Larry C. Johnson

But they're not even full conversations, because Pakistan will deliver the message, and more often than not, Iran just says, "We don't have anything to say to that," and doesn't respond. Meanwhile, the buildup of U.S. military forces continues—the movement of amphibious equipment to the area, to be used in a possible amphibious operation against Iran. I can't rule out that they might actually try to take Karsk Island, as well as Omesh, and maybe Bandar al-Bas. They may try more than one. I mean, there are really a lot of rumors swirling right now, and you don't know how much of that is deliberate, to create disinformation.

#Pascal

I mean, listening to you, I get the impression that what they're doing right now is, again, they need a little bit of time to amass enough troops to have a good shot at a ground invasion of some kind—some strategic island or something that somebody sold to Trump as a good idea. And Trump says, in his usual business attitude, "Okay, then let's make a buck or two while we wait," right? So just up and down, string the people along, keep the market where it's useful. And then boom—we strike when nobody expects it, and we're going to laugh and have a jolly good time when finally all the dreams come true. Is that kind of the idea?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, yeah. His art of the deal includes lying and throwing your opponent off balance, lulling them into a sense that everything's okay, that we're all on track. And then, yeah—boom—out of the blue, you sucker punch.

#Pascal

Yeah, but at this point, you kind of wonder—who's the enemy? I mean, the Iranians understand all of this. They're prepared for it. They say, like, "Please come, we are happy to obliterate you." I mean, if that's what you want—they almost literally say that. I can't help but notice your cap: "We, the people, are pissed off." And we've had this huge march—beautiful cap, by the way. We've had this march, these demonstrations in Washington the other day. I mean, is Trump at this point basically trying to lull everybody inside the United States into just not rising up more? Because this seems to be getting bad.

#Larry C. Johnson

He's painted himself into a corner. The scapegoat so far appears to be the head of Mossad, who reportedly assured Trump and Bibi that the Iranian regime was just a house of cards—needing only one strong wind, one good blow for it to collapse—and that the people of Iran would be walking in the streets to create a new government. Well, that turned out not to be true. Iran had prepared layered defenses, and they're all disconnected, so it's not dependent on just one node. It's a multi-nodal—or let's call it multi-polar—defense. But multi-polarity? Multi-nodal.

#Pascal

The node is a better metaphor.

#Larry C. Johnson

Okay.

#Pascal

They call it “mosaic.” The term they use is “mosaic defense.” So, like, the different parts of the mosaic play together to create the whole picture. Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

So, Iran responded very rapidly—and actually with a plan. They methodically took out a total of 13 different ground radar systems that were critical for keeping track of planes, missiles, drones, movements of personnel, and vessels on the ocean. Once those were taken out, the United States was effectively blinded. They tried to compensate by flying in the E-3 AWACS, the one that was destroyed at Prince Salid Air Base two days ago. And now, without that AWACS—because it was doing what the radars used to do—the U.S. forces are blind again. They really don’t see what’s going on out there.

#Pascal

What I mean is, the situation now—one month after the first strikes—in terms of U.S. military capability, is definitely worse than at the beginning. What I don’t really know is how good the situation is for Iran. All we know is that they’re still able to fire missiles, and more and more of them keep hitting Israel and the Gulf region. Now, if we were aware of that, then what could be a realistic scenario for U.S. ground troops to be engaged in Iran or on one of the islands? I mean, trying to take out the uranium—that’s just stupid, right? It makes no sense. But just putting them there for the sake of being there also makes no sense, because you’re a sitting duck. So, what in your mind would be something this Pentagon would actually sign off on, in terms of a strategic goal for an amphibious landing?

#Larry C. Johnson

There is none. That’s the problem. So let’s draw a parallel with World War II in the Pacific to get an idea of when military action is taken with a very specific goal in mind. That was the invasion of Guadalcanal by U.S. Marines. The purpose was to seize the airfield—later known as Henderson Airfield—so the Japanese couldn’t use it. Because if they had that airfield, they would essentially be able to control the sea around the island, up toward New Guinea as well as toward Australia. So it actually had strategic significance. The military mission there was clear: prevent the Japanese from controlling the island, secure it, control it, and establish your own air power there. That way, you created air cover around the island, which then enabled subsequent missions to be launched.

You don’t have that kind of clear objective here. So let’s start with Karg as an example. What’s the purpose there? To shut off Iranian oil? Well, Karg is not the only terminal Iran uses to load oil, so seizing it won’t actually cut off Iranian exports. What it does do is put U.S. troops in a position of great vulnerability, because they’d be on an island without effective underground fortifications or

bunkers to take cover in. And it's close enough to be bombed, strafed, hit with drones, or shelled with artillery. So whatever U.S. troops land there would face an immediate problem. What's the endgame? Is it to hold Karg Island? Okay—what does that get you? Bragging rights over territory?

That doesn't weaken Iran militarily at all. Will it disrupt their oil flow? Yes, it'll disrupt some of it, but they've got other options. So that's not the only alternative. Let's drop down to Qeshm. It's not quite an island because it's connected to the mainland, but it sits right next to the Strait of Hormuz, and it's a great location to monitor ships passing through. There are about 150,000 people on that island, so if you take it, you're going to have to deal with that population. Say you take it with 10,000 Marines—well, I'm not great at math, but they're outnumbered 15 to 1, at least, maybe 150 to 1. So they've got a problem right away with crowd control. And if some of those Iranians have firearms, they're going to be taking potshots at the Marines.

But you claim that the goal of that is to open up the Strait of Hormuz. Okay, what's keeping the Strait of Hormuz closed, apart from Iran saying it's closed and the insurance companies saying, "We're not insuring any ships"? There's the risk—you've got submarines, many submarines operated by Iran that can fire torpedoes. You've got mines, underwater drones that can maneuver and hit ships, drones that fly above the water, rockets, missiles. So Iran's got a whole range of weapons they can use, and none of the actions the troops take there on Qeshm Island solve that. So again, what's the point, other than just flexing muscles and saying, "Hey, we can land here on Iranian territory"?

#Pascal

Well, I mean, if you think about it in a twisted way, one of the goals could be to force Iran to use up its missile stockpile by firing at its own territory, right? You put those 10,000 troops there, tell them to dig in, maybe try to identify the bunkers Iran built, storm the bunkers, use them for your own troops, and you'd be forcing Iran to fire at itself until it's exhausted. I mean, I can imagine people thinking in those terms.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, it is. Again, think of it in terms of what you actually accomplish, from a strategic standpoint, by having them there. What you create is really a liability, right? And the liability is, how do you resupply those troops? You've got to feed them. They need a certain amount—something like 8,000 gallons of water a day. Where are you going to get that water from? It's not like you've got fresh mountain springs running there. Right.

#Pascal

A huge hostage-taking operation—those 150,000 people you just mentioned—take all of them hostage and tell Iran, "You have to let our water and supplies through, otherwise they die. And if you fire at us, we have our people in the hospital and in city hall," and so on. Something like that.

#Larry C. Johnson

Then you've certified yourself. The United States will have certified itself as a terrorist. That's what terrorists do.

#Pascal

Yeah, but terrorists don't care about that, do they?

#Larry C. Johnson

No, they don't. Well, in fact, even terrorists who take hostages usually do it for the purpose of using them.

#Pascal

Right.

#Larry C. Johnson

But again, in this situation, the ability of the United States to, you know, hold those people hostage—good God, that's going to be, you know, a horrific image broadcast around the world.

#Pascal

Well, I mean, it's Hollywood—United States, CNN, MSNBC—they'll be really great at saying that the United States sent its troops to defend the people of the island, right? A hundred and fifty thousand people are now being protected by the United States from the regime. They're now free—free people on the island.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, yeah. They'll try that, but you'll see what happens when the Iranians start fighting back—which they will. So again, I come back to this idea: think of it like fistfighting.

#Pascal

You don't just walk down the street and punch people at random. I mean, you could do that.

#Larry C. Johnson

But all that's going to do is attract attention, and you're probably going to get beaten up by an angry mob. That's different from stepping into a boxing ring with an opponent, where your goal is to knock

them out or disable them so they can't fight back. Or, if you're out on the street and see someone attacking someone else, you want to stop them. So in this case, what are you trying to accomplish with this show of military force? Because the size of the—well, I haven't even begun to discuss the problem of how you get the troops there. So, option one is that you land them amphibiously.

Well, Iran's got plenty of missiles, drones, and other things they can use to attack that kind of force if it's coming toward shore. So you're going to get boats sunk and sailors and Marines, or possibly Army personnel, drowning in the Strait of Hormuz. Or you can try to insert them via helicopters or parachutes. Again, the parachute option isn't great, especially on an island that size, and it doesn't necessarily get all your people into the fight right away. It could work if you did it by surprise, but all this talking about it is drawing more and more attention, and now the Chinese and Russian intelligence officers know what to focus on and what to collect to share with Iran.

So now, with all those negatives—and, you know, the troops, or let's call them the mid-level officers—I think they're just sick at heart over this. They recognize that it has the potential to be a complete disaster, something akin to what the Brits, Aussies, and New Zealanders suffered at Gallipoli in World War One. This could be the Persian Gulf version of Gallipoli, because once the troops are on land, they've got to figure out how to defend themselves—and, more importantly, how to feed themselves.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

Because normally, like a beach landing in Normandy in World War II—at Sword, Juno, Omaha, Utah, and I forget the other one—once they got ashore, the logistics lines started flowing in. That brought fuel, ammunition, and food to sustain the army so it could keep fighting and moving forward. You won't have that kind of sustainment for forces that land. I don't care whether they land at Bandar Abbas, at Qeshm, at Kharg, or at some other location. The other issue is, if you really want to open the strait, you've got to guarantee that nobody can take a potshot at a ship. You've got about a hundred miles of coastline there. The United States doesn't have enough troops to cover that entire area and make sure there isn't someone hiding up in one of the caves, ready to pop out and hit a ship.

#Pascal

You're right. As long as the risk of getting hit exists, the insurance companies won't come back. They just won't. I mean, if the risk is too high—because it's all a game of statistics for them, right, for

insurance—I just have such a hard time believing that nobody has a serious plan. I mean, somebody, even if it's a bad plan, even if it's a twisted plan, there must be some sort of plan. Otherwise, it just seems like—even suicide bombers have a plan.

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, did the U.S. have a plan when it invaded Iraq in 2003? No. No, it didn't.

#Pascal

They destroyed Iraq, and they did so successfully.

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, they got rid of Saddam, and then what? There was no plan for governing the country when L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer, who was a friend of mine back then, was named to be sort of the pooh-bah of Baghdad. He went in immediately and disarmed and fired all the Baathist members of the army, sent them home. They had their guns with them, for God's sake. Well, gee, next thing you know, you wind up with this rising tide of terrorist or guerrilla attacks against U.S. soldiers. And that continued for four more years, with the number of attacks going up every year. They started in, you know, June—effectively June of 2003—and they continued to escalate well into the summer of 2006, 2007. And there was no plan then.

They didn't sit there and say, "Okay, we need to have this person in charge of this, and this person in charge of that. And this is what we're going to do with the Ba'ath army." Because at the same time, the United States was viewing Iran—even back then—as a major threat. The people we put in charge in Baghdad were beholden to Iran. You know, it doesn't make sense. If you're saying Iran's your enemy, your other enemy, then why do you put all the folks who are sympathetic to Iran in positions of power in the new government? And, you know, I think the Iranians themselves probably thought, "This has got to be some trick." Because, like you, they were going, "Surely the Americans can't be this stupid."

#Pascal

Yeah, they can.

#Larry C. Johnson

I used to do the terrorism briefing and the human rights briefing for a course called the Senior Crisis Management Seminar. It brought in government officials from different countries. One time we had Saudi Arabia, another time Cyprus, then Greece, Egypt—we even had Israel, Colombia, India, and Pakistan. I did this with officials from over 80 countries. And the ones I dealt with after the 2003

invasion of Iraq—what was amazing was that, regardless of language, culture, or ethnic background, all of the foreign leaders I spoke with would come up to me and say, “Okay, what’s the real U.S. plan here?”

You know, what is actually—surely they’re lying to us about what they’re doing right now, that they’ve got some hidden secret agenda. And I had to tell them, no, really, we’re that stupid, guys. Please don’t assume that just because we’re pretty wealthy, we dress well, and we’ve got a clean area in our city, it means we actually know what we’re doing. We didn’t, which is why it was such a disaster. And I’m telling you, that’s what’s going on right now. There isn’t some grand master plan—they’re trying to figure it out as they go along.

#Pascal

They're trying to figure it out as they go along. It's like, you know, in political science we'd call it a path-dependent way to misery or something like that. You just play with what you've got, one day after another. And that actually makes it quite hard for any kind of opponent to figure out a counter-strategy if there is no strategy.

#Larry C. Johnson

Right. The counter-strategy for the opponent is to destroy the American army. Right—inflict as many casualties as you can, cause as much pain as you can, and make it as expensive as possible, to the point that the United States will no longer be able to continue. Because unless and until U.S. forces occupy Iran and are able to control all movement, allocate food and water, and everything else, there’s no way you can control Iran just by dropping bombs or threatening to drop bombs or destroy things. You know, it’s one thing if you destroy a power center—and Iran has made it clear: you destroy ours, we’re going to destroy yours, and it’s going to be worse for you. You knock out the desalination plant in Iran today, and I’ve heard varied numbers—2% to 8% of their potable water comes from that.

But when they knock it out in Kuwait—where Kuwait is 90% dependent on desalination plants—and the one that was destroyed, I believe, in Kuwait yesterday, accounts for 35% of their fresh water. So, you know, you would think these things through. And clearly, the United States didn’t even think through getting control of the Strait of Hormuz. You know, if you’re going to launch a surprise attack on Iran, the very first thing you do is move your naval force in and secure that Strait right away. Then you go out and start methodically preparing to attack those targets. The U.S. certainly didn’t do that. And now look at the results—you’ve got a global recession unfolding.

#Pascal

How is this going down now inside the U.S.? I know you're in Florida, not in D.C., but we've seen pictures of pretty large protests last weekend in D.C. What's the reaction of the general population to how this is unfolding?

#Larry C. Johnson

Well, right now, even the public opinion polls show that a majority of Americans—well over 54%—oppose this war. That's as of now. Once bodies start coming home in large numbers—and I'm not talking about two or three—but once the weekly toll starts getting up around a hundred, then all of a sudden there's going to be a severe, serious backlash in the United States.

#Pascal

So for the time being, it seems as if all sides, including Israel, are just set to go there, right? I mean, the U.S., Israel, and Iran, too, are basically saying, "Well, if this is what you want to do, then that's what's going to happen." I mean, we're not giving up—we have a strategy, and we can pull it off. So at the moment, it looks pretty even on the playing field. Or how does it look to you?

#Larry C. Johnson

No, actually, I think Iran clearly has the advantage. The United States no longer has secure bases it can operate from in the Persian Gulf. Every single one of them—including the Muafaq al-Salti base in Jordan—could be hit. The Financial Times yesterday published a piece saying that about 80% of Iran's missiles are getting through. In other words, the combined Israeli-U.S. air defense system is only 20% effective, which means it's basically ineffective. So the economic problems now being created for the rest of the world are causing anger and unrest in those countries. And they're not blaming Iran—they're blaming the United States for having started this, in most cases. Sorry.

#Pascal

Go ahead. We've also heard in the last couple of days that Iran is actually trying to figure out a system that would let the ships of countries it likes pass through. Apparently, 20 or 30 Pakistani-flagged tankers have already managed to go through, and I think one tanker to Bangladesh was let through. So they're trying to find a way to keep this sustainable, especially with the countries they're friendly with.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, and they'll try to keep it open in that regard for as long as possible. So one thing you do is set up basically another choke point in the Persian Gulf that all ships have to pass through—maybe, you know, a five-mile gap. And the Iranians, with their small boats, will go out and verify that, you know,

this boat—and they can also do it with drones. They can fly a drone out, look at the ship, see who it's registered to, feed that information back, get the certification that payment's been made, whatever the toll is that Iran decides to exact, and then the ship goes through.

You know, this wouldn't have happened if the United States hadn't attacked Iran along with Israel. By creating this oil shortage, you've got people desperate for oil—they've got to get it somehow. We've gone from a position where the United States basically controlled the price of oil to one where it no longer does. Iran now has a large measure of that control, and they're doing it in tandem with China, saying, "Hey, you want to use this oil? Great—you've got to buy it from China now."

#Pascal

Right.

#Larry C. Johnson

Or to pay in Chinese yuan.

#Pascal

Right. And, you know, what I find very deceptive, actually, again, from our Western media, is that they keep repeating this lie that the Strait of Hormuz is closed. It's not closed. The Iranians just control it—it's now Iranian-controlled, and they're asserting that. But actually, what I guess, you know, in the country where I am, in Japan, is that people, a couple of months from now, are going to get very, very jumpy and probably willing to negotiate with Iran, saying, like, "Look, OK, fine, we'll pay, but just let our ships go through and let us get some oil." But that's something the United States is interested in preventing, right? If they don't get the oil, if they don't control it, then nobody should. So it's actually the United States that will make sure this trade remains as closed as possible to everybody, in order to put all the blame on Iran.

#Larry C. Johnson

They can try to do that. But, you know, right now I think the majority of world opinion—or at least among the Global South—is entirely in Iran's favor on this. Right. And the internal situation in Iran is being exacerbated by their decision to invade southern Lebanon and start fighting Hezbollah.

#Pascal

Right.

#Larry C. Johnson

Um, I don't know, you know, you're too young to remember the first go-around in 2006. You were probably just a teenager back then—what, twenty years ago? Yeah.

#Pascal

I remember those events, but I didn't follow them closely.

#Larry C. Johnson

I mean, you know, you were in college having fun, which is fine—that's what you're supposed to do. But the Israelis were quite confident they were going to sweep into southern Lebanon back then, vanquish Hezbollah, and take control of all that territory south of the Litani River. Hezbollah had—well, I forget how many years it had been since the previous attack, probably twelve—but they were prepared for the Israelis this time. They used bunkers and interlacing fields of fire, had enough anti-tank weapons, and were able to hit both tanks and armored personnel carriers.

And as I recall, they lasted about a month before they declared victory and retreated back into Israel. The level of damage Israel is suffering now compared to then is at least twice, if not three times, as bad. And we never had a single example back in 2006 where Iran destroyed twenty-one Merkava battle tanks in one day, in one battle. So that itself is quite telling. Now you've got Israel completely stretched. And two days ago, a retired chief of the army, along with an active-duty member of the Israeli Defense Force, were saying, "Look, the red lights are flashing. We cannot sustain this."

And Iran's going to, you know, probably be the first to come out and try to cut a deal. But I don't think that deal's going to hold. You know, the Trump administration's desperation is evident in his pushing, saying, "No, we're close to an agreement," when the fact of the matter is there are no direct talks. Iran is talking—we'll hear from the Pakistanis—but it doesn't always respond to their messages either. So Iran, I think, is going to keep pushing this to create an economic Armageddon, if you will, that will compel the United States to negotiate.

#Pascal

I'm just, honestly speaking, quite surprised that Israel is still able to do this. You know, even after a month, they're able to open yet another front with southern Lebanon, and the level of attacks they're being subjected to isn't enough to actually force Israel to say, "Okay, we need to stop this one way or another because we're suffering too much." I mean, during the 12-day war, it seemed that it was also Israel that kind of said, "No, no, no, we need to finish. We didn't manage to overwhelm them in the first week, so we need to wind it down." And this time they don't. This time they go even further, all in. And apparently, I mean, obviously they're able to do so — they have enough reserves, they have enough missiles, they have enough...

#Larry C. Johnson

No, no, that's the point. They don't have enough reserves. So again, the chief of staff of the army went into the cabinet and said, "Look, we've got ten red flags right now. We don't have enough personnel. If we activate the 400,000 men we need, it's going to create major economic problems in this country, among other things." But you've got two experienced military leaders, and, you know, this is lost. So it may take another—well, the level of casualties Israel is experiencing this time dwarfs what they went through back in 2006. And those casualties in 2006 were serious enough that Israel pled for an agreement—a get-out-of-jail-free card from the United States, which Donald Trump played by using those bunker-buster bombs that were dropped at Fordow, Isfahan, and Natanz.

#Pascal

And this time around, the Iranians don't let them get out of jail for free anymore. Correct. Yeah, and Iran has said very clearly what its goals are, and until they're met, they won't stop. And it seems, I mean, obviously, so far nothing has worked to coerce them, right? Well, Trump's treating this like it's a real estate deal. Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

That, hey, the price on this apartment, this condo, is five million dollars. And he's acting like the Iranians are coming up saying, "I'll give you two and a half million for it," and then they're going to haggle back and forth until they agree on a price. That's not this at all. This is akin to—and I've asked a number of men this today, so it's a sexist question, but it's sexist with a purpose—if you had a daughter, and the man who raped her comes to you and wants to negotiate, would you negotiate? Most men say, "No, I'd kill the son of a bitch." That's where, you know, Iran has been raped violently—not just the murder of its top leaders, but also the schoolgirls and other children. And that is where, you know, Iran, there's nothing to negotiate. Iran's position has been real simple: lift all the sanctions, get your troops completely out of the area, pay reparations. You know, that's the start. And then, and only then, can we start to have negotiations about how to end this. Right.

#Pascal

What's your assessment of, you know, let's call them the Hagseth wing of the White House—the Christian Zionist fundamentalists? We've seen them praying several times now, with the president and without him. We've seen Hagseth giving these kind of unhinged prayer-sermon rally speeches at the Pentagon. So, how big is that fundamentalist part of what the U.S. is probably trying to do militarily?

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, no, it's a significant driving force. But as I noted earlier, there's no popular support for this war. About 44% support it, but the vast majority are against it. And that's where Trump's problems are going to continue to escalate. You know, he tried to manipulate the market today—it started off about 600 points up, and by day's end, it was up only 41 points. So as the economic problems in the United States continue to mount, and then the whammy of inflation comes in, Trump's position will be very tenuous. I could personally see him at some point resigning, because if he stays on through the election—next November, or the upcoming midterms—if he loses control of the House and Senate, he's toast.

He's a genuine lame duck. And then the only game to be played at that point is whether the Democrats want to impeach him, throw him out of government, humiliate him—but then have him replaced with J.D. Mance, who does have some competence and at least knows how to politically deal with people without becoming, you know, like Triumph the Insult Dog. And I could see, at that point, the Democrats saying, "You know what? Maybe let's just leave Trump around as a convenient punching bag that we can always riff off of." Because he's not going to be able to get anything done. He can do executive orders, but those don't really have a lot of potency.

#Pascal

And maybe one last thing—the role of Russia and China after one month. What's your assessment?

#Larry C. Johnson

Both are providing support—intelligence support in particular. I learned today there was a major cyberattack on the U.S.—on Central Command and the other supporting commands throughout the military. They're called supporting commands because they support what CENTCOM's doing and provide manpower, materiel, and intelligence. So Russia and China are providing target lists, I believe, as well as other intelligence and material aid. Now, people want to sit and pretend that this is somehow shocking—"Oh, how dare Russia do that"—apart from the fact that the United States has been doing the same to Russia via Ukraine. It's simply, you know, when people can't remember, but you can read about it, that during the course of the Vietnam War, particularly after 1968, you had Soviet pilots flying with the North Vietnamese pilots. So the U.S. and the Soviet Union were in a proxy war.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Larry C. Johnson

Literally like what's happening now. But that didn't stop Nixon from negotiating with Leonid Brezhnev and creating a new arms control agreement—the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, as they

were called at the time. And, you know, the United States found a way to compartmentalize: “Okay, we’ve got this proxy war going on here, but we’ve got these other diplomatic things we’re trying to pursue.” My impression of Trump is that’s not how they’re operating. They’re operating in black and white—you’re either with us or against us. And to that end, this war looks like it’s going to escalate. I’ve picked up intelligence from another friend, a connected friend in Moscow, that Putin is telling people he expects escalation but also expects Russia to be in a position to try to de-escalate it.

#Pascal

We'll see. Yeah, I mean, obviously there are so many unknowns at the moment that it's almost impossible to predict. But maybe one last point—over the weekend I was in the countryside here in Japan, and the TV was on the whole time. They were actually quite proud that their prime minister managed to go to Washington. And although there were some embarrassing moments, overall she managed to convey the message that there are things Japan can do and things Japan can't do. You know, because of the pacifist constitution, which the United States wrote for them, right? And apparently Donald Trump understood that and isn't pushing Japan anymore to send ships anywhere. Do you have any indication of how this is being framed by the U.S.? Is there any kind of expectation toward Japan to do something at this point?

#Larry C. Johnson

So far, no. You haven't seen the same criticism directed at Japan as the one Lindsey Graham aimed today at the government of Spain. Spain told the United States, “Hey, you're not flying your warplanes through our territory anymore. You go around.” And, you know, that set off a lot of outrage in America—those damn French, you know, getting upset with them. But let's say they send warships. What are they going to do? Those warships are just going to be big, fat targets. If they get close enough to the Strait of Hormuz and are sunk, what have they accomplished?

It's not like they're bringing fire—a magical weapon that can, you know, sweep the hills, clear out every firing position there, and make sure there's no fire from the mainland on the Strait of Hormuz. For heaven's sake, they've got artillery there. They have long-range drones, short-range drones, missiles of all kinds. So, you know, Iran's in a position where it can fight and inflict a lot of damage on the United States. And that's the point: the United States can't afford the damage or massive casualties, because that would further alienate the voting public from Trump.

#Pascal

But it seems that if what we discussed is actually what's happening, they're just, at the moment, playing for a little more time and playing games with the market while they build up their forces to position them somewhere. Then they're really setting themselves up for exactly that scenario.

#Larry C. Johnson

Yeah, I mean, the concern I'm hearing expressed is that we're really going in without a plan. There's this assumption—and this is where we sort of started our conversation—that somebody's got a plan and is following it. Okay, the rest of the world will think we're confused, but we're actually going to be able to do A, B, and C. Years ago, when Ronald Reagan was in office, Saturday Night Live did a skit. It was rumored at the time, but it was also true—I had friends who had dealt with Reagan in their positions at the State Department—and he was showing early signs of dementia. He was not mentally with it, and so a lot of times in public, he would appear confused.

What the Saturday Night Live skit did was show President Reagan talking to someone, being very light and airy, sort of absent-minded. Then the person leaves, and as soon as the door shuts, Reagan's demeanor changes: "Okay, let's get over here. Now we're going to start with plan A, we'll follow this, and we need the logistics over there." It's this massive, you know, like Henry Ford setting up a mass-production factory. That's not what's going on here. It's not like you close the door and suddenly Trump becomes Charlemagne. Yeah—no, it's not happening. They're literally making it up day to day as they go along.

#Pascal

So if that assessment is true, then the sad conclusion is that the troops being sent down there now only have a choice between prison and a coffin.

#Larry C. Johnson

Right. There was an interesting TikTok video from a stripper who's located near one of these military bases. She was describing this very fatalistic attitude—you know, the troops are coming in and it's like, "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" kind of thing. And she was actually sad about it because she hadn't seen that before. So, you know, this is really the first...

#Pascal

Die for what? Die for what?

#Larry C. Johnson

That's a good question. Die to make Israel more secure, maybe? You know, as a political scientist—and for the students you're teaching who might be going on to get a PhD—man, they've got all sorts of PhD material out of this. Yeah. What's coming up? Because what we're witnessing is a collision of 20th-century systems coming up against 21st-century systems. Let me give you two examples of 20th-century systems that are no longer relevant in the 21st century: high-rise office buildings and aircraft carriers. What do they have in common?

Well, high-rise buildings made sense when people didn't have access to the internet. You couldn't do Zoom calls like we're doing now. We don't have to meet in person—we could have the same conversation this way, and it would be just as effective, you know, without a hug or a handshake. And now you've got all these high-rise buildings that have been built in places like Dubai, Doha, and Bahrain that are empty. What are they good for? There aren't these massive companies that have to employ a lot of people, especially now that AI is coming online and can do the jobs some of those office workers used to do.

So now you've got these city skylines filled with giant office towers that are virtually empty. They're no longer relevant in the 21st century. The same goes for the aircraft carrier. You know, the Ford—they spent \$14 or \$15 billion to build that. Excuse me. In the 20th century, that aircraft carrier could sail up close to a country's coast, its planes could launch from there, and they could get deep penetration into the country. So it was really feared—it was a formidable weapon. Now it has to stay hundreds of miles offshore.

And even then, some of the missiles that Russia and China have can go beyond that 1,000-mile range. So those ships are now vulnerable—they can be easily taken out. In fact, that's what we've seen happen. We had two aircraft carriers in the area: the Abraham Lincoln, which, you know, mysteriously withdrew. Well, Trump admitted the other day it had been attacked from seventeen sides. I didn't know there was such a thing as seventeen sides, but... no, it was attacked, and it had to withdraw because it was too dangerous to stay close. And similarly with the Gerald R. Ford—you know, the story was that a dryer caught on fire and it took them thirty hours to put it out. But other information from Russian intelligence says, no, it was hit, and as such, it couldn't stay.

It was hit, and the damage done to the rear of the ship made it impossible to actually, you know, raise and lower the elevators to get airplanes up onto the deck. Now, whether that's true or not, the reality is Iran does have missiles that can reach the ships if they're within 500 miles of the shore. So again, we're dealing with 20th-century technology. It's the same kind of phenomenon we saw with the importance of horse cavalry in the 19th century. By the end of the First World War, they recognized horse cavalry no longer made sense. It was too—well, apart from the logistics of having enough feed to keep the horses healthy—they were also susceptible to gunfire in ways they had never been before, with machine guns and high explosives.

So we're in this transition period, and the petrodollar, which has reigned supreme for 54 years, is coming to an end because it's no longer the United States setting the price of oil. Now there's this upstart Iran, which is setting the price of oil by controlling the flow out of the Persian Gulf. And there's no magic switch the U.S. can flip. It's going to make an attempt, militarily, to try to change that equation. But you know what? I think there's not going to be a knockout blow. No matter what damage they do to Iran, Iran will still retain the capability to attack any ship that goes out there in

the channel. And if they sink it, then you're back to the insurance problem. The insurance companies are going to say, no, we're not insuring that. If you want to go on your own, go on your own—take your chances. And so this is going to grind the supply chains to a screeching halt.

#Pascal

You had an open faucet, and you forced Iran to close it. Whenever you try to take its hand away from the faucet, they just slap your hand and you have to pull back. It's like, okay—well, that seems to be the name of the game. Larry, thank you very much for all those insights. That was fantastic again. We'll have you back on the show. Everybody who wants to follow Larry, go to sonar21.com—yes, dot com, that's it—sonar21.com. Follow Larry Johnson. They threw him off YouTube, but luckily he's coming on all these shows, and you can follow him and his writing on sonar21.com. Larry Johnson, thank you so much for your time today.

#Larry C. Johnson

Thanks, Pascal. Look, I'm not a hateful guy, but I just—you know—I don't like to accept government explanations at face value, because more often than not, every government lies about what it's doing, especially when it's involved in a war.

#Pascal

Naturally, that's what they have. I mean, anyhow—but I'm very glad for analysis like yours. Thank you so much.

#Larry C. Johnson

Thank you, my friend.